

Ben Franklin's Forgotten Visit to Ireland

In 1771, Benjamin Franklin visited Ireland. Some say this seven-week visit may have transformed him. Franklin was Britain's biggest fan. He was born in Boston to English parents. He lived in London for almost twenty years as a colonial representative. In his letters back to the colonies, he praised Britain's culture, science, and government. But upon seeing Ireland according to writer Brighid O'Sullivan, "Franklin was horrified by the extreme poverty he saw". Although this was well before the Great Famine, entire families starved while British landlords exported grain and livestock from Ireland. The people survived mainly on the potato harvest. When first landing in Dun Laoghaire, he described the city as a sinkhole of filth. However, upon entering Dublin, the seat of British control, a magnificent city of Georgian architecture, the contrast struck him.

Franklin noted that the British penal laws were in effect in 1771. Therefore, the majority Catholic people could not vote, own land, or inherit property. He observed that the Irish were kept on a level below the English and wondered if that would be the fate of the Americans in America.

From a proud Englishman, loyal to the British Empire, to an American revolutionary and patriot. Franklin had been transformed. He became a proponent of the American Revolution, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and a true founding father of the United States. The American Revolution certainly influenced world history. It led to the downfall of kings and the rise of democracies. The oppression of the Irish in Ireland may not have ignited the American Revolution, but it is possible that it woke up the revolutionary fire in Franklin. This forgotten visit by Franklin to British-controlled Ireland did not bring about the American Revolution, but for sure, it did influence one of the paramount proponents of one of the most paramount events in world history. – **submitted by Bill Burke .**

Sources: *The Irish Times Among friends -Denis Fahey on Benjamin Franklin in Ireland, Seamus Dubhghaill Ben Franklin Begins Visit to Ireland by J. Doyle 9.5.17, How Benjamin Franklin's Visit to Ireland Turned Him Against The British Empire YouTube 8.28.25.*