

‘From ludicrous to logical: the transformation of sport in North  
Munster, 1850–1890.

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### **Commonly used abbreviations.**

LAAC	Limerick Amateur Athletic Club
LAABC	Limerick Amateur Athletic and Bicycle Club
LBC	Limerick Boat Club
LCC	Limerick Coursing Club
LCCC	Limerick County Cricket Club
LFC	Limerick County Football Club
LPYMA	Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association
CLF	County Limerick Foxhounds
CLI	Catholic Literary Institute
SRC	Shannon Rowing Club

# Dedication

To my wonderful wife,  
Louise Anne Marnell.

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# Prologue

‘O Captain! My captain.’

In the summer of 2006, while driving between Castlemaine and Milltown in County Kerry on the way to a country house hotel, my wife and I encountered a large number of motorcyclists, extremely well attired and each in possession of an expensive designer vehicle; given the location it was not unduly fanciful to suggest they resembled latter day ‘wild colonial’ boys and girls. As a teenager my wife and I (separately) spent part of our social lives in an edgy pub in Limerick city frequented by many motorcycle enthusiasts and musicians. Those earlier male and female bikers affected an *Easy Rider*/Hell’s Angels attitude, but their youth, rebelliousness, coolness and angst appeared substantial, romantic and authentic. As a result, we were well disposed to those characters we met on Kerry’s roads and though they seemed more corpulent, affluent and greyer than the bikers we once knew, we felt they had some of the spirit of our onetime bar-mates.

Further along the road the sight of a man sporting a bib over his leather jacket announcing that he was the ‘Road Captain’ interrupted our reverie. What initially seemed to us a gathering of the human equivalent of wild mustangs immediately transformed into a more bovine, bourgeois herd of weekend motorcyclists, weekday professionals on a jolly to capture a different feeling that corporate life could not provide. It was not a moment to compare with the surprise of Odysseus when his men were transformed into swine in the *Circe* episode of Homer’s famous tale, but our shock at the level of organisation, cooperation and planning required to produce the need for an official, so designated, was considerable.<sup>1</sup>

Sadness at the transformation of the rugged, uncouth, transgressing individual of our pasts into the polished, mannered and conformist unit of a motorcycle division remained our overwhelming impression. I am sure that the bikers of our memory exist

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<sup>1</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, (Penguin, London, 2003). That is the end of livestock puns.

yet, but the co-option of their pastime by the ‘man’ they once railed against cannot be gainsaid.<sup>2</sup> Now, in a spirit of competitive parenting, the first of us to identify the need to change our daughter’s nappy will cheerfully nominate the other as the ‘Captain of the child’, just as we dispute who is the ‘Captain of the washing up’; a rueful, yet mocking tribute to the domestication of the once proud, two-wheeled Christy and Christina Mahons and Jack and Jacqueline Duggans. In our disapproval we fell into the same ‘it wasn’t like that in my day’ trap as the editorial writer of the *Limerick Chronicle*, in October 1886, who similarly bemoaned the younger generation and described them as regular idlers – ‘not used to the style of living’ their fathers endured.’<sup>3</sup> *Plus ça change ...*

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<sup>2</sup> The main rival to the Hell’s Angels gang in England is the ‘Outlaws’, a crew that boasts, not unlike a golf club, ‘chapters’, a three page, twenty-two-rule constitution, dress code and rules excluding female membership, *MG* 28 Nov 2008.

<sup>3</sup> *LC* 16 Oct 1886.



# Introduction

In Limerick, in the second half of the nineteenth century, sport was gentrified and made responsible, respectable and resplendent; this was achieved by the development of the club and the creation of the office of ‘captain’ with a full panoply of lieutenant and non-commissioned officer equivalents to support him. The regularisation, organisation, disciplining and *embourgeoisement* of play and games in this period were the outstanding features of the sports boom. The first task of this study is to investigate and explain the processes by which sports, marshalled by its captains, was altered, disciplined, hardened and penned into the club form.

This research explains how something as trivial, unpromising and marginal as play, games and sport came to enjoy such prominence in debates on gender, class, nationality and politics during the second half of the nineteenth century. Hurling and cricket became markers of nationality, skating, even, became a trial of ‘moral qualities’ in women, and rugby and other codes of football encoded a more martial masculinity. Standard historical takes on the emergence of the GAA in 1884 also seemed too casual in their acceptance of the dynamic and processes by which the GAA usurped the pre-GAA sports infrastructure.

The aim was to discover a more clear, nuanced and accurate picture of the sports infrastructure to which the GAA was responding. By delineating more finely the sports world that prompted the reaction of the GAA it was hoped to acknowledge the real contribution of the Anglo-Irish and folk sports movements to Irish sporting and cultural history as well as shedding more light on the likely motivations of the GAA sports entrepreneurs, the *ochtó-ceatharnaigh*, that sought to supplant both.

A comprehensive study of the Anglo-Irish (and as far as practicable, their plebeian counterparts) at play also promised to shed further light on part of another significant

question of interest; the fate of Ireland's 'tories'. History's 'losers' are a fascinating bunch; independence era American Tories were battered and exiled to Canada, the Caribbean, Great Britain and Florida, but their fate tells as much about America as do the happy scenes on the Fourth of July. Ireland's southern unionists, to use Buckland's formulation, variously called unionists, tories or loyalists, also endured a slow, grinding and demoralising campaign against them, but though many were similarly battered and exiled, many more adapted to an Ireland that was out of sympathy with them, and demonstrated a civic spirit and grace that contradicted many of the more outrageous calumnies laid at their feet.

The fingerprints of Ireland's tories may be detected in the transformation of a customary, rudimentary sports infrastructure into a diverse, organised, coherent and efficient infrastructure, one of the more interesting developments of culture in the industrial revolution era. A study of this process in Limerick offered the opportunity to assess how a largely agricultural economy adapted an industrial sporting culture to its needs while also offering perspectives on the interaction of sports, class, politics and gender in nineteenth century Ireland. Limerick was a town at the centre of a series of overlapping sporting, agricultural, commercial, political and cultural webs extending from Listowel in the west to Tipperary in the east, to Charleville in the south, to Gort in the north-east and to Nenagh in the north-east.

One must also be sceptical of popular histories of Limerick sport that allow a great role to the military in the development and promotion of sports. The attribution to the British military a large role in the popularisation, organisation and development of rugby union, for instance, did not chime with my earlier research into the response of Loyalism in Limerick to the New Departure, an era during which the key late nineteenth century sports were marshalled into organised form, but which also

coincided with the army's least popular decade. The 1880s, in particular, witnessed considerable civilian antipathy to the military and was notable for the prolonged battle between a more assertive nationalist town council under Stephen O'Mara's mayoralties and central government about how to pay the excessive costs of policing the city. The notion of garrison sports is a durable one in Irish sports culture, but in Limerick it is clear that the 'garrison' most responsible for sports organisation in the years before 1884, sporting Ireland's year zero, was the urban, commercial and professional, Protestant and Roman Catholic middle class.<sup>4</sup>

The tremendous role of non-sporting voluntary associations in the organisation and development of sport was the key discovery of this research. As the major sporting events of the period were examined, the significance of the relationship between the sporting and non-sporting voluntary associational sectors became clearer and thus a large part of the research concentrated on institutions such as bands, musical and theatrical groups, religious and secular societies. This proved not to be a detour, however, as all these groups and clubs were interconnected as strands of a social web competing with and complementing each other in a vibrant, growing and increasingly diverse civic culture.

The lack of primary source material for early sports clubs trumped any excessive presumptions of a dense empirical study. Initially, I hoped to generate a picture of the late nineteenth century sports infrastructure much as Stanley Kubrick painstakingly created scenes for his films; I was obliged, however, to accept that the scene I have prepared may bear closer relation to a the staging of a Beckettian drama with the suggestion of a tree in place of a complete description of a forest.

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<sup>4</sup> Hannigan, Dave, *The Garrison Game: The State of Irish Football*, (Edinburgh, 1998).

The chief resource for this research was Limerick's nineteenth century paper of record, the *Limerick Chronicle*, every edition of which was examined for the period 1850 – 1890. This approach was necessary given the lack of primary sources for sports clubs, but it yielded a more rewarding, deeper picture of the cultural life of the region than could possibly be imagined. There was a much wider range of sports at an informal or formal stage of development than anticipated; the stories of archery and croquet, for instance, give insights into elite women's leisure experiences. The commercialisation of many leisure activities was also a surprise, particularly the relative success of a commercial skating rink in the 1870s that has long since been deleted from popular memories and from Limerick's sporting story. Croquet, walking, swimming, skating, pigeon fancying and most shooting pursuits were all enjoyed on an informal basis. With the exception of a single, exclusive rifle club in County Clare, none of these sports achieved a formal club existence, so no records could possibly exist of their many activities. This makes local media, in particular the *Limerick Chronicle*, the only accurate and detailed source of reliable data on a large component of the region's sport infrastructure.

The value of the *Chronicle's* sports coverage cannot be underestimated. It responded to the growth of sports organisations and the evolution of sporting culture in three principal ways. First, over the course of the period studied the paper progressively increased its coverage of sports events, the administrative machine behind sports and the personalities pushing this vibrant form of voluntary association. Second, the *Chronicle* altered the ways in which it covered sport. These changes in the form of the coverage of sport reflect the increasing seriousness of the pursuits and greater public appetite for the minutiae of contests. For example, in the early part of the period it was more usual to simply note a hunt took place or that a cricket match was held; in each case a simple outcome was noted and one or two names mentioned in

dispatches. By the later part of the period more complete analyses of the events required thorough scoring charts (for cricket) and large attendance lists for hunts. The reports of the 1879–1880 County Limerick Foxhounds hunts, for instance, offer a detailed description of the course, direction and timing in most of that club's hunts that season – a considerable advance on the earlier, simpler letters to the editor by enthusiastic correspondents. The third way in which the *Chronicle* responded to the growth and evolution of sport culture was by attaching increasing significance and value to sporting pursuits and sportsmen. What in 1850, was regarded as a diversion or amusement, had, by 1890, become a totem of masculinity, nationality, individual self-worth, commercial value and local representation. The transition of sport from mere play to signifier of cultural, political, social and economic value was tracked assiduously by the reporting, commercial and editorial staff of the *Chronicle*.

The *Limerick Chronicle* is a complete source for the study of sport in the region in this period. It is also a source capable of offering more than club records can provide.

Though the Limerick Boat Club records, for example, are extensive and extremely accessible, even they do not give the full flavour of the Limerick regatta that may be gleaned from *Limerick Chronicle* reports. The practice at many regattas of inebriated or exuberant spectators inventing their own amusements often made the pages of the *Chronicle*, while being completely ignored by the official sporting body behind the main event. One such aside to the Limerick regatta was the daring practice of jumping into the River Shannon, often from sixty feet or more, from the top of a brig or similar ship in Limerick Docks. This feck-making addition to the main fare of the day may be variously interpreted as an attempt by excluded young men to draw attention to their exploits and away from the water-borne heroes in their super-craft or even as attempts to relieve boredom at a tedious event. In any case, these tricks often served to puncture the air of seriousness around sports events of the time and may be seen as the lower

orders two fingered salute to the pretensions of their social betters. The *Chronicle's* role in sports development was considerable. By accepting advertising from middle class men of business who were also sports entrepreneurs, for both their sporting and commercial enterprises, a symbiotic relationship developed between the main agents of the new sports infrastructure and the *Chronicle*. The sporting businessmen brought advertising revenues and were repaid with advertising and positive, extra column and editorial inches devoted to the exploits of their various clubs and societies. This makes the *Chronicle*, in effect, the late nineteenth century *Pravda* of Limerick's sporting community, and in the absence of official club records, the truest source of data on those clubs.

An undoubted benefit of a wide and deep immersion in such a source as the *Limerick Chronicle* was the ability to place sporting developments in a real-time social and political context. A modest advertisement in that journal in March 1880 asking Limerick Hunt Club members to avoid newly tilled or sown fields only assumes an importance when it can be demonstrated that such requests began to be made only in the early 1880s when agrarian issues began to dominate the political and social sphere.<sup>5</sup> Before that contentious decade members' (literally) cavalier attitudes were unremarkable. The new requirement to appease by this courtesy more assertive tenants, and land proprietors recently raised to that position from their former tenant status, points to an end to deference as well as a process of negotiation between landlord and tenant about all affairs to do with the land, not just the legal and financial, but the leisure and sporting ones also.

The co-optation of many tenant farmers into the gentry's hunting and racing fraternities that accompanied such developments occurred slowly, but was most obvious in the 1880s – a decade chiefly understood to be one of near institutional, permanent

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<sup>5</sup> LC 23 Mar 1880.

hostilities between those classes. The sporting output of those classes provides an interesting perspective on their non-sporting experiences and demonstrates more common ground than high politics might suggest.

The *Chronicle*'s reach was a line south from south Offaly (King's County) to Tipperary South Riding and all points west of that line to the Atlantic Ocean. Within that area the *Chronicle* was an assiduous recorder of loyalist business and landlord interests and this places us at an exceptionally clear vantage point in witnessing that community at work, at worship and at play. However, the paper did not restrict itself to such a narrow focus as would hurt its commercial interests and it reported on all the major issues in counties Limerick and Clare, the northern portions of Cork, Kerry and Tipperary and the southern portion of Offaly. The relative dearth of local, detailed primary sources was ameliorated by this wealth of data the *Chronicle* revealed.

Further afield, *The Irish Sportsman and Farmer* and the *Irish Times* (both Dublin journals) were consulted, but proved fitful and less than reliable sources for the story of sport in the mid-western region. The lack of national governing bodies in the sports in the period studied meant a lack of centralised primary data on which to base any serious conclusions and led to a further reliance on the locally sketched picture.

This study was helped by the great range and quantity of secondary sources dealing with the sport history of the United States of America, Great Britain, other English speaking societies and continental European and some South America countries. The study thus triangulates between local and global narratives of sport in the past to draw some conclusions on the place of sport in late nineteenth century Irish society. *The Journal of Sport History*, from the North American Society of Sport History, *The International Journal of the History of Sport, Sporting Traditions*, from the Australian



Society for Sport History and *The Sports Historian*, subsequently, *Sport in History* – the journal of the British Society of Sport History, were the main secondary periodicals offering the international and comparative contexts against which to assess the Limerick experience.

