



THE MEADE BROTHERS

BY JOHN DE COURCY IRELAND

of each of these people, their first name and their destination are available on Professor Poussou's list. The surnames are as follows:

Bonfield	Browne	Bourck
Bulkeley	Butin	Conor
Creagh	Caigny	Cantillon
Cassye	Collins	Conty
Daniel	Delfy	Forstall
Gromely	Head	Heas (2)
Hurly	Lahill	Lingh
Macdonough	MacInerney	
MacKinnery		
Macnamara(4)	Mahon	Mihane (2)
Moran	Moore (2)	Morphy
Murray	Naish	Nelly
Newcome	Nonan	O'Connor
Power	Pujos	Reilly
Rions	Ryan	Satson (2)
Shileh	Stackpole	Sullivan
Taner	Welby.	

One or two of these may have been naturalized Irishmen, originally French citizens who had been driven out after the suppression of the Protestant religion by Louis XIV in 1685, but who ventured back to their country of origin for business, family or sentimental reasons. We know that some of the 10,000 French Protestant (Huguenot) refugees did return at times, when, as also happened in Ireland, the persecuting laws on the statute books were not being applied in practice. (Of the 144 deaths of Irish people at Bordeaux, the registration of which has been analysed, the origin of 103 is noted, and four of these were from Limerick. During the same period, six Irish priests from the diocese of Limerick were working in Bordeaux at one time or another).

There is a considerable amount of material about the Meade family in the

archives of Bordeaux and Nantes, where a branch of the family settled later, and there is certainly a good deal more to be revealed than I have written here. No Meade seems to have been a seaman, a shipbuilder, a ship-designer or a shipowner, and it is of these that I had set out to make a particular study. Most of the Meades were wine-merchants, who were attracted to Bordeaux by the growing prosperity of the wine trade there in the first half of the 18th century and the increasing strength of the Irish economy (a fact few of us heard of at school) from about 1745. They seem to have arrived in Bordeaux in or about 1751, at the same time as another Limerick family, the Bonfields, who were to do very well indeed from the export of claret to Ireland.

We know from the researches of Richard Hayes in a *Biographical Dictionary of Irishmen in France* that David Bonfield, a merchant, a native of Limerick, emigrated to Bordeaux where he carried on a successful business. He was a generous benefactor to the Irish College at Paris, within whose walls he expressed a wish to be buried. After his death, he was interred in the crypt of the College des Lombards. A memorial tablet to his memory there was later removed to the college in the rue de Irlandais.

By 1756, we find John Meade proclaiming that many of his relations had served in the Irish regiments in the French army, chiefly, it would appear, in the war of the Austrian Succession, when Irish soldiers and seamen helped in a number of French victories over the British. By this time, too, records show that there were nine other Irish people, all, apparently, apprentices to the wine trade, living in the Meade household. There appears to have been some business associations between the

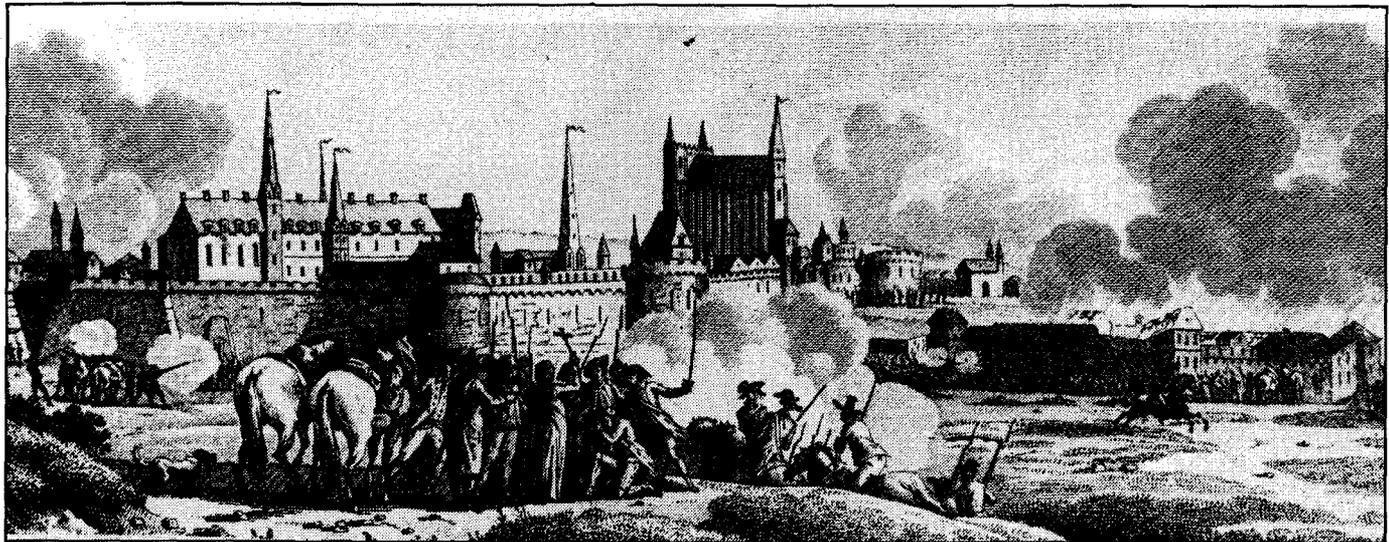
The researches of Professor J.P. Poussou of the University of Bordeaux, have revealed that 1620 Irish people legally left Bordeaux by sea between 1713 and 1787, two years before the French Revolution began. This list is almost certainly definitive, but there were probably a few stowaways who were not recorded. Many of these people returned to Bordeaux, as their departures were for business reasons or simply to visit relatives, or, in times of war, to take temporary refuge in a neutral port.

