

A Revolutionary Band, the St James Brass Band



*O'Donovan Rossa Funeral 1915.
(St James Band playing in the back)*

St. James's Brass and Reed Band is Dublin's oldest band, indeed possibly Europe's oldest brass band. It was officially established in the year 1800, though the earliest reference to "a band of musick in the Parish of St. James" dates back to 1737. In the 1700's, there was a reservoir, known as the Bason, located off James's Street. The Bason was surrounded by beautiful trees and flowers and the gentlefolk liked to take the air there. In the mid 1700's journals announced "Councillor Bradstreet intends to have for the entertainment of the Ladies and Gentlemen and the rest of his fellow citizens a Band of Musick at the Bason every Monday night during the season." In the early years of the 20th century the Band headquarters were located at 3 North John's Street, from here it moved to Bridgefoot Street, where it was located for the next quarter century. From the O'Connell period, right through the tragic years of the Young Irelanders and the failure of the '48 Rising and Fenian Movement, the band was supportive of every successive campaign directed towards the National objective.

1772: The Band was prominent in the festivities which ensued on the granting of its Charter to the Grand Canal Company.

1783: The Band played at the opening of the New Castle Market, between George's Lane and William Street.

1844: The Band played at the great meeting at Tara, held by The Liberator, Daniel O'Connell, on the 6th of September, after his release from gaol. The Band were supporters of O'Connell's earliest agitations in the causes of Repeal and Emancipation.

1861: The Band led "an enormous cortège of men with brass bands and torchlight" from Kingsbridge Station to Glasnevin for the funeral of Young Ireland patriot Terence Bellew McManus.

1867: The Band headed the funeral procession of the Manchester Martyrs.

1874: The Band travelled to County Meath in support of Charles Stewart Parnell against the Tory candidate. On another occasion the Band members were invited to Avondale, where they entertained Parnell who saluted them as "Ireland's Premier Band."

1891: On the 6th of October Parnell died in Brighton. His remains were brought back to Ireland, where they were met by St. James's Band, at Westland Row Station.

1898: On the 15th of August, the Centenary year of the 1798 Rebellion, the Band led a vast crowd to the junction of Grafton Street and Stephen's Green, where an inscribed stone was placed to mark the site of a proposed memorial, to Theobald Wolfe Tone. Eventually, after many years, the memorial was erected in a different corner of Stephen's Green.

1903: The Band were leaders of a parade to the Emmet Commemoration, meeting in Thomas Street, where the assembled crowd were addressed by the Fenian, John O'Leary.

1913: On the 11th of November, at the Rotunda, the Irish Volunteers were founded. A newspaper reported "St. James's Band occupied the balcony, playing national airs". The crowd joined in, singing songs.

1915: The Band were in the vanguard at the memorable public funeral of the veteran Fenian, O'Donovan Rossa, where Patrick Pearse delivered his famous oration. Many of the men and women present, would, within a short time, be destined to give their lives, serving the cause of Irish freedom. The Band, are photographed waiting to play the musical tribute, under their popular conductor, Percy Beechfield Carver.

1916: At least six of the Band members were active in the fighting, during the Rebellion, five of whom were Irish Citizen Army soldiers. One, perhaps more, were Irish Volunteers.

Of the three O'Reilly brothers, Tom was attached to the G.P.O. Garrison when he was killed; Jack was in the City Hall and Paddy in Jacob's garrisons, respectively. Paddy Hughes served in the G.P.O. Headquarters. George Geoghegan was killed on the roof of the City Hall. Patrick Kelly, another Band member, fought in the Church Street area.

All survivors rejoined the Band on release from English gaols, approximately a year later.

This stand is dedicated to the memory of Tom O'Reilly and George Geoghegan who gave their Lives for the cause of Irish Freedom.