The local picture is the primary focus, but it is almost equally concerned to do justice to the sporting and leisure experiences of historically invisible sections of society.<sup>6</sup> The trawl through the *Limerick Chronicle* helped to partly overcome the invisibility of many pursuits that, due to precarious primary sources and the lack of primary sources, can often be neglected. Between the lines of many sensational news reports was found evidence of leisure and sporting activity that would not have emerged otherwise. We would not have known a Dr. Gelston was on way to bathe in the River Shannon in 1851 but for the fact that he came across a murdered woman's body.<sup>7</sup> In a similarly macabre story three months later some boys digging for worms found a human skull, that of a dead infant.<sup>8</sup> Their angling exploits would have remained lost but for this surprising, vital evidence.

A review of two books on nineteenth century leisure in *Victorian Studies* in 1979 offered a succinct summary of the dangers of too narrow a focus on the apparatus or club infrastructure of sports and encouraged a more holistic and liberal approach to sports and leisure history. It stated:

This preoccupation with the growth of the apparatus means that we hear more about the leisure pursuits of the better-off than the less well-off, more about men than

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<sup>6</sup> “ ‘archival silence’ should not infer that a rich and meaningful life was not being led by the ‘people’.”, Maguire, J. A., ‘Conceptual and Methodological Confusion in Analyses of Nineteenth Century Leisure - The Case For Historical Sociology’, in Mangan, J.A., & Small, R.B., *Sport, Culture, Society; International historical and sociological perspectives (Proceedings of the VIII Commonwealth and International Conference on Sport, Physical Education, Dance, Recreation and Health)*, (University Press, Cambridge, 1986), 41.

<sup>7</sup> LC 9 Apr 1851

<sup>8</sup> LC 2 July 1851.

about women, more about adults than about children. Home-based leisure - the reading and sewing, the informal relationships of families, relatives, and friends, the talks and the walks - is difficult to quantify, but nonetheless important. So too, is the continuing influence of religion and religious association, which surely deserves more than a three-page treatment. Children digging on the sands, families gathered round the winter fireside, and friends just walking in the countryside are at least as representative of Victorian leisure as gin palaces and sacred choral societies, but we learn nothing of them from this otherwise good book.<sup>9</sup>

With this warning ringing in my ears this study seeks to discover, analyse and report such neglected experiences, and though the primary objective has been to narrate and interpret the organisation and development of modern sports and leisure in late nineteenth century Limerick (the apparatus), the informal elements of the story have not been ignored. Often the material uncovered has not been sufficient to develop a robust narrative or thematic discussion. One report of the prosecution of some boys in 1878 for the crime of stealing pigeons revealed a hitherto unknown pigeon fancier in Newenham Street in Limerick city, but with few corroborating facts to fortify the story we are left with the merest tantalising glimpse of an unsuspected leisure form and are hindered from drawing anything but the simplest conclusions.<sup>10</sup>

In the choice of material and mode of analysis a liberal, holistic interpretation of sports has been adopted, but this is not entirely typical among sports historians. The late nineteenth century sports revolution separated play from games and both of these from sport. Sport in the new order became a cultural idiom in its own right and not an adjunct to other social and cultural institutions and practices. The pre-eminent sports historian, Allen Guttman, has offered the best explanation of the spectrum from play to sport in *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*. He presents play as spontaneous and an end in itself. Games are organised play. Contests are games that demand an outcome involving a winner and, therefore, a loser. Finally, sports in

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<sup>9</sup> *Victorian Studies*, 22:4 (Summer 1979), 469-70. Review of Delgado, Alan, *The Annual Outing and Other Excursions*, (Allen & Unwin, London, 1977). Lowerson, John, & Myerscough, John, *Time to Spare in Victorian England*, (Harvester Press, London, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> *LC* 24 Aug 1878. An 1867 agricultural show in Limerick had a section for showing pigeons, *LC* 19 Dec 1867.

Guttman's analysis are physical contests, a rigid definition. In short, sport is physical, competitive, organised play.<sup>11</sup>

With three adjectives of rationality to describe a common noun of dubious rationality, it is clear that the concept of organised sports has an inherent tension between the logical and the ludicrous. Most sports historians, however, elevate the logical and treat the ludicrous as a frivolous aside and have concentrated on the competitive wing of the play/contest spectrum. This allows them to focus and avoid being diverted, but its drawback is that it emphasises the organised, competitive and official sports infrastructure over the informal, spontaneous and unofficial sports tradition, so that pastime swimming, for instance, is passed over and deemed less capable of offering truths about individuals and society. Definitions of sport throughout the present thesis are more liberal. Guttman's definition of modern sports also emphasises discontinuities with the past, but this thesis highlights the continuities between the old and new sports infrastructures as the latter crystallised in the late nineteenth century.

Mike Cronin is currently the most productive historian focused on sport in Ireland's past.<sup>12</sup> His most important text covering nationalism and sport is essentially a 'historiographical investigation', but it makes a strong bid for the topic to be given a more serious degree of attention than it has been accorded so far.<sup>13</sup> In this difficult though (given sport's ubiquity and immense popularity) curiously Sisyphean enterprise of uncovering Ireland's sports and leisure past, he has been joined by historians such as Paul Rouse, Brian Griffin, Tom Hunt and Neal Garnham, supported by many

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<sup>11</sup> Guttman, Allen, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1978).

<sup>12</sup> Cronin, Mike, 'Fighting for Ireland, Playing for England? The Nationalist History of the Gaelic Athletic Association and the English Influence on Irish Sport', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 15:3 (December 1998), 36-56.

<sup>13</sup> Cronin, Mike, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland; Gaelic games, soccer and Irish Identity since 1884*, (Four Courts Press, Dublin 1999), 16.

postgraduate students and amateur custodians of the past in a thousand locales around the country.<sup>14</sup> Conferences dedicated to redressing the lack of work in, and variety of, Irish sport history have also been held and promise to expand our knowledge of a neglected part of our Irish history – and it must be conceded that in comparison to Irish literature, the level of attention given in academia to sport, as a key plank of popular culture, has been underwhelming.<sup>15</sup>

One of the first questions asked of sport by most researchers is its contribution to, and relationships with, the different forms of Irish identities in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>16</sup> Crucially, the problem of the dearth of sources on the connection between sport and Gaelic/Irish national identity did not exist in relation to sport and Irish/British national identity. The historical sources for the connections between sport and Irish-British national identity in the nineteenth century are in inverse proportion to those existing for Irish-Irish national identity. As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth a greater equality of coverage of the competing sporting national identities can be discerned in the sources, but in the second quarter of the twentieth century the early sport/identity pattern was reversed and it was as uncommon to find Irish–Britishness reflected in 1930s sporting sources as it was to find Irish–Irishness reflected in 1870s sources.

This thesis outlines a complex set of malleable identities in Limerick’s sports infrastructure in the second half of the nineteenth century. The most eclectic of these

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<sup>14</sup> Rouse, Paul, ‘The Politics of Culture and Sport in Ireland: A History of the GAA Ban on Foreign Games, 1884-1971. Part One: 1884-1921’, in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 10:3 (1993). Rouse, Paul, ‘Offaly Tradition: The Gaelic Athletic Association’, in Nolan, William P., & O’Neill, Timothy P., eds., *Offaly: History and Society*, (Geography, Dublin, 1998). Garnham, Neal, *The origins and development of football in Ireland: being a reprint of R.M. Peter’s Irish Football Annual of 1880*, (introduction by Garnham), (Ulster Historical Foundation, Belfast, 1999). Garnham, Neal, ‘Sport History: The Cases of Britain and Ireland Stated’, *Journal of Sport History*, 31:2 (Summer 2004), 139-144.

<sup>15</sup> Rouse, Paul, ‘Why Irish historians have ignored sport: a note’ in *History Review*, XIV (2003), 67-73.

<sup>16</sup> Cronin, Mike, & Mayall, David, (eds.), *Sporting Nationalisms: Identity, Ethnicity, Immigration and Assimilation*, (Frank Cass, London, 1998).

identities is manifest in the contribution of many Irish Protestant Home Rule Association (IPHRA) members, in their cultural role as sports entrepreneurs, to Limerick's sports infrastructure. Their achievement in creating a broad range of cultural institutions was remarkable and was out of all proportion to their denominational and political influence. The IPHRA men (and other agents of sporting change) in this period took the sporting infrastructure bequeathed them and modified it to make it more efficient and rational. Their national politics mirrored the local patriotism they espoused and though their political position was more complex than narrow green and orange caricatures, and even precarious, they played a significant part in attempting a rapprochement between green and orange Limerick.

The growth and development of sports under the tutelage of the IPHRA members *et al* was almost an organic, but certainly an evolutionary affair. Nancy Struna is a sports historian who emphasised a point supporting this analysis that late nineteenth century sports developments occurred in an evolutionary fashion. Theories of evolution accept that change occurs, but that it is not entirely original; the continuities between past and present, and between the present and the future are more pronounced than the modifications. Struna argues that we should see sports development as a move away from the past and not a move towards some nebulous future.<sup>17</sup> It is a point with which one can concur: the sports entrepreneurs of the late nineteenth century were not moving towards the early twenty-first century sports infrastructure; they were moving away from a past one towards many possible futures, one of which happens to be the infrastructure of the twentieth and twenty-first century. The story of biological evolution is the story of genes interacting with environment; the story of sports evolution is sports 'DNA' interacting with its social, cultural, political and economic environments. Folk football of the nineteenth century has many varied descendants; the

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<sup>17</sup> Struna, Nancy, 'Reframing the Direction of Change in the History of Sport', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 18:4 (Dec 2001), 1-15.

American, Canadian, Australian, Gaelic, Association, Rugby Union and Rugby League football codes have, in essence, a single ancestor, but through the various impacts of the non-sporting environment upon them they developed in vastly different ways.

Among the other historians whose subjects, approaches and styles have impressed or influenced the present study, are the Canadian sports historians Bouchier and Wamsley.<sup>18</sup> Bouchier, in particular, has ploughed a similar furrow by analysing the meaning of sport to the middle class of distinct locales in Canada over roughly the same period as the study of Limerick.<sup>19</sup> Hardy's work on sport in Boston, strong on the effects of urbanisation on sports development, was useful in the present approach to the development of sport in Limerick city.<sup>20</sup> Tony Mason's groundbreaking study of association football in England is a model of scholarly investigation of a discrete sporting subject and though the present study eschews his approach by sticking to a catholic interpretation of Limerick's sport infrastructure, the model offered by his work has been invaluable.<sup>21</sup> In an Irish context, the work of Mandle on the early GAA, and Comerford on Fenianism and its pastime component, created the space in which to imagine the possibility of approaching a postgraduate study of this Cinderella branch of historical study.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Bouchier, Nancy B., 'The 24th of May is the Queen's birthday': Civic holidays and the rise of amateurism in nineteenth-century Canadian towns', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 10:2 (August 1993), 159-92. Wamsley, K. B., 'Cultural signification and national ideologies: rifle-shooting in late nineteenth-century Canada', in *Social History*, 20:1 (Jan 1995), 63-72.

<sup>19</sup> Bouchier, Nancy Barbara, 'For the love of the game and the honour of the town': organised sport, local culture and middle class hegemony in two Ontario towns, 1838-95', Ph.D. Thesis, (University of Western Ontario, Canada, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> Hardy, Stephen, 'The city and the rise of American sport: 1820-1920', in *Exercise and Sports Science Reviews*, 9 (1981), 183-219. Hardy, Stephen, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915*, (Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1982). Hardy, Stephen, & Alan G. Ingham, 'Games, Structures, and Agency: Historians on the American Play Movement', in *Journal of Social History*, (1983), 285-302.

<sup>21</sup> Mason, Tony, *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915*, (Harvester Press, Sussex, 1980).

Mason, Tony, (ed.), *Sport in Britain - a social history*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989). Mason, Tony, 'Football on the Maldan: cultural imperialism in Calcutta', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 7:1 (May 1990), 85-96. Mason, Tony, 'Our Stephen and Our Harold: edwardian footballers as local heroes', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 13:1 (March 1996), 71-85.

<sup>22</sup> Mandle, W.F., 'Cricket and Australian nationalism in the nineteenth century', in *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 59:4 (September 1973), 225-46. Mandle, W.F., 'The I.R.B. and the beginnings of the Gaelic Athletic Association', in *Irish Historical Studies*, 20, no. 80 (September 1977), 418-3. Mandle, W.F., 'The Gaelic Athletic Association and Popular Culture', in MacDonagh, O., Mandle, W.F., and Travers, P., (eds.),

One target missed, by a country mile, was the completion of an entire chapter on the issue of gender and sport in Limerick in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was part of an ambitious plan to investigate the onion-styled layers of meaning to an individual, male or female; to the community, urban or rural; and to the nation, whether green or orange. While much material and experience was accumulated for a future attempt at this gender summit, it must be admitted that the study fails to extract anything but rudimentary conclusions on gender and sport in Limerick.

One statement that can be made with confidence is that sports culture in Ireland did not produce a culture of respect for the body. Sports entrepreneurs in Ireland have been less concerned with the individual body than the public body: the immutable club, society or representative body and not the mutable physical body is the focus of attention in Irish sports culture and, therefore, its historiography – unfortunately, this thesis included.

Two further historians who have taken sport as a subject in a country largely comparable to Ireland are the Scots, Tranter and Jarvie.<sup>23</sup> Their work on nineteenth

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*Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750-1950*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1983), pp. 104-121. Mandle, W.F., *The Gaelic Athletic Association and Irish Nationalist Politics 1884-1924*, (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1987). Mandle, W.F., 'Parnell and sport', in *Studia Hibernica*, no.28 (1994), 103-16. Comerford, R.V., 'Patriotism as pastime: the appeal of fenianism in the mid-1860s', in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol.XXII, no.87, March 1981, 239-50. Comerford, R.V., 'Ireland 1850-70: post-famine and mid-Victorian', in Vaughan, W.E., (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, V: Ireland Under the Union, I, 1801-70*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989), 372-95. Comerford, R.V., 'Comprehending the Fenians', *Saothar*, 17 (1992), 52-6. Comerford, R.V., *The Fenians in context: Irish Politics and Society, 1848-82*, (Wolfhound, Dublin, 1998)..