There was a thriving Irish colony in Bordeaux throughout the 18th century. It survived the Revolution, and people with Irish names are still prominent in the city's life. The last time I was there, at a conference on 18th century maritime commerce, all those attending were invited to a lunch by the president of the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce, Monsieur O'Quin.

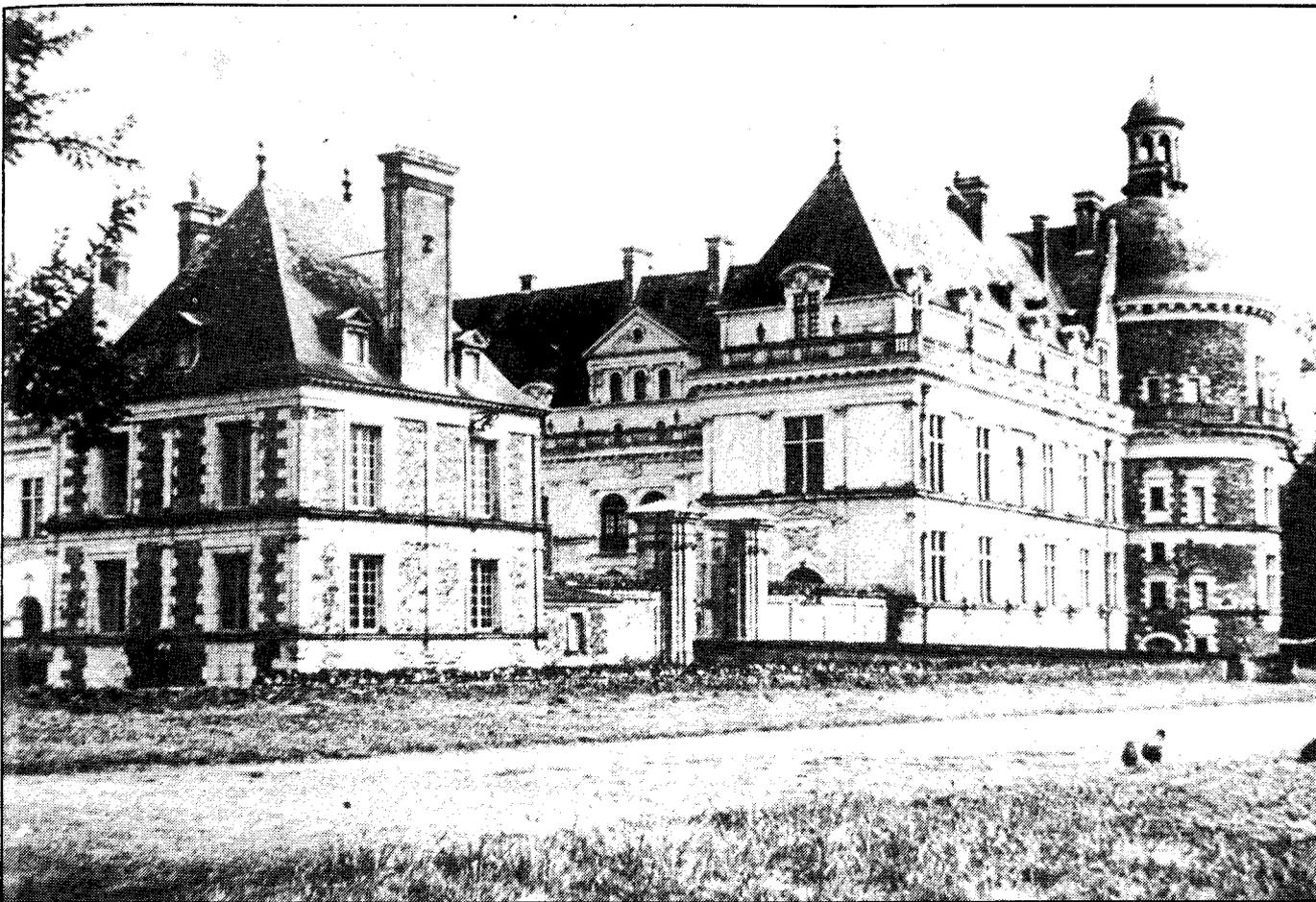
Of the 1620 18th century Irish travellers by sea from Bordeaux, 54 are recorded either as having been born in Limerick or as having given Limerick as their destination. Many of the rest are recorded simply as born in Ireland or travelling to Ireland. Of these, one, at least, Catherine Meade, is identifiable as belonging to one of the most prominent Limerick families in Bordeaux and Nantes in this period.

