

What the Irish Flag Means to Me in 2022

When Thomas Meagher first brought the green, white and orange flag to Ireland in 1848, I wonder if he realised what a great gift he was giving to the Irish people. Since it first flew on the Wolfe Tone Club in Waterford City on 7th March 1848, the Tricolour has been flown all over the world, at sports stadia and universities, parliaments and aid camps. People have also flown the Irish flag through their actions; in pop concerts, schools and hospitals across the globe.

The Irish flag has been a symbol of many things in its 174 year history; freedom, peace and hope, to name just a few. But it means an additional something to many of its people. Here's what it means to me.

First and foremost, the Tricolour means family. The entire Irish family, everyone who thinks of Ireland as a home, but also my own family. People like my great-grandmother who believed in a free Ireland and was an active member of Cumann na mBan, but also my grandfather who fought with the Royal Irish Fusiliers in World War 2. People like my great-great grandmother, who never learned to write, but also like my great great great grandfather, a wealthy landowner in Wicklow.

The flag also means my wider Irish family. People like Mary Robinson, Kellie Harrington and Saoirse Ronan who promote Ireland all across the world with their hard work and actions. But the flag also represents the so-called 'ordinary' people of Ireland, both the people living in Ireland, and our diaspora who take our customs and traditions with them wherever they go. It flies at the European parliament buildings in Brussels and the United Nations headquarters in New York. The flag of our small nation is now universal as it gives hope to people in refugee camps and aid stations in the poorer regions of our world.

Originally, the Irish flag represented peace. But, in my opinion, that particular meaning has evolved to include respect. Respect for everyone who calls Ireland home. Respect for all of the differences that make people who they are. Respect for the many cultures and traditions that people have brought with them to Ireland.

But the Tricolour still means peace, as shown by the efforts of Irish soldiers like my uncle Brian, in countries like Lebanon, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mali as they keep the peace; staying true to the original message of the flag.

But most importantly, the Irish flag means home. Home to me and my family and friends. Home to the almost 5 million people who live here. Home to the Irish diaspora of 70 million people. Home to people of all genders, sexualities, religions, ethnicities and cultures. Since 1848, Ireland has become a more diverse, more welcoming and more inclusive place.

And whenever I see the Irish flag flying, no matter where in the world I am, I am proud to call Ireland 'home'.