<sup>23</sup> Jarvie, Grant, 'Highland gatherings, historical sociology and sport', in Mangan, J.A., & Small, R.B., (eds.), *Sport, Culture, Society, International Historical and Sociological Perspectives; Proceedings of the VIII Commonwealth and International Conference on Sport, Physical Education, Dance, Recreation and Health*, (University Press, Cambridge, 1986), 68-75. Jarvie, Grant, 'Highland Gatherings, Sport, and Social Class', in *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 3:4 (Dec 1986), 344-55. Jarvie, Grant, 'Balmorality, cultural production and the Highland Gatherings', in *Scottish Journal of Physical Education*, vol.17, no.1 (April 1989), 9-11. Jarvie, Grant, 'Culture, Social Development and the Scottish Highland Gatherings', in McCrone, David; Kendrick, Stephen, and Straw, Pat, (eds.), *The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture and Social Change*, (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1989). Jarvie, Grant, 'Sport, Gaelic Nationalism and Scottish Politics, 1879-1920', in Laine, Leena, (ed.), *On the Fringes of Sport*, (Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin, Germany, 1993). Jarvie, Grant, (ed.), *Sport in the Making of Celtic Cultures*, (Cassell, London, 1999). Jarvie, Grant, & Burnett, John, (eds.), *Sport*,

century Scottish sport, culture, identities and politics is a useful comparator to the organisation and development of Irish sport history, but Tom Hunt's work on sport in Westmeath, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath*, trumps both and is a *sine qua non* for historians embarking on future local, regional or national studies.<sup>24</sup> Hunt's work, modelled on the approach of Tranter and Mason, is a rich, balanced and sharp assessment of the sport infrastructure in an Irish county in the second half of the nineteenth century and tracks the key themes and developments that the present study endeavours to follow in Limerick and its surrounding districts.

This thesis, however, provides a more satisfactory template for the future study of nineteenth century Irish sport. Chapter One identifies the nineteenth century roots of Limerick's modern sports infrastructure that need further investigation, following with an argument outlining the necessity of considering sports within the overall framework of voluntary associations, and a consideration of the themes under which studies into these infrastructures may be attempted. Chapter Two narrates the widespread organisation and subsequent development of all sports that achieved a codified form, and some that continued to be enjoyed informally. It argues that organisation led to the effective privatisation of sports and demonstrates the evolutionary nature of the process.

Localism and sport is the focus of Chapter Three and in thematic discussions of sports infrastructure, performance and athletic virtue may be observed some aspects of what

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*Scotland and the Scots*, (Tuckwell, East Lothian, Scotland, 2000). Tranter, Nigel L., 'The social and occupational structure of organized sport in central Scotland during the nineteenth century', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 4:3 (December 1987), 301-14. Tranter, Nigel L., 'The rise and fall of Highland Games in nineteenth century Scotland: a regional anomaly', in *Scottish Journal of Physical Education*, (April 1989), 13-15. Tranter, N.L., 'Organized Sport and the Middle-class Woman in Nineteenth-century Scotland', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 6:1 (May 1989), 31-48. Tranter, N.L., 'The patronage of organised sport in central Scotland, 1820-1900', in *Journal of Sport History*, 16:3 (Winter 1989), 227-47. Tranter, N.L., 'Rates of participation in club sport in the central lowlands of Scotland, 1820-1900', in *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*, XXI:2, (December 1990), 1-19.

<sup>24</sup> Hunt, Tom, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath*, (Cork University Press, Cork, 2007).



sports meant to the participants and communities that sponsored those activities. The development of sport in the nineteenth century paralleled the growth of cosmopolitanism, the antithesis of localism, but it is a paradox that sport exploited localism to bind its participants and adherents to movements that diluted local feeling. The growth of the U.K. unitary state, developments in transport and education and trends in globalisation (economic and otherwise) were huge macro forces squeezing localism, and in the discussion on sport and localism may be seen the expansion of the ‘borders of foreign-ness’ at a cultural and social level.

A discussion of nationalisms and sport is essential to a true picture of sport in Limerick in the late nineteenth century and in Chapter Four the complex interplay of these phenomena is discussed. Many existing narratives of sport and nationalism, including some academic and most popular understandings of the period are crude. One quote by the British historian, Holt, with which many greener nationalists would agree, deserves to be taken down the yard and strangled; it reads,

The formation and early history of the GAA is arguably the most striking instance of politics shaping sport in modern history; it is certainly the outstanding example of the appropriation of sport by nationalism in the history of the British Isles and Empire.<sup>25</sup>

It is more correct to state that the GAA’s brand of nationalism was expressed in overt form, but that the lack of a similarly explicit political manifesto in other sports movements did not make them any less political. Flags, anthems, toasts, club mottoes, club and governing body forms and hierarchies all betrayed the political leanings and sympathies of sports entrepreneurs and clubs in the pre-GAA decades. Chapter Four outlines the attachment of political significance to sporting practice in the mid-

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<sup>25</sup> Holt, Richard, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, (Clarendon, Oxford, 1992), 240.

nineteenth century and also outlines the tensions, based on class and national politics, which existed in the pre-GAA sports infrastructure.

Sport in Limerick in the second half of the nineteenth century was promiscuous, elastic, flexible and eclectic. Middle class sports clubs developed later than their rival forms of voluntary association, but they outpaced and outfoxed them in attracting what even then were known as fanatics – or fans. Sport's willingness to exploit tried and trusted forms of organisation and administration and to discard failed routes towards progress mark it out as an evolutionary demon among nineteenth century voluntary association forms.

# Chapter 1

Sport in its local, ludicrous  
and logical context

‘Of all the countries on the civilized earth Ireland is that where there is least recreation for the people; and of all the cities or towns in Ireland the dullest and the stupidest for the toiler and the worker is Limerick. There is not the slightest effort made for supplying rational amusement to the people. The only place is the public house. There alone he is cared for.’<sup>26</sup>

This Rick Blaine-like statement, the boldest one describing the supposed poverty of Limerick’s recreation infrastructure, certainly pulled no punches; it was delivered in 1881 by the Rev. James Dowd, and addressed the issue of intemperance arising out of the lack of leisure outlets, whereby men, after the toil of the day, sought recreation ‘in unhallowed means.’ ‘Habitual dullness’, ‘usual monotony’, and ‘want of amusement’ were some of the other unmistakable, unflattering phrases used to describe the lack of recreational outlets in Limerick in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Writing about its own proposal for a regatta, the *Limerick Chronicle* stated that if some of the young townsmen threw their energy into it, the project was certain to receive support and would ‘throw some animation into our city and river, both of which badly need it just now.’<sup>28</sup> An incident on April Fool’s Day five years earlier revealed that the need for animation was a recurring one. Tricksters distributed handbills around the town drawing a large unsuspecting crowd to a phantom athletic contest.<sup>29</sup> The hoaxers knew how interested the townspeople were in sporting spectacle, but the incident also illustrated how infrequent sporting diversions were, and how few alternative spectacles were available.<sup>30</sup>

Dowd’s withering analysis of leisure provision, however, took no account of the existing formal, and the very significant, informal sporting and leisure infrastructure in the region. More pointedly, with the exception of organised Gaelic sports, all modern

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<sup>26</sup> LC 11 Oct 1881.

<sup>27</sup> LC 17 June 1865, 3 Oct 1868, 17 Aug 1869, 9 Sept 1882.

<sup>28</sup> LC 23 May 1868.

<sup>29</sup> LC 1 Apr 1876.

<sup>30</sup> LC 7 July 1877, 6 Oct 1877. For a pessimistic view of the lack of spectacle in rural Ireland see Vaughan, W. E., *Landlords and Tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland*, (Clarendon, Oxford, 1994), 4.

sports were available in the same dullest, stupidest town.<sup>31</sup> Dowd's remarks were also undermined by the fact that his audience was the membership of one of the most important leisure providers in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association (LPYMA, formed 1853). The LPYMA had a choral society, reading room and gymnasium; hosted bible, literary and debating classes; and held frequent public lectures, soirees, musical festivals and *conversazione*s.<sup>32</sup>

From mid-century, moves to cater for 'something after toil' for young men had focussed on their intellectual and spiritual needs and were catered to by movements such as temperance societies, Mechanic's Institutes and religious and secular societies.<sup>33</sup> The ostensible, formal mission of such societies was to develop intellect, to teach new skills, build character and to promote individual self-improvement. This improvement-movement was transformed with the gradual introduction of play-recreation and sport to societies' programmes. In the case of the LPYMA's Roman Catholic counterpart – the Catholic Literary Institute (CLI, formed 1876), the transformation was completed in spectacular fashion when the younger membership prevailed in a partisan campaign to permit billiards, that signifier of dissoluteness, to be played at the Institute on the Sabbath.<sup>34</sup>

The evolution of the LPYMA and CLI from strictly educational, Christian character-building agencies into social centres and part-time providers of entertainment and recreation – as well as the development of sporting branches, is a clear example of the

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<sup>31</sup> Athletics, cricket, and rowing had a decade-long history of organisation in the region, rugby football had been organised for six years. Even those thoroughly modern sports such as cycling and lawn tennis had both been organised for seven years.

<sup>32</sup> *Report to 29th Annual General Meeting of LPYMA, for year ending 31 Oct 1882*. LC 26 Oct, 4, 18 Nov 1865, 11, 18 Oct 1873, 6 Nov 1880.

<sup>33</sup> LC 4 Jan, 3 Apr, 14 June 1866.

<sup>34</sup> LC 13 Nov 1875, 27 Jan 1876, 2, 9 June 1883.

impossibility of separating sporting and non-sporting associational culture in the late nineteenth century. The LPYMA incorporated social, recreational and entertainment elements into their activities within a formal programme, but many voluntary associations also exhibited a commitment by the memberships to sharing leisure, recreation and sport outside the club's formal programme.<sup>35</sup> Young men's societies invariably had a social aspect with frequent activities outside the core society activity.<sup>36</sup> In 1872 a series of readings was organised by young men from Freemason lodges, an activity labelled a 'new amusement'.<sup>37</sup> In the same year the Masonic Hall also became a home to a billiards table, and later the Hall was chosen as the meeting place for the gentlemen who formed the first bicycle club in Limerick city in 1874.<sup>38</sup> Even when there was no deviation from the core society activity, a change of context in which that activity took place could introduce both spectacle and a recreational dimension.

This was the case when, in 1857, a Roman Catholic religious group – the Young Men's Society, organised an outing to the picturesque village of Adare. A religious procession (and prayers) was followed by a dinner hosted by the Earl of Dunraven. With no loss of solemnity the day's proceedings were deemed a huge success, the report stating that 'never was recreation and religion so happily blended.'<sup>39</sup> The changed context in which this society function took place was all the more remarkable for the participation of young women in the procession, and many others among their supporters. A droll, if apocryphal, story from America in *The Shamrock* magazine in 1878 also demonstrates the truth behind much of what is spoken in jest. Asked if there were any converts at a camp meeting one man replied 'Well, I swear, I forgot to ask.

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<sup>35</sup> LC 5 Sept 1874.

<sup>36</sup> LC 27 Oct 1881.

<sup>37</sup> LC 28 Sept 1872.

<sup>38</sup> LC 30 Mar 1872, 29 Dec 1874.

<sup>39</sup> LC 5 August 1857. LC 14 Jan 1857 – a Wesleyan soiree 'terminated with a hymn – having been a happy combination of religion, reason and recreation, a real mixture of the *utile cum dulci*'.

But the baked beans were bully, the sailing and rowing were divine, and there was some of the handsomest girls there I ever saw.<sup>40</sup> The mix of religion, sport, food and social opportunities was clearly not a uniquely eastern Atlantic recipe.<sup>41</sup>

The association of amusement with reading, and religion with recreation indicated a flux between earnest and fun uses of leisure–time in many voluntary groups – in both their formal and informal programmes. The earnest and the entertaining uses of formal and informal leisure were explicitly linked in a public address by another local notable, William Monsell, M.P., who, in an 1851 address to the Trades’ Literary Institute, exhorted his audience that

Men who have leisure for literary pursuits have no right to reserve those enjoyments, [they had] a solemn duty to contribute as far as they can, to the amusement and instruction of those through whose exertions they enjoyed the necessaries and the luxuries of life.<sup>42</sup>

A considerable licence in the language of sport accompanied the apparent contradiction of a ‘solemn duty’ to ‘amusement’.<sup>43</sup> The terms used in relation to sporting and non–sporting activities in public discourse were indistinguishable; recreation, leisure, diversion, entertainment, amusement and spectacle require particular attention.<sup>44</sup> Illustrating the linguistic licence with sporting terms, the Limerick Cricket Club committee’s 1852 meeting arranged to renew this ‘handsome and invigorating entertainment’, while devotees of hawking arranged ‘a most fashionable amusement’ for local spectators in 1856.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *The Shamrock*, XV:618 (17 Aug 1878), 735.

<sup>41</sup> Schmidt, L.E., *Holy fairs: Scottish communions and American revivals in the early modern period*, (Princeton, 1989).

<sup>42</sup> *LC* 22 Nov 1851.

<sup>43</sup> *LC* 14 May 1851, 19 Jan 1856, 23 May, 11 July 1860, 12 Aug 1862, 21 May 1867, 9 Nov 1872.

<sup>44</sup> *LC* 5 May, 25 Aug, 25 Sept 1852. Brailsford, Dennis, *A Taste for Diversions: Sport in Georgian England*, (Lutterworth, Cambridge, 1999), 235. Renson, Roland, ‘Traditional Rural Sports in Europe’ in Collins, Tony, *et al* (eds), *Encyclopedia of Traditional British Rural Sports*, (Routledge, London, 2005), 1-15.

<sup>45</sup> *LC* 5 May 1852, 26 Mar 1856. Morris, R.J., ‘Leisure, Entertainment and the Associational Culture of British Towns, 1800-1900’, paper at Third International Conference on Urban History, Central European University, Budapest, August 1996. Bailey, Peter, “‘A mingled mass of perfectly legitimate pleasures’: The Victorian

The elasticity of terms like recreation was complemented by the flexibility with which associations incorporated non-members in their formal activities. Roscrea YMCA in 1873 secured a ground for ‘athletic and other sports’ for its ‘members and friends’.<sup>46</sup> Roscrea YMCA’s concern to provide services to non-members demonstrates that association between the members did not finish at the door of the society, but neither was association between members and non-members, under the umbrella of the club, ruled out. Roscrea YMCA, the LPYMA and the CLI sought to place themselves at the centre of particular ‘societies’ and their activities were very often open to members’ friends and families – what Hardy labelled an ‘interest community’.<sup>47</sup>

The value of voluntary associations to society has received much attention leading to the development of ideas of social capital.<sup>48</sup> Scepticism remains that their contribution to civic engagement is tenuous.<sup>49</sup> It is interesting, however, that Putnam, (the foremost contributor to debates on social capital) has chosen to hang his argument on a sporting image – that of individual Americans bowling alone – emphasising the absence of sufficient social cohesion in contemporary American society.<sup>50</sup>

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middle class and the problem of leisure’, in *Victorian Studies*, 21:1 (Autumn 1977), 22. Mitchell, Sally, ‘Sentiment and Suffering: Women’s Recreational Reading in the 1860s’, in *Victorian Studies*, 21:1 (Autumn 1977), 29-45. ‘A Farmer’s Pleasure Garden’, in *Old Limerick Journal*, 24 (Winter 1988), 95-6. Constantine, Stephen, ‘Amateur Gardening and Popular Recreation in 19th and 20th Centuries’, in *Journal of Social History*, 14:3 (Spring 1981), 387-406. Gaskell, S. Martin, ‘Gardens for the Working Class: Victorian Practical Pleasure’, in *Victorian Studies*, 23:4 (Summer 1980), 479-501.

