



Michael Dwyer (1 January 1772– 23 August 1825)

was an insurgent captain in the Irish Rebellion of 1798, leading the United Irish forces in battles in Wexford and Wicklow. Following the defeat and dispersal of the rebels, in July 1798 Dwyer withdrew into the Wicklow Mountains, where he sustained a guerrilla campaign against British Crown forces. Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

Aghavanagh

The remote area of Aghavanagh (Aughavannagh) often provided refuge for Dwyer and his supporters. In December 1801, the names of rebels frequenting Aghavanagh were listed as 'Michael Dwyer, Hugh Byrne (under sentence of death but broke gaol), Martin Burke, John Mernagh, Richard Byrne, Laurence Byrne, Charles Mernagh and one Ford'.

Arklow

The Battle of Arklow on 9 June 1798 was Michael Dwyer's first major engagement. His bravery here was noted. During the battle, he 'advanced to within a few paces of a gun ... which commanded and cleared the road ... with grape[shot]' and he helped to load a cannon. However, the rebels were defeated and had to retreat into County Wexford.

Ballymanus

The home of well-known nationalists, the Byrnes of Ballymanus, and the Wicklow 1798 leader Garret Byrne. Dwyer joined the Ballymanus Division and fought with them during the Wexford rebellion. He also fought under Garret Byrne at the second Battle of Hacketstown in July 1798. Byrne gave Dwyer his first command during this engagement.

Baltinglass

The prisoners captured at Derrynamuck in February 1799 were taken here. With the exception of Hugh Byrne, who turned King's Evidence, they were court-martialled and executed in the town. Court-martials of suspected or captured rebels, including many of Dwyer's supporters, continued in Baltinglass into the early nineteenth century.

Camara

Michael Dwyer was born here in 1772. During Dwyer's lifetime, Camara was described as 'two thirds rocky and green pasture intermixed with heathy pasture with coarse grass through the heath; high and exposed with heath pasture on the mountain top'. It was difficult to make a living from agriculture.

Derrynamuck

Dwyer's narrowest escape occurred here on 15 February 1799. Soldiers surrounded Connell's cottage and called on Michael Dwyer, Sam McAllister, Patrick Costello and John Savage to surrender. They refused. McAllister sacrificed his life to give Dwyer a chance of escape. Dwyer fled as the soldiers reloaded. He was to only rebel to escape capture.

Dunlavin

Dwyers' parish chapel was located in this local market town. Michael's kinsman, John Dwyer of Seskin, was imprisoned in Dunlavin Market House before being executed in the massacre of 24 May 1798. This news prompted Dwyer to join the rebellion and he later cited it as one reason behind the longevity of his resistance.

Eadstown

The Dwyers moved to Eadstown townland in 1784, when Michael was about twelve years of age. Eadstown was not quite as remote as Camara, but it was still situated well within the Glen of Imaal. The move to Eadstown improved the family's circumstances somewhat, but life on the land was still difficult.

Glendalough

Although Dwyer frequented this area – later the site of a Military Road barracks – the Romantic stories of his use of the cave at Saint Kevin's Bed as a base and a lookout point are almost certainly false, as is the story of Dwyer jumping from the cave and swimming across the lake to immerse the muskets of his foes in the water before escaping.

Glenmalure

In July 1798, Dwyer was among the rebels who retreated into Glenmalure. Their leaders debated whether to stay here or try to join other rebels. One group instigated a disastrous expedition through Kildare and into Meath, but Dwyer stayed in Glenmalure with a small force. At this time, Dwyer was referred to as 'the Governor of Glenmalure'.

Humewood

Dwyer spent his first night in captivity here. In late 1803, Dwyer made overtures regarding surrender via his wife to William Hume. Hume gave some assurances to Mary Dwyer, but their nature is unclear. Certainly, Dwyer's life was to be spared, and safe passage to America was possibly agreed. However, Dwyer was jailed and sent to Australia.

Keadeen

In September 1798, Dwyer and some followers were involved in a fire-fight with a group of yeomen on the slopes of this mountain. The rebels used the cover provided by the terrain, which was interspersed by clumps of turf. When their ammunition was running low, Dwyer's men set these clumps alight, providing a smoke-screen and enabling escape.

Michael Dwyer

in Wicklow Folk-Memory



Kilranelagh

This is the site of an ancient cemetery, and the reputed location of the graves of Patrick Costello, John Savage and Sam McAllister, all of whom were killed at Derrynamuck. McAllister, a deserter from the Antrim Militia, sacrificed his life so Dwyer could escape. He was buried in Leitrim graveyard before being reinterred in Kilranelagh.

Macreddin

The area around Macreddin village is 'intimately associated with stories of Dwyer and his men'. For example, on 12 November 1801, a fair day, Dwyer and a few of his men met some Rathdrum yeomen in a tavern. Fisticuffs ensued and the yeomen were forcibly ejected. Dwyer and his men were long gone when an armed party arrived the next day.

Military Road

By 1803, the new Military Road aided Crown forces. This was possibly the first single-purpose road in Ireland – built to capture Dwyer and his band. Barracks were built at strategic points. Garrisons were stationed at Seven Churches (Glendalough), Leitrim, Glencree, Glenmalure and Aghavanagh. This hindered Dwyer's ability to move around freely.

Rathdangan

This village was familiar territory for Dwyer and his men. Dwyer had a narrow escape here when yeomen learned of his presence, with Martin Burke and Hugh Vesty Byrne, in the local chapel. Forewarned, Dwyer sent three local men as decoys running away from the building. The yeomen set off in pursuit and the rebels escaped detection.

