



The Irish Rebellion of 1798—when the United Irishmen attempted to free their country of British rule—ultimately did not succeed. This image depicts their defeat at Vinegar Hill.

The illustration, by George Cruickshank, supports the story passage about Vinegar Hill in William Maxwell’s book entitled *History of the Irish Rebellion of 1798*. It appears opposite page 144 in the 1854 edition of the book.

We learn more about the important Battle of Vinegar Hill from “Ask about Ireland,” a website featuring primary sources, videos and pictures from the National Library of Ireland:

While the southern rebels were struggling in New Ross, the northern rebels were suffering similar problems in Arklow. They lost many men trying to break the government defenses of the town, and were unable to draw them out for a battle. They retreated back to Gorey, badly defeated.

The result was a two-week stalemate. Both the southern and northern rebel divisions moved frequently, getting into skirmishes along the way.

By 19 June, the rebellion had petered out in most of the rest of the country. Wexford was one of the last remaining rebel strongholds. Thousands of reinforcements had arrived from Britain to boost the government army. General Lake was their commander, and he decided the time was right to make a move against Wexford.

He collected 10,000 troops in five different points around the county.

Thereafter, things would not go well for the Irishmen. Women and children were among the victims. “Ask about Ireland” continues the story:

The Battle of Vinegar Hill changed the course of the Wexford rebellion. From that point on, they had to fight on the run, which prevented them from raising a bigger army.

The northern rebels had been forced to retreat to Vinegar Hill by 20 June. The government army of 10,000 formed a ring around the hill. It bombarded the rebel headquarters with artillery. Around 20,000 rebels, including women and children, were located there.

The bombardment soon became too much for the rebels, who managed to escape through a gap in the ring of attack. While withdrawing through Needham’s gap, they were chased by the government forces. Although most of the rebels got away, many were brutally murdered in the chase. These included women and children. The surviving rebels were now scattered. It was a big victory for General Lake and the government.

Surviving rebels were on the run. Thinking they could find reinforcements elsewhere, they split into separate groups. As “Ask about Ireland” tells us, however, they were ultimately defeated at different times and in different places:

After the defeat, the rebels split into two groups again. One of them, led by Father John Murphy, fled as far as Laois before becoming trapped in the Blackstairs Mountains. Father Murphy was captured and executed.

The second group headed in the direction of Ulster, where they hoped there would still be rebels fighting. After attacking several government outposts along the way, they marched towards the Timahoe Bog in Co. Kildare. Then they attacked Clonard in Co. Meath. They were defeated in Knightstown on the border of Lough and Meath.

Several hundred rebels escaped and headed back south on horseback. However, they were surrounded in a small village in North County Dublin called Ballyboghil.

Despite all their efforts, and the good fight they'd made, the Wexford rebels went down to defeat.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Battle-at-Vinegar-Hill>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Battle-at-Vinegar-Hill>