<sup>46</sup> LC 18 Sept 1873. IT 4 Sept 1879.

<sup>47</sup> Hardy, Stephen, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915*, (Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1982).

<sup>48</sup> Gamm, Gerald, and Putnam, Robert D., ‘The Growth of Voluntary Associations in America, 1840-1940’, in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXIX:4 (Spring 1999), 511-57. Gutmann, Myron P., and Pullum, Sara M., ‘From Local to National Political Cultures: Social Capital and Civic Organization in the Great Plains’, in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXIX:4 (Spring 1999), 725-62.

<sup>49</sup> Keen, Susan, ‘Associations in Australian History: Their Contribution to Social Capital’, in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXIX:4 (Spring 1999), 639-59.

<sup>50</sup> Putnam, Robert, ‘The strange disappearance of civic America’, *The American Prospect*, XXIV (1996), 34-48. Putnam, Robert, *Bowling Alone; Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (Simon & Schuster, New York, 2000).



A consideration of leisure time devoted to activities of a non-sporting nature is therefore, for three reasons, vital to this study. First, many non-sporting societies moved into the provision of both recreation and sporting activities.<sup>51</sup> This provision occurred within the formal and informal programmes of these societies, and encompassed members and non-members alike. Second, non-sporting associations did not just complement the growing world of organised sport: they provided rival possibilities for people's leisure time. To understand why people chose sports we must understand the alternatives before them. Third, and most importantly, however, analysis of non-sporting organisations and their activities facilitates a better understanding of contemporary traditions and processes of association – *la vie associative* of the region.<sup>52</sup> Association through sport was only one of the myriad associational possibilities in late nineteenth century Limerick. At the least a person could associate through agencies like bands, musical and theatrical groups, the pub – and its polar opposite, the temperance society, religious or secular groupings, trades and agricultural societies, friendly societies, and, finally, political movements.

People did not join sporting groups for ludic reasons only, the opportunity to associate, network and socialise in wider (generally male) company, and to flee the bonds of domesticity were immense impulses behind the growth of organised sport.<sup>53</sup> If sport had been the only reason for the establishment of such clubs as the Limerick Boat Club (LBC) in 1870, the subsequent consistent failure of this large membership club to send out more than a single competitive fours crew could only be explained by more attention to the word 'club' than 'boat'.<sup>54</sup> During the late 1860s another elite club, the

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<sup>51</sup> Catholic Literary Institute, LC 17, 24 Nov 1883, 11 Mar 1884. On association football clubs that emerged out of the pub and church, Mason, Tony, *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915*, (Harvester Press, Sussex, 1980).

<sup>52</sup> Baker, Alan R. H., *Fraternity among the French Peasantry: Sociability and Voluntary Associations in the Loire Valley, 1815-1914*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>53</sup> Tosh, John, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, (Yale University Press, London, 1999).

<sup>54</sup> *Annual reports & minute books of the Limerick Boat Club, 1870-1929*. LC 15 July 1886.

Munster Archers also had a discrepancy between the number of registered members (100) and the number of active archers (sixty).<sup>55</sup>

At the beginning of the final quarter of the nineteenth century a thriving non-sporting associational culture complemented and competed with a rudimentary sports infrastructure, contradicting the frequent jeremiads about leisure provision.<sup>56</sup> There was an elite organised sport scene, much sporting activity was informally organised, and much remained *ad-hoc*. Complaints about leisure provision also failed to acknowledge those occasional, successful, but poorly supported attempts to redress the recreational deficit, the most notable of which were Ambrose Hall's efforts to organise regattas for the city in the early 1860s.<sup>57</sup> The cumulative criticisms of recreational provision were directed at the lack of sufficient recreation outlets and the lack of certain types of recreation. The adequacy and reach of sport was questioned, but it was not alone; there were frequent calls for dances, musical, theatrical, literary and scientific endeavours.<sup>58</sup>

This chapter deals with the types and the sufficiency of the sporting, recreational and leisure infrastructures in place in North Munster in the 1850s and 1860s – before the key late nineteenth century developments. The discussion of types of recreation deals with two dimensions of nineteenth century sport and leisure: firstly, the sport and leisure infrastructure that existed in mid-century Limerick, and secondly, non-sporting associational culture – as it related to recreation. The multiple links that existed between sporting and non-sporting associational cultures will also be acknowledged and described. The second issue, sufficiency, occupies the final leg of the chapter and

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<sup>55</sup> LC 21, 23 Sept 1865.

<sup>56</sup> LC 12 June 1852, 21 July 1860, 11 May 1867, 20, 25 Feb 1869, 22, 24 June, 1 Aug 1871, 27, 29 June, 27 July 1872, 20 Nov 1873, 14 Mar 1876. NG 26 July 1873.

<sup>57</sup> LC 2 Feb 1859, 3 June 1865.

<sup>58</sup> LC 5 Oct 1850, 5 Apr 1851, 21 July 1860, 9 Nov 1872, 21 Nov 1882, 15 Sept 1885.

analyses how well placed was the existing sports, leisure and recreational infrastructure to cope with the demand for access to sport and leisure. The question of the sufficiency of sport and recreation provision in the 1850s and 1860s seemed to be decided in favour of the pessimists, but the contribution of non-sporting associational culture to recreational and sometime sporting opportunities was considerable.

The first root of the late nineteenth century sports system was the existing sport and leisure infrastructure. This inchoate but not inconsiderable structure had five components; organised sport; informal sport; celebratory sport; sport in education; and finally, sport in the army, militias, and police.

Organised sports in late nineteenth century Limerick included hunting, coursing, horse racing, yachting and cricket.<sup>59</sup> These were first organised in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and had developed traditions, customs and modes of organisation that reflected their earlier phase of development. Though organised (and therefore modern), they remained the property and fiefdoms of sporting patrons. Hunt packs, shooting parties and cricket clubs were organised and maintained by individuals or families for the benefit of friends and invitees. Mr. Chadwick, owner of the Arravale Harriers that hunted near Tipperary Town in west Tipperary and east County Limerick was one patron lauded for his commitment to maintaining, at his own expense, a pack ‘for the enjoyment of friends’.<sup>60</sup> This ‘old’ sporting infrastructure had much in common with the sports explosion later in the century, but had many differences too,

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<sup>59</sup> Bowen, Muriel, *Irish Hunting*, (Kerryman, Tralee, 1955). Wyndham-Quin, W. H., *The Foxhound in County in Limerick*, (Dublin, 1919). *Members of the Royal Western Yacht Club, Irish Division*, (Limerick, 1837). *LC* 31 Jan, 13 Mar 1852. D’Arcy, Fergus A., *Horses, Lords and Racing Men: The Turf Club, 1790-1990*, (Turf Club, Co. Kildare, 1991), 191-3. *LC* 17 Aug 1850, 10 May, 27 Aug, 20 Sept 1851, 8 May 1852, 2, 5 Feb, 25 May 1859.

<sup>60</sup> *LC* 9, 14 Apr 1874.

particularly; limited access, prohibitive costs, and their reservation to, and control by what Thorstein Veblen labelled the ‘leisure class’.<sup>61</sup>

Horseracing and field sports were the most organised and among the most popular of leisure pursuits. They were characterised by the highest degree of organisation, a regular season of events, dedicated venues, regular and consistent participation, and finally, these sports enjoyed a high degree of public acceptance. Angling and shooting were more individual pursuits, and required less combination or organisation to be enjoyed satisfactorily, but they too were popular.

In history generally, and sports history in particular, we know more of the rich than the poor, of men than women, of adults than children, of extra-domestic than domestic leisure, and of formal than of informal leisure.<sup>62</sup> Limerick’s mid-century informal sports infrastructure was a combination of loose, popular, sometimes spontaneous, and culturally significant set of practices and traditions. Informal sports were those recreations and games that were practised irregularly and without the apparatus of clubs. Hurling and some race meetings stand out among this group.<sup>63</sup> Handball, Sunday hurling, *caid* (folk football), swimming, skating, croquet, lawn tennis, shooting, angling and coursing are some of the many sports that were run informally.<sup>64</sup> Many sports that were subsequently organised such as coursing and lawn tennis, also continued outside formal club structures.<sup>65</sup> Any consideration of the formal organisation of sport in the late nineteenth century must, therefore, recognise that for

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<sup>61</sup> Veblen, Thorstein, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, (Penguin, London, 1994). Dooley, Terence, *The Decline of the Big House*, (Wolfhound, Dublin, 2001). Bence-Jones, Mark, *Twilight of the Ascendancy*, (Constable, London, 1987). Bence-Jones, Mark, *Life in an Irish Country House*, (Constable, London, 1996). Hoppen, K. Theodore, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885*, (Clarendon, Oxford, 1984), 116-22; Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants*, (1994), 4, 120, 131-3.

<sup>62</sup> Lowerson, John, & Myerscough, John, *Time to Spare in Victorian England*, (Harvester Press, London, 1978).

<sup>63</sup> Ó’Caithnia, Liam, *Scéal na hIomána*, (Clóchomhar, Baile Átha Cliath, 1980). *LC* 8 Aug 1857, 6 Feb 1866.

<sup>64</sup> *LC* 4 May, 31 July 1850, 18 Sept 1866, 9 July, 3 Sept 1868, 29, 31 Dec 1870, 25 Aug 1874, 29 July 1875, 27 July, 27 Dec 1877, 25 Jan 1881.

<sup>65</sup> *LC* 25 Apr, 17 Sept 1878.

many years (perhaps decades) after formal organisation, sports still retained a largely informal character for many, if not most, of its practitioners.<sup>66</sup> Croquet, ice-skating and swimming were sports that were not formally organised in Limerick and though croquet experienced a drop in popularity when lawn tennis arrived all of them continued as informal sports.<sup>67</sup> The most important informal sports for Limerick's men and boys were swimming, skating, poaching, pitch and toss, and handball – all five were also frequent public nuisances that required police intervention.<sup>68</sup>

The most invisible informal leisure activity was walking.<sup>69</sup> The King's Island in Limerick City was a favourite promenading venue and its attractions were increased when a broad path was completed around the entire island.<sup>70</sup> Swimming and walking – informal, historically invisible and requiring no resources – seem to be unworthy of much attention in comparison with football, but this unlikely pair of recreations was arguably more important in the nineteenth century than the ball game.

Swimming and walking were the first recreations around which an entire seaside leisure industry was based, an industry upon which the emerging towns of Kilkee, Lahinch and Ballybunion were dependent.<sup>71</sup> In August 1850, one visitor to Lahinch stated that a recently built wall was obstructing walkers. His contention that the resort was in competition with other resorts was a reminder that tourists would metaphorically talk with their feet: 'nothing should be done to harm the place's

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<sup>66</sup> Cosmic or Xtreme bowling was a turn of the millennium American innovation that integrated flashing lights, loud music and garish apparel in a sport that had been losing appeal, but which reversed that trend; it accompanied a change in bowling where recreational bowlers for the first time outnumbered competitive players, *Irish Examiner* (Money & Jobs), 7 Dec 2001, 10.

<sup>67</sup> *LC* 29 July 1875, 29 June, 14, 17 Dec 1878, 10 June 1882, 15, 17 Jan 1885. Bowen, Elizabeth, *Bowen's Court*, (Collins Press, Cork, 1998), 332-5.

<sup>68</sup> *LC* 31 July 1850, 29 Jan 1859, 15 Aug 1871, 15, 27 June, 30 July 1872, 22 May 1875, 10 June 1876, 3 Apr 1877, 22 May 1879, 15 July 1886.

<sup>69</sup> Solnit, Rebecca, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, (Verso, London, 2002).

<sup>70</sup> *LC* 12, 29 June, 9 Oct 1850, 2 May 1860, 21 May 1867, 16 June 1874.

<sup>71</sup> *LC* 31 July 1852. Hembry, Phyllis, *British Spas from 1815 to the Present: A Social History*, (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Madison and Teaneck, NJ, 1997). Travis, John F., *The Rise of the Devon Seaside Resorts, 1750-1900*, (Exeter University Press, Exeter, 1993).

attractiveness'.<sup>72</sup> Resorts were not obliged, however, simply to remove obstacles to people's enjoyment of leisure, they also had to provide additional attractions.<sup>73</sup> Later additions to the resorts came swiftly, and within a decade the attractions of Kilkee included shooting, boating, yachting, billiards, athletic races, horse races, a reading room and cricket.<sup>74</sup>

Musical bands and Friendly Societies were among the first to utilise the railways to establish links with distant colleagues via the railway and a new phenomenon of travel as leisure emerged. Foresters from Cork visiting Limerick and Castleconnell were entertained by their Limerick brethren in 1865, while a few years later bands from towns along the Cork–Limerick line headed large numbers of excursionists to Limerick.<sup>75</sup> The tradition of organised works outings in Limerick dates from a slightly later period, and was connected with the rise of association among workers and employees for more practical, trade union, purposes.<sup>76</sup> Some works outings in the third quarter of the nineteenth century bear more the character of employer patronage than employee organised leisure, most notably Sir John Arnott's yachting trips for employees out of Cork Harbour.<sup>77</sup> Outside of a work *milieu*, in 1860, the demesne of the Earl of Dunraven was opened on Sunday afternoons for visitors, but there were restrictions preventing visitors bringing in even a basket of refreshments, thus hampering the crowds' desire to picnic. The importance of this rule was cast into stark relief by a report on one occasion that the grounds were completely deserted while on the same day a thousand people went to Castleconnell, many of them having picnics.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> LC 3 Aug 1850, 31 Aug 1859, 10 June 1876.

<sup>73</sup> LC 11 Sept 1850.

<sup>74</sup> LC 11 Sept 1850, 24 Sept 1851, 15 Sept 1852, 11 June, 4 July, 13 Aug 1859, 15 – 31 Aug 1865, 29 Nov 1887.

<sup>75</sup> LC 6 June 1865, 24 June, 19 Aug 1873.

