



Limerick and France

No country in Europe contains within its borders as many contrasts in landscape and terrain as France. It comprises Atlantic France and Mediterranean France, the France of the sandy Camargue and arid maquis, of the lush rolling fields of Normandy, the France of ravines, marshland, mountains, open plains. Politically, it has meant throughout history that France has been a mosaic of different habits, attitudes, and aspirations. The rulers of the nation centred in Paris, whether monarchs or republicans, have always fought against this tendency. So there was not one but many French Revolutions, each the product of local circumstances as well as national issues.

Thus wrote Andrew Wheatcroft in his book, *The World Atlas of Revolution*. The commemoration of the bicentenary of the French Revolution this year presents an opportunity for all countries – including France itself – to reflect, not only on the Revolution and its importance, but also on the role of France and its people in world history.

The objective of this special French edition of the Old Limerick Journal is to explore some of the links between Limerick and France. Given the extent and variety of these links – commercial, military, cultural, religious, educational, sporting and many more – it would take far more than a single issue of this magazine to cover the full range of people and periods that such a study would entail. However, it is hoped that this edition will be a worthwhile contribution to the subject and to the commemoration of the Revolution.

It is hardly surprising that, in this bicentenary year, the Journal contains sections on the French Revolution of 1789, and on Quimper, Limerick's twin city in Brittany. It is only natural that the Revolution – and the Limerick people who were caught up in it, in one way or another – should be given a central place in the magazine. In the words of one of the contributors to this edition, the eminent historian, A.J.P. Taylor:

Here were the three themes that revolutionary France launched into the world and that have continued to haunt the world ever since. They developed in many different ways. Nevertheless the three revolutionary causes – democracy, nationalism, socialism – all sprang from the fall of the Bastille on 14 July, 1789.

Liberty, equality and fraternity continue to form the basis of modern democracy throughout the world. It is vital for the future of democracy, and for the freedom of minorities and individuals, that these principles be vigorously safeguarded: the rights of man can never be taken for granted.

In more than forty articles, our contributors have examined the lives of various Limerick people and their involvement with France. Included among these articles are the impressions of Limerick by two Frenchmen, Coquebert de Montbret and Chevalier de La Tocnaye, who travelled through the region on foot in the 1790s, just after the Revolution.

Future editions of the Journal will commemorate the sieges of Limerick of 1690 and 91, and it is hoped to continue our examination of the role of the French in Limerick, during the Jacobite war of 1689-91, in these issues.

But many more links between Limerick and France will undoubtedly be formed in the extended and more open European Community in the years ahead. Limerick, the capital and university city of the Mid-West, is well placed to further develop these links. And there is no reason to believe that this renewed interest in France will not be reciprocated.