

## Tricolour Festival held in glorious city sunshine



Actor Kieran Doyle (Thomas Francis Meagher) leading the match down The Mall on Sunday during the 1848 Tricolour Celebration. | Photo: Mick Wall

The Fifth 1848 Tricolour Celebration was held in Waterford last weekend, with the ceremonial flag raising ceremony held in glorious sunshine on The Mall on Sunday.

Two ambassadors attended the event: from France, Jean Pierre Thebault and Canada's Kevin Vickers, who, as Sergeant at Arms in the Canadian Parliament, gained national hero status when ending the attack of a gunman in the Parliament Building in Ottawa last October.

Five representatives from Thomas Francis Meagher's Fighting 69th Infantry Regiment attended, some, including Colonel James Tierney and Sergeant Dennis Rick were on their fifth visit to Waterford. The office of the US Ambassador to Ireland was also represented at the ceremony.

The Omagh Peace Choir provided excellent entertainment, singing 'Danny Boy', 'Red Rose', 'Ireland's Call' and 'Go Lassie Go'. The Thomas Francis Meagher Fife and Drum Band also performed and the Barrack Street band. Liam Rellis proved an excellent MC and showed his knowledge of the city's history and the Mayoralty of Waterford.

He made reference to James Rice, an 11-time Mayor back in 1483, who journeyed to Saint James's pilgrimage city of Santiago de Compostella in Spain, sailing from Waterford to La Coruna and on one occasion brought four Councillors with him.

He joked that this could have been the first Council junket, but they probably paid their way and took on the pilgrimage walk of nearly 100 kilometres.

City & County Mayor James Tobin welcomed all the guests and noted how this was an important date in the calendar of Waterford, commemorating that famous day on March 7th 1848 that the Tricolour was flown from 33 the Mall. Thomas

Francis Meagher, having been inspired by the 1848 rebellion in France, was presented with a French tricolour and it was from there that the idea of uniting orange and green traditions via the flag was born.

Minister of State Paudie Coffey delivered a detailed keynote address on The Mall. He noted how Meagher was just 25 years old in 1848, when he produced the tricolour, a flag which represented both Catholic and Protestant traditions, separated by the white of peace.

In his speech, Minister Coffey emphasised the peaceful theme and inclusivity of the flag, as well as the patriotism and peace which the Irish have extolled at home and abroad, and how peace was won at home in the wake of the Civil War.

Minister Coffey also referred to the growing levels of co-operation between the south east counties in the joint submission for the European City of Culture by Waterford, Kilkenny and Wexford for 2020.

Minister Coffey said that regional alliances work and there had been strong co-operation on this matter among the local authorities and Tourism Ireland; there would also be new branding by Fáilte Ireland for the south east region coming soon.

The new bypass bridge naming ceremony for the Thomas Francis Meagher Bridge (which takes place in the presence of President Higgins this Thursday) was also a sign of co-operation, along with the NRA.

Waterford would remain the economic driver of the region with further initiative and investment, he added. Waterford, said Minister Coffey, will prosper once again and embody a more prosperous, confident Ireland.

Actor Kieran Doyle, dressed as Thomas Francis Meagher, then read a letter from Meagher when he was in jail awaiting deportation to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), after his failed rebellion of 1848.

In that letter, he referred to how nations such as Greece and Italy had suffered but, like Ireland, they too would recover and move beyond upheaval and distress. And as Kieran Doyle read those words, we had to remind ourselves that Meagher had penned them almost 170 years ago.

Kieran Walsh