<sup>76</sup> On contemporary English traditions, Delgado, Alan, *The Annual Outing and Other Excursions*, (Allen & Unwin, London, 1977). Durie, A.J., & Huggins, M.J., 'Sport, Social Tone and the Seaside Resorts of Great Britain, c. 1850-1914', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 15:1, (Apr 1998), 173-87.

<sup>77</sup> LC 22 July, 8 Aug 1865.

<sup>78</sup> LC 11 July 1860, 5 May 1866.

Celebratory sports were games and pastimes practised at festival time and at social events.<sup>79</sup> Such pastimes were mainly athletic in nature and mostly involved feats of running, throwing and jumping, but football and cricket were not unknown at Sunday school and regular school outings.<sup>80</sup> Celebratory sports were run to mark important occasions in the life (and death) of individuals, groups or institutions, to which the friends, supporters and members of such groups and institutions were invited, to witness or to participate in a day's, afternoon's, or evening's amusements.<sup>81</sup> When one Tipperary land agent was saved from drowning by his son they were greeted on their return to the estate by a spontaneous celebration involving music and 'amusements'.<sup>82</sup> In County Clare a more elaborate event was organised to mark the completion of slob reclamation works near Newmarket-on-Fergus in 1884 – it included boat races and athletics contests.<sup>83</sup> Celebratory sports events for the Roman Catholic tenant farmer and rural labourer sections of society were often held in conjunction with important events in the life of landlords – marriages, coming of age parties, or simply upon the return of a landlord to his estate after an absence.<sup>84</sup> These celebrations were social affairs involving dancing and music, but frequently it was an opportunity to hold athletics contests such as throwing weights. Celebratory events were variable and infrequent, but there were regular calendar occasions when sports were included in celebrations – especially harvest and religious festivals. The athletic sports marking harvest festivities at Waterpark in 1879, for instance, included a married women's race.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ó Súilleabháin, Seán, *Irish Wake Amusements*, (Mercier, Dublin, 1997). *LC* 8 Apr 1869.

<sup>80</sup> *LC* 2 Aug 1851, 25 Sept 1861, 27 Sept 1873.

<sup>81</sup> *LC* 22 Mar 1856, 21 Jan 1857. *IT* 4 Sept 1879, 12, 15 Oct 1880.

<sup>82</sup> *LC* 8 Aug 1867.

<sup>83</sup> *LC* 18 Oct 1884.

<sup>84</sup> *LC* 31 Mar, 26 Jun, 25 Aug 1852, 1 Jan 1859, 1 June 1861, 12 Aug 1862.

<sup>85</sup> *LC* 19 Aug 1879.

The earliest clear category of celebratory sports was that held by Protestant Sunday schools (and some Orphan Societies).<sup>86</sup> These were extremely popular, to judge by their relatively high frequency, and by the large levels of attendance at Sunday school sports outings.<sup>87</sup> Sunday–school picnics and landlord–hosted parties included fun and novelty sports events that imitated amateur military sports programmes.<sup>88</sup> Some of these are staples yet at school sports days – egg and spoon race, sack race, and the three–legged race. Following a Sunday school fete at Rathkeale in 1873 one letter reported in sympathetic, pastoral terms, the excitement and joy experienced by the children in anticipation of, and during the entire outing:

The natural rest of many boys and girls was curtailed on Thursday morning by reason of excursions made to windows at unseemly hours ... The assembly turned itself loose on the spacious lawn and abandoned itself to the exciting fun of racing, running, foot-ball, leap-frog, and cricket ... Over the way, a muscular lad, having given the football a kick that reminded you of a balloon, is rushing after it with as much earnestness as if his whole course in life depended on it.<sup>89</sup>

Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century sport in Irish schools was reserved to the boarding school system and universities and was thus the preserve of a small, but influential elite.<sup>90</sup> Sport in early nineteenth century English public schools was an end in itself, schoolwork, though important, was just one element of the grander scheme of producing young gentlemen, so a Corinthian spirit pervaded the school system.<sup>91</sup>

Under the impact of mid–century reforms a greater earnestness entered the system and sport became a means to a number of ends; greater discipline; the inculcation of values; the development of group and national identity, and the promotion of a virtuous

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<sup>86</sup> *LC* 24, 28 July 1852.

<sup>87</sup> *LC* 3 July 1873.

<sup>88</sup> *IT* 12, 15 Oct 1880.

<sup>89</sup> *LC* 27 Sept 1873.

<sup>90</sup> *LC* 26 June 1869, 27 June 1871, 26 June, 17 July 1873.

<sup>91</sup> Wright, C.J., 'Before Tom Brown: education and the sporting ethos in the early nineteenth century', in *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, (G.B.), 9:1 (1977), 7-15.



and vigorous masculinity.<sup>92</sup> Thus, a Corinthian spirit was sacrificed for a Spartan one. A particularly caustic reference to the do or die attitude in modern sport (albeit a twentieth century literary American one) was Holden Caulfield's observation about Pencey Prep.'s football game against Saxon Hall: 'It was the last game of the year, and you were supposed to commit suicide or something if old Pencey didn't win.'<sup>93</sup> A similar transition occurred in Irish public schools. In 1852 a grammar school on the south east coast of Ireland advertised the attractions of sea bathing in summer, its gymnasium and the cricket and archery clubs formed by the boys attending there.<sup>94</sup> Such *ad hoc* arrangements in which the boys were masters of their own sporting programme was transformed in Irish schools to a more competitive structure, but this time more closely identified with the school itself than with the individual schoolboys. Another, later, advertisement for the High School in Harcourt St., Dublin in 1880 noted the school's prowess at hurley in the previous year (in addition to its playing facilities).<sup>95</sup> Though the grammar and high school's advertisements each noted the importance of sport to the school atmosphere there was a difference in the emphasis in both that pointed to a change in the three cornered relationship of school, sport and individual. The importance of sport to the individual was gradually compromised by its growing importance to the institution, in a like manner to the diminution of Corinthianism in favour of Spartanism, and the individual body became subservient to the corporate body.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Hearl, Trevor, 'Military Education and the School Curriculum, 1800-1870', in *History of Education*, 5:3 (1976), 251-64. Mangan, J.A., 'Muscular, militaristic, and manly: the British middle-class hero as moral messenger', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 13:1 (March 1996), 28-47.

<sup>93</sup> Salinger, J. D., *The Catcher in the Rye*, (Penguin, London, 1987), 6. Berryman, Jack W., 'From the cradle to the playing field: America's emphasis on highly organised competitive sports for pre-adolescent boys', *Journal of Sport History*, 2:2 (Fall 1975), 112-131.

<sup>94</sup> *LC* 25 Feb 1852.

<sup>95</sup> *IT* 2 Jan 1880.

<sup>96</sup> The tone of school annuals is one that emphasises the credit due to the school and the glory that reflects on the school from the sporting prowess of its students, *Crescent College Review*, *Mungret Annual*.

The importance a school attached to the formal sporting programme was also an indicator of the class of students for which it catered. The lower–middle and labouring classes rarely enjoyed the same level of sporting provision and the ‘cult’ of athletics so prevalent in public schools was entirely absent. Anderson has noted in contemporary Scotland a force that was equally at work in Ireland, that sport in schools was a luxury that ‘could be indulged in schools whose pupils had an assured future’ – meanwhile the ‘grim business’ of passing examinations remained the priority.<sup>97</sup> Sports associated with education were predominantly team–based and included cricket and football – though athletics was the most important spectator sport.<sup>98</sup>

A different set of ‘corps’, the army, militias, and police similarly utilised sport as a relief from boredom, to encourage physical exercise, for gambling purposes, and as a promotional device – athletic and gymnastic displays for the public were important public relations opportunities.<sup>99</sup> These institutions were hugely instrumental in organising sports spectacles in nineteenth century Limerick.<sup>100</sup> As individuals, officers and NCOs were prominent in events (including dog fights) that arose out of gambling challenges.<sup>101</sup> One humorous challenge to the members of the Limerick Club, to which military officers were automatically admitted, and that perfectly illustrates the intersection of ludicrousness and rationality, called for forty men to grass as many pigeons as possible in five shots. The winner was to receive ten guineas and a pig – which he had to drive to the door of the clubhouse or forfeit £2. Adding to the theatricality and jape–making an advertisement also noted that the pig could be seen in a local hotel.<sup>102</sup> Rowing, running and walking, handball, falconry, shooting and horse

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<sup>97</sup> Anderson, Robert, ‘Secondary Schools and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth Century’, in *Past and Present*, 109 (Nov 1985), 176-203.

<sup>98</sup> West, Trevor, *The Bold Collegians - the development of sports in Trinity College, Dublin*, (Lilliput, Dublin, 1991).

<sup>99</sup> *LC* 16 Aug 1850, 25 Mar, 19 Dec 1865, 17 Aug 1869. *IT* 10 & 11 July 1865.

<sup>100</sup> *LC* 6 Aug 1859, 22 May 1861, 25 Oct 1873.

<sup>101</sup> *LC* 22 Mar 1870.

<sup>102</sup> *LC* 18 Sept 1866.

racing were some of the pursuits for which military men offered wagers and challenges that received great publicity.<sup>103</sup> As an institution, the army held sports meetings for the purpose of providing entertainment for the military themselves.<sup>104</sup> Gradually, approved members of the public were introduced to the athletic and gymnastic displays until the events were laid open to the general public.<sup>105</sup> In this evolution of sport from spare time activity to promotional opportunity may be seen a similar process to that which unfolded in sport in the public school system.<sup>106</sup>

The largest sports meetings were those of the regular army; local militias ran smaller athletics events. The Clare Militia was the first local unit to include a sports day to mark the final day of annual training, but the County Limerick Militia did not include such displays.<sup>107</sup> The army and militias' greatest contribution to athletics and cricket – the two sports most closely associated with them, was to introduce their local enlistees to the rules and traditions of organised games. It is arguable, however, that there was no long lasting legacy from this introduction; cricket failed to take off as anything other than an elite sport (thus not the work of enlisted men), and athletics was soon taken over by the middle classes and local communities – long before the arrival of the G.A.A., an organisation entirely opposed to British military involvement in sports.

The final root of Limerick's late nineteenth century sports infrastructure was the existing non-sporting associational infrastructure. A variety of clubs and societies representing an associational spectrum ranging from bands to friendly societies enjoyed, retained and developed links with the local sports infrastructure. The contribution of non-sporting associations to modern organised sports in Limerick

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<sup>103</sup> *LC* 15 June, 13 Nov 1850, 16, 30 Apr, 3 May, 16 Aug 1851, 9 May 1867, 27 & 29 Jan 1874.

<sup>104</sup> *LC* 3 Jan 1857. *IT* 2, 11, 15 Sept 1865.

<sup>105</sup> *LC* 31 July 1861, 14, 17 Aug 1869, 21 May 1870, 24 Aug 1872, 3 May 1873, 8 Sept 1874, 29 June 1876, 28, 30 June 1877, 8 Aug 1878, 25 Sept 1880, 12 Aug, 25 Nov 1882, 13 Sept 1884, 25 June 1885, 16 Sept 1886.

<sup>106</sup> *LC* 21 July 1885.

<sup>107</sup> *LC* 17 June 1865, 24 June 1871, 26 June 1873, 20 June 1874, 29 May 1875.

resembles Sherlock Holmes's 'hound that didn't bark'. Though their contribution has been unheralded, it has been anything but negligible. The Protestant Young Men's Association, for example, contradicted two indicators in the society's name and mission – by branching into sport and by catering for women's leisure.<sup>108</sup>

An analysis of the range of associational possibilities in late nineteenth century Limerick is necessary to a proper understanding of the fantastic growth in organised sports. To understand the reasons people chose sports one must understand the other leisure pursuits they also chose, as well as those they ignored. It is instructive (and perhaps coincidental) that concern for the disappearance of musical societies in Dublin, in 1880, was expressed during a period when sport was in a frenzy of organisation.<sup>109</sup>

A further reason for considering sport within the framework of contemporary associational culture is that the sports club is but one component of voluntary associational culture.<sup>110</sup> Among the faults of sports historiography is parochialism, an emphasis on biography – which often veers towards hagiography – and a tendency to view the subject in isolation.<sup>111</sup> An approach towards sport, leisure and recreations that emphasises the links with other cultural forms is a valuable addition to sports and to social and cultural history.

An analysis of sport culture that acknowledges links (and debts) to other aspects of associational culture is invaluable because sport was not simply influenced by that culture; it exerted a powerful counter-influence. Non-sporting associations and movements did not ignore sport, but neither did the sports world ignore non-sporting

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<sup>108</sup> *LC* 6 Aug 1887.

<sup>109</sup> *IT* 24 Sept 1880.

<sup>110</sup> Baker, Alan, *Fraternity among the French Peasantry*, (1999), 47-52.

<sup>111</sup> Metcalfe, Alan, 'Canadian Sport History in the Twenty-First Century', paper given at annual conference of North American Society of Sport History, Banff, Canada, May 2000.

pursuits.<sup>112</sup> Through anthems and flags, sports were adapted to the politics of the day (and of the organisers of events).<sup>113</sup> Even art was not ignored – in early Olympics medals were also awarded for literary and artistic pursuits.<sup>114</sup>

Band music was crucial to the festival atmosphere of nineteenth century sports events.<sup>115</sup> A ballad commemorating the ‘Olympic Games’ tournament in Roscrea in 1873 went

The Roscrea band, all dressed so grand, was there to make us glad  
And played until the crowd were set all musically mad.  
Oh, how we pranced and how we danced, while on us glanced the eyes,  
With looks half-bold and half-askance, of maidens that we prize.<sup>116</sup>

Most major sporting events included band performances.<sup>117</sup> Horse races, regattas, athletics and cricket were the sports best catered for.<sup>118</sup> Sport has, even yet, not severed its links with band music; witness the marching band tradition in American sports and the continued association of the Artane Boys Band, among many others, with the Gaelic Athletic Association. Musical band performances were not confined to the events only. Race balls, post-regatta banquets and end of season or testimonial dinners were integral parts of the sporting infrastructure of the period.<sup>119</sup> All required bands. Thus, during and after the event itself, band music was a pre-requisite for a well conceived and executed sporting programme. Though the numbers of people who could aspire to attend post-event balls and banquets was small and exclusive, sporting

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<sup>112</sup> *IT* 25 Feb 1880.

<sup>113</sup> Jarvie, Grant, ‘Balmorality, cultural production and the Highland Gatherings’, in *Scottish Journal of Physical Education*, vol.17, no.1 (April 1989), 9-11. Comerford, R.V., ‘Patriotism as pastime: the appeal of fenianism in the mid-1860s’, in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol.XXII, no.87, March 1981, 239-50. Bradley, Joseph M., ‘Football in Scotland: A history of political and ethnic identity’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12:1 (April 1995), 81-98.