Rathdrum

Joseph Holt is probably more readily associated with Rathdrum than Michael Dwyer, but Dwyer also had links to this area. His father, John Dwyer, was tried here, charged with 'treasonable and seditious practice, harbouring rebels, keeping arms for them and carrying intelligence to them', but the sentence of 'transportation for life' was not carried out.

Sruhan

In December 1798, Dwyer was involved in a violent incident here. Two local yeomen named Magennis were shot dead, perhaps because they might report Dwyer's whereabouts, but more probably because they refused to surrender their arms. These killings reputedly reduced Dwyer's popularity in nearby Baltinglass.

Stratford-On-Slaney

Close to Imaal, this textile village was familiar to Dwyer. It attracted skilled workers from the north of Ireland, who helped to bring the United Irishmen into Wicklow. The leading recruiter was William Putnam McCabe. Stratford was also a venue for baronial meetings of delegates such as Dwyer's kinsman, John Dwyer of Seskin.

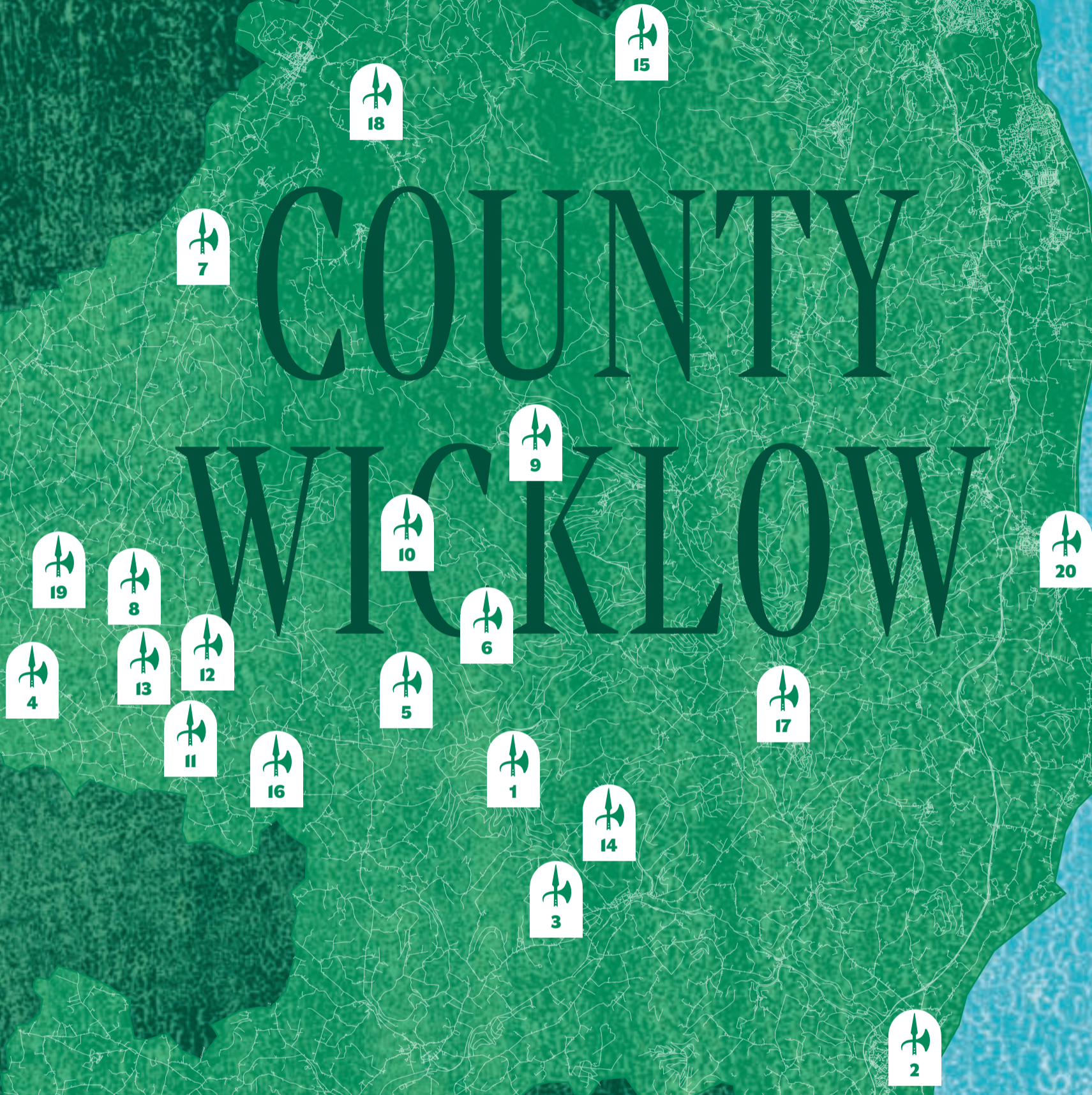
Wicklow

Michael Dwyer was not incarcerated in Wicklow Gaol, but his father, John Dwyer, was held here for some four months. John was arrested in 1800 and imprisoned in Baltinglass before being moved to Wicklow. He was later sent to New Geneva, serving over two years in captivity. John Dwyer was described as 'a broken man' when hostilities ended.



To Dublin

COUNTY WICKLOW



Locations by Number

- | | |
|---------------|------------------------|
| 1 Aghavanagh | 11 Humewood |
| 2 Arklow | 12 Keadeen |
| 3 Ballymanus | 13 Kilranelagh |
| 4 Baltinglass | 14 Macreddin |
| 5 Camara | 15 Military Road |
| 6 Derrynamuck | 16 Rathdangan |
| 7 Dunlavin | 17 Rathdrum |
| 8 Eadstown | 18 Sruhan |
| 9 Glendalough | 19 Stratford-on-Slaney |
| 10 Glenmalure | 20 Wicklow |



New South Wales