



## Factsheet: Daniel O'Connell- The Liberator: 1775-1847



Daniel O'Connell was born into a Catholic farming family near Cahersiveen in Co. Kerry. At a young age, he was adopted by his Uncle Maurice, who was a wealthy man. Daniel went to live with Maurice at Derrynane Abbey. At this time, Catholic people living in Ireland did not have access to a proper education because of a set of laws called the **Penal Laws**. These laws restricted the lives of Catholic people living in Ireland. Therefore Maurice sent Daniel to a local **hedge school**. Daniel was a good student and when he was 15 years old, his uncle sent him to France to go to school there.

A revolution broke out in France while Daniel was at school there and he saw a lot of violence during this **French Revolution**. Daniel left France because of this violence in 1793 and moved to England where he began studying law. In 1798, he came to Dublin to complete his training as a lawyer.

People in Ireland had been influenced by what happened in France and in 1798 there was also a rebellion in Ireland. However, Daniel's student days in France had convinced him that violence was not the answer to Ireland's problems.

After the 1798 Rebellion, the British Government passed the **Act of Union** in 1801. The Act of Union shut down (or abolished) the parliament in Ireland. Ireland had no government of its own anymore. Now there was a shared parliament between Ireland and Britain which was located in Westminster in England. This act became law on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1801.

For over 100 years Catholic people in Ireland could not become Members of Parliament because of the Penal Laws. Daniel O'Connell had a plan; he would try to win the right for Catholics to sit in parliament by peaceful means (**Catholic Emancipation**).

When he achieved this he would try to restore the Irish Parliament by overturning the Act of Union This was called the **Repeal of the Union**. He would also try to achieve this by peaceful means.

In 1823, with the help of others, Daniel set up the Catholic Association. Large numbers of people in Ireland joined the Association and paid 1 penny a month to help with the campaign for Catholic Emancipation.

### **At Glasnevin Cemetery**

Visit Daniel O'Connell's crypt on the Cemetery Tour.

In 1828, O'Connell stood for election in the Clare by-election. There was great excitement when he won the election by a large majority. When O'Connell could not

### Did you know?

Daniel O'Connell campaigned for the end or 'abolition' of slavery. He was known in many countries around the world. He was so well known that kings and princes often looked for his autograph. Whose autograph would you like to have today?

take his seat in the British Parliament because he was a Catholic the Irish people grew angry. The British Government feared another rebellion and so in the following year, 1829, Catholic Emancipation was granted. This meant that Catholic people could now sit in parliament and after this, Daniel became known as **The Liberator** because he had 'liberated' the Catholic people from the Penal Laws.

Daniel O'Connell now turned his attention to the Repeal of the Union. In 1840 he set up the Repeal Association. He organised

huge public meetings out in the open. These were known as 'Monster Meetings'.

O'Connell was an excellent speaker and thousands of people came to hear him talk about the Repeal of the Union. Almost one million people attended one of his meetings in Tara, Co. Meath! One of O'Connell's meetings, which was supposed to happen in Clontarf on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October, was declared illegal by the government and banned. O'Connell was afraid there would be violence if the meeting went ahead so he cancelled it. This disappointed many people and Daniel's popularity began to decline (drop).



Daniel O'Connell's silhouette

In 1845, the Great Famine began in Ireland and many people were starving. Daniel O'Connell was 70 years old and he was not in good health. His last speech in parliament asked the Members of Parliament to do something to help the victims of the famine in Ireland. He travelled to Rome in 1847, but died on the way there in a place called Genoa. O'Connell's last words were: 'My body to Ireland, my heart to Rome, my soul to heaven'. You can read these words on your tour when you visit the crypt where Daniel O'Connell is buried at Glasnevin Cemetery.

**Learn More...** In the book 'A History of Ireland in 100 Objects', one of the objects is Daniel O'Connell's chariot. Learn more about this chariot and complete activities on the life of Daniel O'Connell at <http://www.100objects.ie/portfolio-items/daniel-oconnells-chariot-1844/>

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