<sup>114</sup> *Irish Examiner*, (160 Years Supplement), 30 Aug 2001, p.19.

<sup>115</sup> Brailsford, Dennis, *A Taste for Diversions*, (1999), 88-90, 133. *LC* 20, 27 Aug 1859, 26 Aug 1865, 18 Sept, 28 Aug 1866.

<sup>116</sup> *NG* 26 July 1873. *LC* 7 Aug 1884.

<sup>117</sup> *IT* 19, 22 July 1865. *LC* 25 Sept 1852, 25 Mar 1890.

<sup>118</sup> *LC* 17 Jan 1857, 15 July 1875, 2 Sept, 11 Nov 1879.

<sup>119</sup> *LC* 25 Oct 1851, 4 Sept 1852, 21 Sept 1867, 4 Sept 1875, 23 Apr 1881.

success was often the cue for impromptu band-led public demonstrations.<sup>120</sup> Shannon Rowing Club's success at an 1872 regatta in Cork inspired a band-led odyssey through the streets illuminated by lighting tar-barrels.<sup>121</sup>

A significant link between band music and sport from the second half of the nineteenth century, which still resists challenge today, was the tradition of playing national anthems at sporting events.<sup>122</sup> Anthems contributed to a process by which sport was accorded cultural and political status out of all proportion to that which it previously enjoyed.<sup>123</sup> Sport was increasingly seen as representative of national worth, but contemporary debate in Ireland on the definition of the nation (and the estimation of the worth of each nation) was a live political issue.<sup>124</sup> Setting band music to sport made a statement about the organising group and its political allegiances, it also reflected contemporary gender norms. All bands, by virtue of their membership, organisation, deployment and attire lent a martial air to proceedings. In this atmosphere the sports, overwhelmingly male participation activities themselves, assumed a hyper-masculine façade.

There was a close connection between sport, theatre, drama and music.<sup>125</sup> Sports societies ran musical and theatrical events to raise money for club purposes and for charity.<sup>126</sup> Barrington's Hospital and the Limerick Fuel fund, an annual public subscription to provide winter fuel for the city's poor, were regular recipients of money from concerts run by the city's rowing clubs.<sup>127</sup> Garryowen F.C. held popular

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<sup>120</sup> *LC* 18 Mar 1886.

<sup>121</sup> *LC* 22 Aug 1872, 17 May 1881.

<sup>122</sup> *LC* 30 July 1881, 11 May, 12 Aug 1882.

<sup>123</sup> *ISF* 19 Feb 1870.

<sup>124</sup> *LC* 13, 15 June 1871.

<sup>125</sup> *IT* 12 Nov 1880.

<sup>126</sup> *LC* 24, 28 Nov, 1 Dec 1885.

<sup>127</sup> *LC* 18 Apr 1876, 31 Mar, 3 Apr 1883.

‘smoking concerts’ to raise funds for the club’s own needs.<sup>128</sup> Ironically, the only evidence extant concerning one sports club is an advertisement for its variety output. The Original Garryowen Cricket Club, in 1865, advertised its proposed amateur theatricals to be held at the Athenaeum.<sup>129</sup>

Shows were not simply secondary elements of the clubs’ activities.<sup>130</sup> They allowed year-round activity among the membership (particularly important to rowing and sailing crews), gave members more value for their subscriptions, provided a degree of celebrity (media coverage was always assured) and reminded the public of the club’s presence and of its value both to individuals and its sponsoring community.<sup>131</sup>

The closeness of the relationship between sport and music and theatricals can best be seen in the origins of the city’s most important, and earliest modern middle-class sports clubs.<sup>132</sup> Limerick’s two main rowing clubs evolved from proto-rowing clubs (based in rival city department stores), to rowing clubs with variety activities (independent of the stores), to rowing clubs *solo*. In the mid-1860s, employees of one of the principal department stores of Limerick city, Todd, Murray and Co., organised among themselves a rowing group. A theatrical group had already existed in the business for at least fifteen years.<sup>133</sup> Following the formation of the Limerick Boat Club (LBC), with which the Todd’s rowing men were involved, the boatmen integrated a large variety element into the club’s programme.<sup>134</sup> With a formal sporting mission

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<sup>128</sup> *LC* 15, 20 Dec 1887.

<sup>129</sup> *LC* 27 Apr 1865.

<sup>130</sup> *LC* 2 Apr 1872.

<sup>131</sup> *LC* 24 Dec 1874, 13, 16, 18, 20, 23, 30 Jan, 3, 10, 13 Feb 1877, 11 Feb 1879. Á la the Turnhalle for nineteenth century London Germans. Cox, Richard; Jarvie, Grant, & Vamplew, Wray, (eds.), *Encyclopedia of British Sport*, (ABC-Clio, Oxford, 2000), 402-3.

<sup>132</sup> *UI*, 5 Sept 1885. Mandle, W.F., ‘The Gaelic Athletic Association and Popular Culture’, in MacDonagh, O., Mandle, W.F., and Travers, P., (eds.), *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750-1950*, (St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1983), 106.

<sup>133</sup> *LC* 25 Jan 1851, 15 Feb, 10, 15 May 1866.

<sup>134</sup> *LC* 7 Nov 1878.

and a formal variety one, in 1874, what was labelled the musical ‘society’ of the LBC grew under the wing of the sports club.<sup>135</sup>

Todd’s commercial rival, Cannock, Tait and Co., also had a sporting, musical and thespian cohort among its employees.<sup>136</sup> The sporting branch became the nucleus of the Shannon Rowing Club (SRC) and this club integrated the variety tradition of the store into its annual programme.<sup>137</sup> The SRC’s musical and dramatic branch was known as the ‘Glee Class’, but the LBC and SRC’s troupes were subsequently known as ‘Christy’s Minstrels’.<sup>138</sup>

In mid-century the military, and its officers in particular, were more influential in local amateur dramatic and musical circles than in sport.<sup>139</sup> Though the contribution of the military to Irish sport has been acknowledged (and over-stated), its contribution to amateur dramatics has not.<sup>140</sup> Military provision of theatrical entertainments preceded, by many years, the provision of military sponsored athletics and other sports events.<sup>141</sup> Other notable military displays with considerable dramatic value were sham battles and training manoeuvres.<sup>142</sup> Sham battles, though held for the serious purpose of testing organisational efficiency and preparedness, nevertheless, when open to public view provided fantastic spectacle.<sup>143</sup>

The emphasis in mid-century elite education on preparation for a military career permitted the importation of (reduced) sham exercises in to school open days. The

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<sup>135</sup> LC 24 Sept 1874.

<sup>136</sup> LC 25 Jan 1851, 8, 10 May 1866.

<sup>137</sup> LC 29 May 1869.

<sup>138</sup> LC 10 Jan 1871, 10 Feb 1877, 4 Nov 1890.

<sup>139</sup> LC 5, 16 Jan 1850, 19 Nov, 3, 6, 10, 13 Dec 1851, 3 Mar, 12 June 1852, 4 Jan 1860, 4, 18, 22, 25 May 1861, 5 Aug 1862, 6 Aug, 10 Dec 1867.

<sup>140</sup> Hannigan, Dave, *The Garrison Game*, (Mainstream, Edinburgh, 1998).

<sup>141</sup> LC 19 May 1868.

<sup>142</sup> LC 9 June 1852.

<sup>143</sup> LC 18 Sept 1850, 20, 27 Aug, 6, 17 Sept 1851, 23 June 1852.



sham battle preceding the annual school athletics event at the Hibernian Military School in Dublin in 1865 led to the death of one unfortunate boy.<sup>144</sup> In Adare in 1852, the youthful Lord Adare organised a re-enactment of a siege.<sup>145</sup> Using fireworks as imitation ordnance, Adare and his companions used a ruined castle as a stage for their sham fight.<sup>146</sup> Mixing militarism, drama, entertainment and spectacle, such displays had a pronounced histrionic component.<sup>147</sup>

Not all school events were so militarist though. Some schools, before they adopted an annual end of year sports day, instead punctuated the term with amateur dramatics shows.<sup>148</sup> By the late nineteenth century schools matched the rowing club's schedules of dramatics in winter (Christmas break) and sports in summer (end of term).<sup>149</sup> It is clear from the annuals of the period that the most important extra-curricular activities of schools were drama and sports, a fact that indicates their cultural equivalence and emphasises the need to view them as obverse and reverse of the same entertainments and voluntary association coin.<sup>150</sup> Leamy School Football Club members were, for example, the main contributors to that school's 1886 and 1887 Christmas entertainments.<sup>151</sup> Equally, sports and amateur dramatics were utilised to 'relieve the monotony of a winter in [military] camp'.<sup>152</sup> Contemporary media reflected the concern of young male consumers of entertainments and one Dublin journal, *The*

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<sup>144</sup> *IT* 10, 11 July 1865.

<sup>145</sup> *LC* 14 Aug 1852.

<sup>146</sup> Adare became a noted sportsman. Dunraven, Earl of, *Past Times and Pastimes*, (2 vols.), (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1922). Bricknell, Louise G., 'Fickle winds and treacherous feelings: Anglo-American relations and the early challenges for the America's Cup', in *Sporting Traditions*, 9:2 (May 1993), 16-30.

<sup>147</sup> *LC* 9 May, 18 July 1885.

<sup>148</sup> *LC* 2 July 1851.

<sup>149</sup> *Mungret College Annual, 1897-1911. The Crescent College Review, 1897-.*

<sup>150</sup> Cunningham, Hugh, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, (Croom Helm, London, 1980), 35-7. Ritchie, Andrew, 'The Origins of Bicycle Racing in England: Technology, Entertainment, Sponsorship, and Advertising in the Early History of the Sport', in *Journal of Sport History*, 26:3 (Fall 1999), 489-520.

<sup>151</sup> *LC* 18 Dec 1886, 17 Dec 1887.

<sup>152</sup> *LC* 3 Jan 1857.

*Wheelman* (incorporating *Irish Athletic and Cycling News*), promised to include football, athletics, theatrical and music notes.<sup>153</sup>

One element, common to sport and entertainment, that has received little attention in sports history, is the actual histrionic nature of sport.<sup>154</sup> The gymnastics and ‘kalisthenics’ demonstrated at a circus on Limerick’s Military Road in 1860, it was reported, ‘afforded much satisfaction’ to the audience.<sup>155</sup> Even more pertinent was the horror of the aunt of C. B. Barrington (founder of Trinity F.C., Dublin) at his footballing attire – formal football costume was new to Ireland – when she likened his appearance to that of an acrobat.<sup>156</sup> Thorstein Veblen, in his economics–based critique of late nineteenth century sport and leisure, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), excoriated the histrionic temperament among sports people.<sup>157</sup> His choice of descriptions, ‘ostensible mystification’, ‘make–believe’, ‘prancing gait’, ‘elaborate exaggeration’, and of course, ‘histrionic nature’, leave no room for doubt about his scepticism of contemporary claims for the rationality of sports. Sociological contributions to the study of sport culture support Veblen’s claims by highlighting the element of carnival within sports.<sup>158</sup> One regatta in Clare even included a boat race conducted by four young men dressed in ‘grotesque’ women’s attire – an aquatic sporting farce.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> *LC* 15 Nov 1887, 14 Oct 1890.

<sup>154</sup> *LC* 24 Jan 1885.

<sup>155</sup> *LC* 21 July 1860.

<sup>156</sup> Cited in West, Trevor, *The Bold Collegians - the development of sports in Trinity College, Dublin*, (Lilliput, Dublin, 1991), 28-9.

<sup>157</sup> Veblen, Thorstein, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, (Penguin Books, London, 1994, 1st edition 1899), especially 246-75.

<sup>158</sup> McPherson, Barry; Curtis, James E.; & Loy, John W., (eds.), *The social significance of sport: An introduction to the sociology of sport*, (Human Kinetics, Champaign, Illinois, 1989). Cheska, Alyce Taylor, ‘Sports Spectacular: The Social Ritual of Power’, in *Quest*, 30 (Summer 1978), 58-71. *LC* 23 Sept 1880, 27 May 1884.

Adair, Daryl, and Vamplew, Wray, *Sport in Australian History*, (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998), xi.

<sup>159</sup> *LC* 4 Sept 1875.

Sports with an obvious histrionic component were gymnastics and skating while cricket and athletics included occasional histrionic displays.<sup>160</sup> Assaults at arms bore the hallmarks of spectacle, choreography and display for the entertainment of others.<sup>161</sup> Limerick Skating Rink offered shows featuring figure skating, skating in elaborate costumes, artistic and comic skating routines and even Chinese bike skating demonstrations.<sup>162</sup> The initial popularity of rinks led to some concern about their potential impact upon theatres and concert halls.<sup>163</sup> Any fears in Limerick that rinks would impact on theatre *qua* theatre were, however, proved wrong when the reverse effect occurred.<sup>164</sup> After six years with a triple function as an exhibition, entertainment and sports venue, the Rink eventually became a theatre only.<sup>165</sup>

Many pre-formally organised sports and some sports in the early stages of codification demonstrated a ludicrous, if entertaining, character. Novelty cricket matches were held involving broomsticks instead of bats, ridiculous costumes and intriguing handicapping systems such as one-handed batsmen and one-legged bowlers.<sup>166</sup> There was a pantomime quality to many athletics events. Sack-races, Siamese (three-legged) races and egg and spoon contests all had the potential for hilarity and a sense of fun and were not confined to children, military men and other adults participating.<sup>167</sup> Many sports events included novelty entertainments that were purely comic, greasy pole climbing, pig-catching and a Limerick favourite – jumping from the top of a ship's mast.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> *LC* 30 Jan 1879.

<sup>161</sup> *LC* 20, 24 May 1879, 25 Nov 1882.

<sup>162</sup> *LC* 27 Jan 1877, 20 Aug, 12 Sept 1878, 31 July, 14 Aug, 30 Sept 1879.

<sup>163</sup> *LC* 15 Apr 1876.

<sup>164</sup> *LC* 21 July, 14 Aug, 15 Sept 1877, 23 July, 23 Nov 1878, 27 July 1880.

<sup>165</sup> *LC* 31 Aug, 7 Sept 1882, 21 Apr 1883.

<sup>166</sup> *LC* 5 Sept 1863, 11 July, 1 Aug 1871, 20, 25, 27, 29 Aug 1874. *IT* 1 Sept 1865.