I propose first to list all these Limerick-connected individuals, giving just the surnames, which often looks and sounds odd, since in foreign lands Irish names are sometimes distorted by uninformed or deaf officials. Of course, there is a surprisingly large number of what most of us would consider 'unusual' names around in Ireland today.

The date of departure from Bordeaux



The attack on Nantes during the civil war in the Vendée, 29 June, 1793.



The Nantes residence of an Irish slave-trader named Walsh, who was later created Comté de Serrant.

Meades and not only the Bonfields, but with two Co. Clare families, Mitchell and Connell, who were also active in the Bordeaux wine trade. The Meades were partners in some ventures with another very successful Irish-born wine exporter, Andrew Galwey.

North of Bordeaux, on the River Loire, is the important Breton port of Nantes, of which it is said that in the mid-18th century half the locally-owned merchant ships belonged to Irish shipowners, Joyces, Walshes, MacCarthys and many more. Very many Irish merchants, Sarsfields, O'Shiels, Clarkes and others were also established in Nantes. This city was the French headquarters of the notorious black slave trade that made fortunes for merchants in Bristol, Liverpool, Amsterdam and other north European ports (Belfast merchants, to their honour, led by the later United Irishman, William Putnam McCabe, refused to have anything to do with it). A magnificent row of beautifully-preserved and still inhabited 18th century houses on the Ile Feydeau, in the heart of Nantes, was where most of the Irish merchants lived in that period. The city also had a fine square called the Place des Irlandais.

Early in the 1780s, some of the Meades moved to Nantes, which also exported wine and brandy. Some Murphys had been doing well there for twenty years previously. And it was in

the archives of the Loire-Atlantique Département, of which Nantes is capital, that I first came across the Meades more than two decades ago.

What I read about the Nantes Meades, George and John, showed that they were, like many other Irish Nantais, very active in some of the many political clubs which had sprung up everywhere in France in the second half of the 18th century, often under masonic influence. These clubs were where the French Revolution was prepared, where those who were to become its local and national leaders learned their political skills, where the new concepts of democratic government, equality for all before the law, taxation of the privileged as well as the unprivileged, the land for the people, and liberty to practice the religion of one's choice or to belong to no religion were debated in all their dimensions. Here the names of courageous and often persecuted thinkers like Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, Condorcet, Rousseau and Tom Paine, and what they said and wrote, were constantly to be heard.

The Meades and another Irishman, Nugent, signed a declaration in Nantes that was widely circulated calling on all citizens to support the new constitution of 1791, which had restricted the king's power and opened the way for the more democratic, republican constitution, adopted two years later.

John Meade went off and joined the French army, which, as the Revolution developed, was called on to defend the newly-proclaimed Republic against invading armies from every one of the leading states and some of the smaller states of Europe. In the archives I found a letter from George Meade to the French republican authorities requesting help for his brother, John, who was lying sick at Bordeaux (presumably in a relative's house), after long and arduous service in many campaigns. A note is attached to the bottom of this letter (numbered in the archives 11424 and headed *Liberté Egalité Indivisibilité* – the last referring to the invaders' plans for partitioning France for daring to overthrow feudalism and proclaim a democracy). This note states that John Meade was 'an excellent Republican', with important knowledge of military affairs. It is signed 'Carrier'. (Jean-Baptiste Carrier, 1756-94, was one of the best-known Jacobin leaders in the west of France, who, convinced that the very real gains of the Revolution could be preserved only by relentless struggle against internal and external enemies, instituted a notorious reign of terror at Nantes, ending by the drowning of hundreds of opponents of the Revolution. This cruel policy was later reversed in Brittany by the famous Hoche, of the Bantry Bay expedition).

I have yet to discover what happened to the Meade brothers after this period.