

Evidence-based submission on renaming the X library to Wolfe Tone library

A Chara,

This is an evidence-based submission to rename the X library to Wolfe-Tone in commemoration of Theobald Wolfe Tone an Irish Revolutionary who attended Trinity College. The United Irishmen, founded in 1791 by Wolfe-Tone, began as a parliamentary reform group that supported Catholic emancipation a radical political opinion of the time. He published ‘An Argument on behalf of Catholics’ in which he urged the co-operation between the religions in Ireland as a means of redressing Irish grievances.¹ As an Anglican Tone's willingness to speak out and for the oppressed Catholics in Ireland was a brave thing to do as it would lead to judgement and begrudgery within his own community. In 2023 when Trinity as an institution is only beginning to come to terms with and acknowledge its colonial it is fitting to rename the library in honour of an alumni who was standing up and speaking out about injustices that were ongoing within Trinity and the wider Irish society.

The United Irishmen had three main principles, political liberty, national unity, and social justice. Believing that a state which governs a population without their consent is a true example of slavery and that both Catholics and Protestants had to unite through a dedication for a democratic Ireland where “national unity and free institutions were inseparably connected.”² These ideals are now the core foundations to any democratic system, and they were written and defined within the wall of the X library by a group of radical students who did not back down from what they believed in. Trinity should recognise and celebrate the importance of this decree not only to Irish democracy but democracy across Europe. Many nations including France were inspired by Wolfe-Tone and the beliefs of the United Irishmen and what better way to remember this legacy then by naming the building which allowed these ideas to flourish after Wolfe-Tone?

¹ Ronald John McNeill, ‘*Tone, Theobald Wolfe*’, In Chisholm, Hugh (ed.). *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Vol. 27 (11th ed.), (Cambridge 1911). pp. 2–3.

² T. W. Moody, *The Political Ideas of United Irishmen*, (Dublin, 1938) p.15

During the 1790s an alliance was made between the United Irishmen and the Catholic agrarian secret society the Defenders whose aims were to redistribute Protestant estates among Catholics, reduce tithes and rents and reform landowning laws.³ These aims are seen today as the steppingstones towards modern democracy. Wolfe-Tone spear-headed the campaign to form an alliance with the defenders and through this he transformed the United Irishmen into a revolutionary society that was unwavering in its goal of establishing a non-sectarian independent Irish republic. A goal which is still a progressive aim in 2023, Wolfe-Tone was truly a revolutionary.

His published memoirs, diary and correspondence became one of the most inspirational and widely read texts throughout the 19th-century, and his candour, vivacity, humanity, and powers of observation were admired. Tone's writings have been overlooked for their rich interlayering of cultural history and literary references. Tone's papers were also donated to our Manuscripts department. All the more reason to name the library in his honour as Trinity holds Wolfe Tones original manuscripts.

However, despite his substantial achievements in life, and his towering posthumous legacy, he has remained forgotten by his own college. In his autobiography, he remembered Trinity warmly: 'I look back on my College days with regret and preserve and ever shall a most sincere affection for the University of Dublin.' He recalled having obtained a scholarship and three premiums, but also three silver medals from 'the Historical Society, a most admirable institution, of which I had the honour to be Auditor', and close the session from the chair, 'the highest compliment that society' could bestow. He was one of Ireland's greatest revolutionaries and a gamechanger, in the context of his times. It is time for Trinity to remember Theobald Wolfe Tone.

Is mise le meas,
Sionainn Nic Cána

³ Elliott Marianne, *THE ORIGINS AND TRANSFORMATION OF EARLY IRISH REPUBLICANISM*, (Cambridge,1978) p.417.