<sup>167</sup> *LC* 3 Jan 1857, 14 Mar 1868, 24 June 1871.

<sup>168</sup> *LC* 25 Sept 1852, 15, 29 Sept 1860, 26 Aug 1865, 13 Sept 1873, 18 June 1874, 7 June 1884.

The link between sport and theatricals was emphasised in another way by the coincidence of the hosting of sports events and shows during the same festivals. An athletics meeting in Castleconnell in 1885 introduced two additional competitions, for best Irish piper, and to find the best jig and reel dancer.<sup>169</sup> Drama groups followed fairs, regattas and race meetings knowing that a town full of people with money and in search of leisure and excitement would prove amenable to their entertainments.<sup>170</sup>

Eating and drinking was integral to the nineteenth century sporting experience – and remains so.<sup>171</sup> The lunch for lovers of ‘Diana’s favourite’ sport at one county Limerick stag hunt allowed the riders and hunt followers to enjoy a social interlude which ran on so late in the afternoon that it became too late to enlarge a second deer.<sup>172</sup> It is arguable that many participants counted the social and dining elements of the sporting day ahead of the sport as a contemporary American baseball example shows. The pioneering New York Knickerbocker baseball club held a large banquet after each game; one player noted the players were more expert with a knife and fork than with the bat and ball.<sup>173</sup> Baseball’s English inspiration, cricket, was, and continues to be intimately associated with food – with lunch and tea breaks punctuating play. It was decided in 1874 that players selected for Limerick County Cricket Club teams who failed to attend games would nevertheless still be liable for their share of the luncheon expenses.<sup>174</sup> Hunting, coursing, shooting, cricket, horse racing and regattas were time intensive pursuits that required many hours, it was unreasonable to hold them without

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<sup>169</sup> LC 26 Sept 1885.

<sup>170</sup> LC 25 Aug 1852, 22 Apr 1876.

<sup>171</sup> LL 23 Apr 2001.

<sup>172</sup> LC 2 Feb 1880.

<sup>173</sup> Rader, Benjamin G., ‘The Quest for Subcommunities and the rise of American sport’, in *American Quarterly*, 29: 4 (Fall 1977), 355-369. Rader cites Seymour, Harold, *Baseball: The Early Years*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1960).

<sup>174</sup> LC 25 Apr 1874.

on-site catering for athletes and spectators (each sport also offered post-event meals).<sup>175</sup>

Food and drink (and music) may have been essential to participants in sporting events, they were no less important to the spectators.<sup>176</sup> Brailsford's analysis of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century English sport and leisure highlighted the contribution of refreshment and catering to sport's appeal, particularly to women.<sup>177</sup> The place of food in the festival atmosphere of nineteenth century sports can be seen in the comments of Limerick's own 'Robin Hood' (no less) who noted about a proposed archery meeting that 'A refreshment tent on the ground would not be out of place, and the sweet strains of a military band would add greatly to the pleasures of the day.'<sup>178</sup> The means by which the County Clare Rifle Club chose to honour their honorary secretary in the 1870s also illustrated the link between sport and dining – the club held celebratory public dinners.<sup>179</sup>

Breakfasts were notable parts of the sporting day for Limerick's first hunt clubs.<sup>180</sup> One meal was not always sufficient unto the day – luncheons and post-hunt repasts provided by the hosts were matters of considerable pride.<sup>181</sup> Lucius O'Brien's (later 13<sup>th</sup> Baron Inchiquin) poetic account of a day's shooting on his Clare estates paid great attention to the three square meals that book-marked a sporting day. Sporting success, the opportunity to socialise and talk and the chance to impress were thus bound together in a sporting meal setting. Shooting success necessitated, O'Brien encouraged, a hearty breakfast to 'nerve your arm'. Eating should accompany talk of previous

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<sup>175</sup> LC 27 Aug 1851, 16 Sept 1865, 20 July 1878, 8 Mar 1880.

<sup>176</sup> LC 22 Nov 1851, 21 Feb 1852, 25 Nov 1869.

<sup>177</sup> Brailsford, *A Taste for Diversions*, (1999), 133. LC 15 Nov 1873.

<sup>178</sup> LC 6 Aug 1864, 15 Sept 1865, 11 Aug, 18 Sept 1866, 15 May 1869, 1 July 1871.

<sup>179</sup> LC 20 Nov 1873, 21 Feb 1874.

<sup>180</sup> LC 12 Nov 1867, 7 Jan 1871, 15 Nov 1884. Bowen, Muriel, *Irish Hunting*, (Kerryman, Tralee, 1955). Wyndham-Quin, W. H., *The Foxhound in County in Limerick*, (Dublin, 1919).

<sup>181</sup> LC 16 Jan, 10 Mar 1880.

shoots and of the shoot to come. Concluding the sporting day, O'Brien noted the verbal strutting of sportsmen, commenting that

At dinner time the subject is renewed  
And after dinner all the day reviewed  
At tea, the same employ beguiles the time  
Told for the ladies now in terms sublime.<sup>182</sup>

Seventy years later, at one Shannon regatta William Bulfin noted people chatting, eating, smoking and refreshing themselves – many of them oblivious to the actual racing.<sup>183</sup> Bulfin's caveat to the frequently overestimated spectator appeal of sport was echoed in Thomas Hardy's reference to the social importance of religious services when 'flesh went forth to coquet with flesh while hypocritically affecting business with spiritual things' – many sports spectators were often only nominally so titled.<sup>184</sup>

The pub was the premier place of leisure in nineteenth century Limerick.<sup>185</sup> The class of care available was, however, viewed in the extreme negative by social reformers – with one anti-alcohol campaigner describing pubs as 'seminaries of iniquity'.<sup>186</sup> The pub in Limerick did not perform the same sporting function as its English counterpart.<sup>187</sup> Publicans certainly participated in efforts to host sports events in their area (particularly as the increase in trade would be to their benefit), but the evidence for Limerick pubs sponsoring or developing sports clubs or events within, or connected to the premises, is negligible.<sup>188</sup> In contrast, Mason credits the pub, church and

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<sup>182</sup> O'Brien, Lucius, 13th Baron Inchiquin, *Directions for a day's shooting at Dromoland*, (Ballinakella Press, Co. Clare, n.d. - text dated to early 1830s).

<sup>183</sup> Bulfin, William, *Rambles in Eirinn*, (Dublin, 1907), 60-67.

<sup>184</sup> Hardy, Thomas, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, (Macmillan, London, 1970), 165.

<sup>185</sup> Malcolm, Elizabeth, 'The Rise of the Pub: A Study in the Disciplining of Popular Culture', in Donnelly, James S. Jnr., and Miller, Kerby A., (eds.), *Irish Popular Culture 1650 - 1850*, (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1998), 50-77. LC 20 Aug 1859. Hardy, Stephen, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915*, (Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1982), 45-61. Cunningham, Hugh, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, (Croom Helm, London, 1980), 186. Lowerson, & Myerscough, *Time to Spare in Victorian England*, (1978), 59-74.

<sup>186</sup> LC 21 Aug 1866.

<sup>187</sup> Collins, Tony, 'Traditional Sports, Modernity and the Pub', paper to 19<sup>th</sup> British Society of Sports History Conference, Liverpool, April 2000. LC 2 June 1860, 30 Aug 1862, 16 Dec 1865.

<sup>188</sup> LC 1 May 1884.

workplace as the pre-existing organisations from which a considerable number of football clubs emerged in nineteenth century England.<sup>189</sup>

The lack of involvement of pubs in sport does not mean, however, that sport did not involve liquor.<sup>190</sup> The Kilruane Football Club from North Tipperary set aside a considerable portion of the club's annual income to the purchase of beer, whiskey, and presumably for the junior members, lemonade.<sup>191</sup> One writer, 'Anti-mantrap', harangued the gentry for their dual role in giving bad example to their social inferiors, and for their acquiescence in allowing liquor tents on cricket fields and race courses; he wrote

When gentlemen cannot play a game of Cricket without having a tent for the sale of alcohol on the ground, and when some of the said gents are seen going home the worse for their visits to the tent, we may guess how much their example is worth. Again, we see gentlemen helping the drink sellers [sic] to get up petty races in the country for the purpose of selling adulterated stuff, and making idlers and drunkards of the peasantry.<sup>192</sup>

Alcohol-fuelled violence led to the withdrawal of permission to hold the horse race meeting at Newcastle in 1871. The consequence of this decision was that, in the absence of an alternative venue, and following a meeting at the less suitable Ballinacurra venue in September 1872, Limerick races were not held again until 1880.

One must be careful not to view the pub in narrow, class terms.<sup>193</sup> Hotels, clubs and theatres (occasionally converted for balls and banquets) and their clienteles operated free from the rigorous legislation curbing popular outdoor gatherings and that led to

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<sup>189</sup> Mason, Tony, *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915*, (Harvester Press, Sussex, 1980). Also Goulstone, John, 'The Working-Class Origins of Modern Football', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 17:1 (March 2000), 135-43. Cunningham, Hugh, 'Leisure and Culture', in Thompson, F. M. L., (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950: Volume 2; People and Their Environment*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996), 279-340.

<sup>190</sup> LC 17 Aug 1850, 12, 15 May 1852, 15, 17, 19 Jan 1867, 20 Jan 1877, 16 Feb 1886.

<sup>191</sup> NLI, Ms. 9515, Account book and records of Kilruane F.C., Co. Tipperary, 1876-80.

<sup>192</sup> LC 25 Aug 1866, 2, 26 Mar 1867, 22 July 1884.

<sup>193</sup> LC 14 Mar 1867.

the ‘disciplining’ of the pub.<sup>194</sup> Clubs and hotels that catered to the more comfortable classes served alcohol and were thus ‘respectable’ pubs. These venues were the first to introduce billiards, so in a narrow sense, ‘aristocratic pubs’ had a sporting function.<sup>195</sup>

Gratifying the desire for fine food, wine and good company, the Limerick Club on George’s (now O’Connell) Street, Limerick was the region’s chief gentleman’s club. The Limerick Club’s secular principles may be adduced from the members’ horror at the sale of the site next to the clubhouse to the Augustinian Order for the construction of a church. Some members were quite prepared to be neighbours to the displaced theatre originally occupying the site, but the thought of a place of worship next door was too much for them to contemplate.<sup>196</sup> There were echoes in this indignation of the rakish eighteenth century hell–fire club tradition. Limerick and Dublin possessed such clubs – havens for ‘rakes’ and men set on dissolute ways that were part of the contemporary fashion of ‘clubbability’. Hell–fire clubs were the anti–moral equivalent of the religious Freemason movement; were dedicated to eating, drinking, smoking and fornicating, and acted upon the Rabelaisian motto ‘Do what you will’.<sup>197</sup> A dedication to ‘carousing’ was also observable in some of the county’s other eighteenth century aristocratic clubs.<sup>198</sup> Male, or stag, sports clubs carried a modified version of this tradition into the twentieth century – and under the disguise of muscular Christianity – a delicious irony that would surely please the most devout devotees of Bacchus.

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<sup>194</sup> Malcolm, ‘The Rise of the Pub’ in Donnelly, *Irish Popular Culture*, (1998), 70-72.

<sup>195</sup> LC 16 Dec 1865, 28 July, 15 Aug 1874, 27 Nov 1884. Maguire, Martin, ‘The organisation and activism of Dublin’s Protestant working class, 1883-1935’, *Irish Historical Studies*, XXIX:113 (May 1994), 65-87.

<sup>196</sup> County Club, Limerick, *The Limerick Club Centenary: A Short History of a Hundred Years of Club Life*, (Hodges Figgis, Dublin).

<sup>197</sup> Ashe, Geoffrey, *The Hell-Fire Clubs: A History of Anti-Morality*, (Revised edn.), (Sutton, Stroud, Gloucestershire, 2000), 35-47. Lord, Evelyn, *The Hellfire Clubs: Sex, Satanism and Secret Societies*, (Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>198</sup> Barnard, Toby, ‘Public and private uses of wealth in Ireland, c. 1660-1760’, in Hill, Jacqueline, & Lennon, Colm, (eds.), *Luxury and Austerity* (Historical Studies XXI – Papers from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Irish Conference of Historians, 1997), (University College Dublin Press, Dublin, 1999), 66-83.



The problem of leisure was generally conceived of as the problem of other people's leisure.<sup>199</sup> Similarly, the problem with alcohol centred on other people's use of drink – specifically the 'working class'.<sup>200</sup> National surveys into liquor licensing hours in the 1860s and 1870s reveal an ambiguous relationship between the government and the governed when it came to alcohol. Select committee reports into Sunday licensing hours in those decades reveal a concern that access to liquor for *bona fide* refreshment purposes ought to be retained as much as possible, consistent with the demands to maintain public order and morals and family and sabbatarian values, but without a satisfactory answer as to how such a balance could be achieved.<sup>201</sup> In this period the difficulty of separating out travellers from distant districts from thirsty locals anxious to have a jolly was acute and presented great difficulties to publicans, patrons, police and persons anxious to curb the reach of John Barleycorn to the undeserving masses. This problem of distinguishing between the deserving and undeserving Sunday alcohol purchasers was exacerbated in the 1870s. The select committee reports give a revealing insight into the Sunday perambulations of a large mass of people, mostly by foot, but increasingly as some Limerick contributors to the report noted, by rail travellers.<sup>202</sup> Large numbers of people were on the move, into the country for a family Sunday walk or into resort towns and cities on a Sunday for group and society excursions. This family and group form of informal leisure was a vital base on which to build the subsequent codified sporting infrastructure. The promoters of the movement to close pubs on Sunday, who held a meeting in Limerick's Theatre Royal in 1875, knew that alternative leisure outlets must be provided if their wishes were to succeed.<sup>203</sup> This realisation was another motivation for pro-codification agents in Limerick's sports scene, but was checked by a desire among sabbatarians to limit all leisure on that day.

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<sup>199</sup> Bailey, Peter, "A mingled mass, *Victorian Studies*, (Autumn 1977), 7-28.

<sup>200</sup> *LC* 22 Oct 1867.

<sup>201</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on the Sale of Liquors on Sunday (Ireland) Bill*, HC 1867–68, (280) xiv. *Report of the Select Committee on the Sale of Liquors on Sunday (Ireland) Bill*, HC 1877, (198) xvi.

<sup>202</sup> *LC* 27 May 1879.

<sup>203</sup> *LC* 2 Mar 1875.

