

Jebb, Richard

by Desmond McCabe and Linde Lunney

Jebb, Richard (1766–1834), author and judge, was born in Drogheda, Co. Louth, and baptised on 24 July 1766, elder son among two sons and three daughters of John Jebb (d. 1796), alderman of the borough, and his second wife Alice or Alicia (née Forster; d. 1790). His younger brother was John Jebb (qv). He was educated at Drogheda endowed school. Though his father's financial circumstances deteriorated from the mid 1770s, the young man was able to matriculate at TCD (1781) and was awarded a scholarship (1784). He graduated with a BA degree in spring 1786, kept terms at Lincoln's Inn, London, and the King's Inns, Dublin, and spent some time living with an uncle in France. In 1787 he inherited a large amount of money from his second cousin, Sir Richard Jebb (formerly court physician to George III), and was thus able to undertake responsibility for the education of his brother John. In Lincoln's Inn Jebb was friendly with Theobald Wolfe Tone (qv). Between 1787 and 1790, with Tone and John Radcliffe (qv), he helped to plan and write *Belmont Castle, or Suffering sensibility* (1790), a high-spirited parody of the romantic novels of the period, making fun of various Anglo-Irish personalities resident in Dublin and London. Some seven of the thirty-five letters making up the novel were composed by Jebb, who mainly portrayed the capers of Thomas Gould (qv), in his youth a well known Dublin dandy, who later became master of the court of chancery.

Jebb was called to the Irish bar in Trinity term 1789, and Tone recommended his friend as barrister to a body of dissenters in Drogheda facing prosecution in 1790. Jebb's friendship with Tone does not appear to have been indicative of any real political radicalism, and by the late 1790s his politics were relatively orthodox. He enlisted in the TCD lawyers' corps of militia in 1798 and was active in Wexford and Wicklow that summer, helping to suppress the rising.

In the following year, when the possibility of abolishing the Irish parliament was being discussed, Jebb published *A reply to a pamphlet entitled 'Arguments for and against an union'* (1799), which was a rebuttal of the views of the under-secretary, Edward Cooke (qv). In a work which was widely read in several editions that year, Jebb predicted that the abolition of the Dublin parliament would injure the local economy greatly if 'principal nobility' and 'first gentlemen' no longer had to reside either in their constituencies or in Dublin. He suggested, in an effort to sway government opinion, that the Irish parliament might give up the right to differ from the monarch over declarations of war and similar matters. Jebb argued that not all Catholics could be blamed for the rebellion; instead, he blamed revolutionary theorists and the pernicious influence of the French republic. Even though he opposed the union, his moderate and clearly argued work impressed the government; he declined the offer of a seat in the post-union parliament at Westminster.

His legal career did not suffer, however, and as time went on and his status increased, he came more and more to support protestant ascendancy. *A letter of remonstrance to Denys Scully esq. upon his advice to his catholic brethren, by an Irish loyalist* (1803), has been attributed to Jebb; it stressed the importance of law and order and the difference between treasonable violence and legal reprisals. Made KC in 1806, Jebb was appointed third serjeant (1816) and second serjeant (1817). In December 1818 he was appointed fourth justice of the court of king's bench, and in 1820 was the judge at the trial of John Scanlan, murderer of Ellie Hanley (qv). He imposed severe sentences on newspapers that criticised the Orange order and government, and on one occasion he defied the convention that judges should go on circuit away from their home districts. He used that opportunity and judicial privilege to reward with the office of sheriff two individuals who had assisted the career of one of his sons. Daniel O'Connell (qv) detested Jebb and commented that 'a more decided Orange partisan never lived. He was a frightful judge . . .' (O'Connell, *Corr.*, v, 176).

There are conflicting accounts of the cause of his death on 1 September 1834. A local newspaper, the *Newry Telegraph*, stated that he died of a virulent form of cholera, possibly contracted when he visited a poor family close to his home in Rostrevor, Co. Down, to provide charitable assistance after their father died of that disease. The *Gentleman's Magazine* of November 1834 stated that he had not died from cholera, but that when a soda-water bottle he was shaking burst, particles of glass had to be extracted from his hands. As a result he suffered a serious nervous excitement, to which he was subject, and died of the shock. He was buried in the family grave in Drogheda.

He married (26 January 1802), at Clondalkin, Co. Dublin, Jane Louisa (d. 1823), eldest daughter of John Finlay (d. 1823) of Corkagh, Co. Dublin, MP for Dublin. They had five sons and one daughter. The eldest son, John Jebb (1805–86) was a clergyman in Ireland and England, became a canon in Hereford, and translated the Book of Psalms from the Hebrew. Another son, Richard Jebb (d. 1884), was judge of the ecclesiastical court in the Isle of Man. Robert Jebb, a barrister in Dublin, was father of Sir Richard Claverhouse Jebb (1841–1905), an eminent scholar of Greek, and MP for Cambridge University 1891–1905, who was born in his mother's home in Scotland, but grew up in Dublin and Killiney and was educated in St Columba's College.

---

*Newry Telegraph* (n.d.), quoted in *British Magazine*, vi (1834), 477–8; *Gent. Mag.*, Nov. 1834, 532–3; Charles Forster, *The life of bishop John Jebb D.D., F.R.S., with a selection from his letters* (1836); *DNB* (on John Jebb, d. 1833); Ball, *Judges*; Francis O'Kelly, 'Wolfe Tone's novel', *IBL*, xxiii (Mar.–Apr. 1935), 47–8; Brian Inglis, *The freedom of the press in Ireland* (1954), 203–4; O'Connell, *Corr.*, v, 176; Marion

Deane (ed.), Theobald Wolfe Tone and divers hands, *Belmont Castle, or Suffering sensibility* (1998); *ODNB* on Sir Richard Claverhouse Jebb; FamilySearch site, [www.familysearch.com](http://www.familysearch.com) (internet material accessed Nov. 2007)

Downloaded from <http://dib.cambridge.org> by IP 100.103.238.216 on Sat Jan 23 00:33:53 UTC 2021 Dictionary of Irish Biography Online © 2021 Cambridge University Press and Royal Irish Academy. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.