

Riocard Bairead (Richard Barrett) - Poet / United Irishman

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Riocard Bairead was called “The Poet of Erris” his work consisted of Verse plus Songs in the Irish Language. He was active in the 1798 Rebellion. He also was a small farmer and taught in a small school at his home.

Riocard Baraid was born at Barrack, near Ely Bay in Belmullet during 1735. His actual birth date has been disputed on several websites as between 1735 up to 1740. His families were descendants of the Norman Barretts. He was known locally as Dici. He lived most of his life there, apart from a short spell in Carne, a nearby parish in North Mayo during 1790. He was married to Nancy, a daughter of Sean Tollett of Moyrane a prosperous Protestant Landowner. Following her demise he married Maire Ni Mhoran, they had two children, Mary and Riocard.

Poetry Bairead made a significant contribution to Folk Poetry that was very much sought after by writers in the English language. His compositions were generally satirical, they include **“Eoghan Coir”, “Seamus O’ Loinsigh”, “Preab an O”, “Tarraing na Mona”, “Bean an Fhior Rua”,** also **“Sean Gabhan agus Oiche Sheain U’ De Dhiarmada.”** Much of his poetry has survived despite his second wife’s burning of some material following his demise as she considered his political work worthless. His work has been transcribed into an English Character type – a so – called phonetic transcription influenced by Robbie Burns.

1798 Bairead was a member of the Society of United Irishmen. During the Rebellion of 1798 he played a significant role among the many pike–men of North Mayo. He was imprisoned in Castlebar Goal for his policies.

His death occurred on 8th December 1819. His Gravestone at Cross Abbey at Cross Point, near Binghamstown in Belmullet has the following Inscription;

***“Why spend your leisure bereft of pleasure
Amassing treasures? Why scrape and save?
Why look so canny at every penny?
You’ll take no money into the grave.”***

Tributes Specimens of Bairead’s Poetry appear in Hardiman’s edition of Roderic O’ Flaherty’s Chorographical District of West or H – Iar Connacht in 1846 also in Michael Timony’s *“Amhrain Ghaedhiligean Iarthair”* in 1906.

Patrick Knight wrote of Bairead’s *“wit, amiability, his social graces”* in *“Erris in the Irish Highlands”* (1836). He described Bairead as *“having a sweet, correct, mellifluous aspect in his language verse...his songs were sung and listened to. He seemed to follow the style of Jonathan Swift.”* (Extract from *“Aspects of its Heritage”* by Bernard O’Hara.)

He is mentioned in the following; *“Emigrants and Exiles; Irish excursion to North America”* by Kerby A. Miller, *“Celtic Culture; Aberdeen breviary, Celticism,”* (edited by John T. Koch), *“The Waters and the Wild”* by Michael Mullen, *“Walksthrugh Ireland”* by John Bernard Trotter, (1918), *“An outline History of Co. Mayo 1600 – 1800”* by Bernard O’ Hara and Nollaig O’ Muraile, *“Amhrain”* by Nicholas Williams in 1978, *“Riocard Bairead The Bard of Mayo”* by J. Kearney appeared in the Gaelic Journal during 1894. His name appears in *“Remembering the Year of the French - Irish Folk History and Social Memory.”* by M. Guy Beiner, also by the same author in 2004 *“Who were the Men of the West?”- an historiographies and the Reconstruction of Democrally Histories,*

Folklore.” Tomas O’ Concheanainn Editor wrote in Eigse “*A Journal in Local Studies*” during 1976. Tom Dunne published “*Subaltern Voices*” *Poetry in Irish, a Popular Insurgency on the 1798 Rebellion*, in *Eighteen – Century Life* Vol 22, No 3, on November 1998 (pages 31 – 44). Patrick J. Kavanagh notes in “*By Words*” a Times Literary of Bairead’s burial site being destroyed during a storm, then the bones were re – interred behind a repaired wall by well wishers from Belmullet, (pages 136 – 168.) An English version of “***Eoghan Coir***” written by Francis A. Fahy was published in Donal O’ Sullivan’s “*Song of the Irish*” during 1960. A Summer School at Colaiste Bairead in Erris was set up by Gael Linn in his honour. At the Centenary Celebrations of 1798 “a Ballad “*The Men of the West*” was set to Bairead’s air of “***Eoghair Coir***”.