



Exceptional weather events

Type of event:
Summer weather

Date:
Summer 1798

Summer of 1798 was exceptionally fine and warm

weather of late spring and early summer of 1798, when most of the fighting took place, was exceptionally dry and warm, typical of a prolonged spell of anticyclonic weather. Evidence for this comes from a number of weather observations from the period as well as contemporary accounts of the rebellion. This weather was probably of most benefit to the rebel armies, who lived for weeks outdoors during the battle; it also delayed the arrival of ships carrying government reinforcements from Britain.

One of the most detailed surviving accounts of the weather of 1798 is the record kept by Maximilian Faviere at Eccles Street, Dublin. Faviere made a daily weather entry in the pages of his 'Gentleman's and Citizen's Almanac' between the years of 1781 and 1812. This record shows that the period between May 23rd 1798, when the ill-fated Dublin uprising took place, and the battle of Vinegar Hill on June 21st (pictured right) coincided almost exactly with a spell of fine weather between May 19th and June 19th. During this period, Faviere records only one day with 'showers of rain', while most days are described as 'sultry, dry and very fine'. Another Dublin observer of the time, Richard Kirwan, recorded around a quarter of the normal May and June rainfall. Dixon, in his 1953 account of historical weather records of Dublin, cites the Annals of Ballitore, Co. Kildare, where the summer of 1798 'seems to have been outstanding and was still remembered in 1818, when an even finer one occurred'.



One effect of the fine weather on the course of the rebellion was to facilitate the Wexford rebels and their families, numbering up to 20,000, who lived outdoors for several weeks and marched on foot over long distances. On the government side, the director general of military hospitals wrote later that *'the weather was so favourable that the regiments upon service underwent considerable fatigue during the summer, and often slept in the open air, with no disadvantage to their general health'*. The anticyclonic conditions and resultant light winds caused delays for the ships carrying reinforcements to Ireland from British ports, the first of which sailed from Portsmouth on June 3rd. The Viceroy Camden expressed his concern to London when no reinforcements had arrived by June 15th. It seems certain that any French invasion fleet at the same time, widely expected on both the rebel and government sides, would have suffered

similar delays. By the time the small French fleet under Humbert arrived at Mayo in late August, the outcome of the rebellion had already been decided.

Although the fine weather had some influence on events during the summer of 1798, stormy weather was much more significant eighteen months earlier, when the attempted French invasion of 15,000 troops under Marshal Hoche failed at Bantry Bay. After initial favourable easterly winds which allowed the fleet to break through the English blockade off Brest, severe storms during the last week of 1796 led to the dispersal of the invading fleet and caused the landing to be abandoned. The loyalist medal struck by landlord Richard White of Bantry House for the Bantry Garrison and Friendly Association was subsequently inscribed with the words *'Deus afflavit et dissipantur'* - God blew and they were scattered.



Above and Cover

Reconstructing the Battle of Vinegar Hill near Enniscorthy.

cover picture The Examiner

above picture courtesy Echo Newspaper Group