In October of that year a citizen responding to the advance of temperance principles (and their designs upon Sunday closing) issued the plaintive appeal ‘are we to pray all day?’ – clearly he saw little alternatives available.<sup>204</sup>

Sport suffered from its connection with alcohol – a social evil, as determined by social improvers, and an economic evil, as determined by the excise men.<sup>205</sup> The machinery for enforcing compliance with laws on liquor production, taxation and sale was finely tuned so that by the second half of the nineteenth century the pub became the principal recreational venue in Ireland – and an indoor one at that.<sup>206</sup> The deficiency of this approach to control alcohol was that traditional outdoor customs, many of which involved sport, were suppressed.<sup>207</sup>

Sport became a key battleground for Limerick’s pro and anti liquor factions.<sup>208</sup> The battle over liquor licences for Limerick races in the 1880s indicates that both sides gained the upper hand from time to time. Though licences for Limerick races were refused in 1881, some magistrates, contrary to a ruling by district justices, issued certificates to allow excise authorities to grant occasional drinks licences for the 1883 meeting.<sup>209</sup> The pro-ban legal moves complemented a campaign by the *Limerick Chronicle*, which heavily promoted temperance and supported refusals to issue drinks tent licences. The paper extolled the virtues of tea – ‘the cup that cheers, but does not inebriate’.<sup>210</sup> Again, using the temperance carrot instead of a legal stick, a temperance lecture to young men in Rathkeale included quotes from professional athletes who

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<sup>204</sup> LC 3 Oct 1874.

<sup>205</sup> LC 3 May 1866.

<sup>206</sup> Malcolm, Elizabeth, ‘The Rise of the Pub’, in Donnelly & Miller, *Irish Popular Culture* - (1998), 50-77.

<sup>207</sup> *ibid.* Ó Maitiú, Séamus, *The Humours of Donnybrook: Dublin’s Famous Fair and its Suppression*, (Maynooth Studies in Local History 4), (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1995).

<sup>208</sup> LC 20, 27 Aug 1859, 30 July 1878

<sup>209</sup> LC 18 Sept 1883, 22 July, 14, 16, 21 Aug 1884, 3, 8, 10 Sept 1885.

<sup>210</sup> LC 12 Sept 1882.

were also total abstainers.<sup>211</sup> It is unclear to what extent the speaker sought to show his audience that one could be a successful athlete without drinking (an activity otherwise intimately associated with sport), or whether the aim was to attach the glamour of sporting success to teetotalism. In any case, if the connection of drink to sport was the problem, the utilisation of the values of sport was also identified as part of the solution.

Curiously, despite having touched on the potential of sport to advance its ends, temperance societies failed to include sporting leisure activities in their range of functions.<sup>212</sup> The character of temperance leisure pursuits was sedate, self-improving, principally social and consisted of reading rooms, libraries, excursions, musical soirees, and even musical bands.<sup>213</sup> The refusal of temperance societies to formally engage the sporting world perhaps reflected a fear that once engaged, compromise with that social giant (and drink) was inevitable.<sup>214</sup> The Temperance movement thus sought not to engage, but to develop a rival social, leisure and non-sporting structure.<sup>215</sup> Temperance musical bands did attend sporting events, but this could be interpreted as a promotional opportunity. Reflecting the religious temper of contemporary debates on alcohol, teetotal individuals did involve themselves in sports, Ambrose Hall and Thomas Revington foremost among them, but they knew by doing so they operated in Caesar's sphere and not the Lord's.<sup>216</sup> The philosophy of 'muscular Christianity' underpinning late nineteenth century sports implicitly involved a tension between the physical (and worldly) and the spiritual (and transcendent). How this tension was

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<sup>211</sup> LC 15 May 1886.

<sup>212</sup> Meller, H.E., *Leisure and the changing city, 1870-1914*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, Boston, 1976), 161-205. LC 16 May 1867.

<sup>213</sup> Morris, R.J., 'Leisure, Entertainment and the Associational Culture of British Towns, 1800-1900', paper given at the Third International Conference on Urban History, Central European University, Budapest, August 1996.

<sup>214</sup> Meller, *Leisure and the changing city*, (1976), 164.

<sup>215</sup> Malcolm, Elizabeth, 'Popular recreation in nineteenth-century Ireland', in MacDonagh, O., Mandle, W.F., and Travers, P., (eds.), *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750-1950*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1983), 40-55. Meller, *Leisure and the changing city*, (1976), 166.

<sup>216</sup> Malcolm, Elizabeth, 'The catholic church and the Irish temperance movement, 1838-1901', in *Irish Historical Studies*, XXIII, no. 89, (May 1982), 1-16. Malcolm, Elizabeth, *Ireland Sober, Ireland Free: Drink and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1986). LC 18 Apr 1860, 3 June, 24 Oct 1865, 21 Aug 1866, 22 June 1867.

resolved and how a balance was sought between the two contrary impulses was more especially evident in the fate of sports and physical activity in the programmes of religious voluntary associations.

Temperance societies, semi-religious providers of leisure at one remove from their sponsoring churches, were supplemented by another wave of semi-religious voluntary associations that included spiritual, literary, educational and personal development objectives in their various missions.<sup>217</sup> In this wave were the Ennis, Nenagh, Roscrea, Adare and Rathkeale Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA), St. Mary's and St. Munchin's Young Men's societies (YMS), Limerick Philognostic Society and Limerick Young Men's Theological Society.<sup>218</sup>

Unlike temperance societies, many of these religious societies eventually saw that initial religiosity diminish and some metamorphosed into improvement societies with a less earnest programme involving a leisure function and occasionally, a sporting dimension.<sup>219</sup> Indeed, the most successful of the late nineteenth century associations were precisely those that introduced a significant element of sport to their programmes.<sup>220</sup> The LPYMA and the CLI were the two most important religious societies that subsequently developed sporting branches.<sup>221</sup> The success of those societies was not due to their embrace of sport, but to their sensitivity to membership demands. By allowing their societies' programmes to evolve without the intrusion of an excessively prescriptive religious ethic, the PYMA and CLI proved capable of

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<sup>217</sup> Morris, R.J., 'Leisure, Entertainment and the Associational Culture of British Towns', August 1996. Lowerson, & Myerscough, *Time to Spare in Victorian England*, (1978). Meller, H.E., *Leisure and the changing city*, (1976).

<sup>218</sup> *LC* 16 Jan 1861, 4 Jan, 3 Apr 1866, 5 Dec 1872.

<sup>219</sup> *LC* 22 Dec 1866, 18 Sept 1873. Vaughan, W.E., *Landlords and Tenants* (1994), 203-4.

<sup>220</sup> Neal, Frank, *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience, 1819-1914; An Aspect of Anglo-Irish History*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988), 225.

<sup>221</sup> Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association, *Five Pamphlets, 1853-1920*, (Limerick, various dates). LRA P3/1, Minute book of Catholic Literary Institute, 1886-1906. Today, both clubs are known only for their sporting role.

responding to the various demands and desires of each new cohort of members. It is no less significant, from the point of view of sports, that these new societies were determinedly for young men and they thus eschewed the age-blind character of their temperance predecessors.<sup>222</sup>

In the LPYMA the triumph of the ‘muscular’ ethic was not achieved at the expense of the ‘Christian’ ethic, but such a fear motivated many other religious societies to demonstrate wariness towards sport. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century a religious sensibility was more likely to inhibit than to encourage a sporting life.<sup>223</sup>

Anti-sport sentiments, rare though they were, came almost exclusively from clergymen. The poor attendance at a lecture to St. Munchin’s Young Men’s Society (that coincided with a boat race) inspired the lecturer to berate the absentee members as ‘saloon hunters’, ‘boat racing inspectors’, ‘cigar smokers’ and ‘regatta admirers’.<sup>224</sup> Another religiously based objection to some sports, though yet a marginal view that enjoyed limited success, was the growing opposition to cruelty to animals.<sup>225</sup> The final religiously motivated barrier to sports was sabbatarianism. The prohibition of sports on Sunday extended to Protestants mainly, but though they were certainly a minority in Limerick, the legacy of this barrier was considerable. Sports such as cricket, rugby and early association football were precluded from the Sabbath inhibiting the reach of these sports into rural areas and among time-poor urban workers. With one less day available to practice these sports, what cultural nationalists later came to term ‘foreign

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<sup>222</sup> *LC* 13 Nov 1875, 27 Jan 1876, 2, 9 June 1883.

<sup>223</sup> Baker, William J., ‘To pray or to play? The YMCA question in the United Kingdom and the United States, 1850-1900’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 11:1 (April 1994), 42-62. Garnham, Neal, ‘Both praying and playing: ‘Muscular Christianity’ and the YMCA in north-east county Durham’, *Journal of Social History*, Dec 2001. *LC* 30 June 1868.

<sup>224</sup> *LC* 20, 27 Aug 1859, 16 June 1874, 4 June 1878.

<sup>225</sup> Curtis, L.P., jun., ‘Stopping the Hunt, 1881-2; An Aspect of the Irish Land War’, in Philpin, C.H.E., (ed.), *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland*, (Cambridge, 1987), 349-402. *LC* 11 Sept 1862, 22 Jan 1876, 30 Mar, 4, 8, 20 Apr, 20, 30 May, 8 June, 19, 26 Sept, 28, 30 Nov 1882, 23 Jan, 27 Feb, 24 July 1883, 18, 25 Nov 1884.

games', were handicapped in a way the Gaelic Athletic Association was not. The national, religious, cultural and urban/rural dimensions of Gaelic versus 'foreign' games have been discussed for over a century, but comparatively little attention has been paid to the simple fact that the GAA provided sports when most people could avail of them.<sup>226</sup>

Though secular societies were independent of churches the topics covered by many religious and secular associations were the same, literature, science, travel accounts, social, economic, and occasionally, political issues.<sup>227</sup> Secular associations were mirror images of religious associations and included Literary and Scientific Societies, The Limerick Institution, an Athenaeum and groups with such self-explanatory titles as the Ennis Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society.<sup>228</sup> Secular clubs were earnest, improving and educational, and sought to train the mind not the body.<sup>229</sup>

Sport was of little interest to the secular voluntary associations whose concern was knowledge, education, development of the intellect, the improvement of employment prospects and occasionally, recreation.<sup>230</sup> The programmes of secular societies were worthy, but the simple desire for the society of like-minded people was, in the end, crucial to their success. This demand for social outlets was most keenly felt in small towns that did not possess the attractions of a city and lacked some of the traditional social structures of the countryside.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Mullan, Michael Leigh, 'Nationalism, opposition, and the rationalization of sport: the Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884-1905', Ph. D. thesis, (University of Delaware 1992).

<sup>227</sup> *LC* 18 Oct 1851, 3 Jan 1852, 23 Nov 1867.

<sup>228</sup> *LC* 4 Apr 1865, 14 June, 8 Dec 1866.

<sup>229</sup> *LC* 5, 23 Oct, 6, 16 Nov, 11 Dec 1850, 1, 15 Jan 1851, 12 June, 27 Nov, 8, 22 Dec 1852, 5, 16 Jan 1856, 1, 4 May 1860.

<sup>230</sup> *LC* 26 Jan 1856, 1 Feb 1866.

<sup>231</sup> *LC* 2 Jan 1864, 2 Mar 1886.

Though the balance between improvement and recreation was heavily weighted in favour of the former, secular associations did not entirely ignore the recreational possibilities of their activities.<sup>232</sup> In the mid-1860s the Athenaeum held a vocal class and most societies' reading rooms and libraries were recreational venues as much as knowledge centres.<sup>233</sup>

The absence of sport from secular societies programmes does not, however, negate their relevance to the nascent sports club revolution. Sports clubs, when they emerged in the 1870s and 1880s, incorporated aspects of the gentleman's club and the library. The boat clubs provided reading rooms with newspapers, magazines and books for their members. There was a correspondence in the way secular clubs and sports clubs styled themselves – both were improvement engines. Secular societies sought intellectual fitness and physical improvement was the *raison d'être* of sports clubs. Sports clubs did not emerge from a vacuum, they took their improvement ethic, organisational models and their extra-sporting programmes from existing clubs dedicated to other, sometimes entirely unrelated, purposes.

Secular improving societies were also seen by some as vehicles to ameliorate the worst effects of sectarian division in mid-century Limerick.<sup>234</sup> Echoing later calls to use sport as a neutral ground for men of varying religious convictions, the welcome for the Limerick Athenaeum noted its potential as a 'secure' 'spot in Limerick, far removed above the noise of political dissension or religious strife'.<sup>235</sup> The idea of sport as a bridge between creeds (a perennial concern in nineteenth century Ireland) was thus

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<sup>232</sup> LC 22 Nov 1851, 19 Jan 1856.

<sup>233</sup> LRA, Limerick Chamber of Commerce Reading Room Records, P1/28-29. LC 23 Mar 1865. Morris, R.J., 'Leisure, Entertainment and the Associational Culture of British Towns', August 1996.

<sup>234</sup> LC 19 Jan 1856.

<sup>235</sup> LC 5 Jan 1856, 4 Jan 1860.

anticipated in the earlier improvement societies.<sup>236</sup> The lack of success of those bridge-building ambitions in late nineteenth century Limerick was, however, pre-figured in the comments of one ‘Protestant’ who deplored societies that were not sufficiently under the firm aegis of local clerics. ‘Protestant’ warned against associations being allowed too much freedom from clerical control and argued that it would lead to ‘Our Young Men’ being led astray.<sup>237</sup> Clerics were not, however, going to be denied influence in voluntary associational culture. The greatest irony of sporting, religious and secular voluntary association in late nineteenth century Limerick was that sport, a secular occupation in its modern guise, was more intimately connected to the religious voluntary sector than to secular associations.<sup>238</sup> An explanation for the role of ‘muscular Christianity’ and religious associations in advancing a key element of secular culture has yet to be satisfactorily advanced and remains a notable blind spot in sports historiography.

Friendly societies were an important component of Limerick’s political, civic and social life.<sup>239</sup> Membership of societies such as the Foresters, Oddfellows, Druids and Friendly Brothers signified independence, self-sufficiency and respectability while offering financial support mechanisms to help members and their families cope with the exigencies of life in a no-welfare state.<sup>240</sup> In addition, Friendly societies were providers of recreational and social opportunities; the principal form of recreation involved drinking (and dining), many societies organised excursions and outings, and

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<sup>236</sup> *New Ireland Review*, XXXIV (1910-11), p.345.

<sup>237</sup> *LC* 22 Dec 1866.

<sup>238</sup> Guttman, Allen, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1978).

<sup>239</sup> Vaughan, W.E., *Landlords and Tenants*, (1994), 191-204. *LC* 2 Jan 1866. Uncle Peter, a character in Sean O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars*, was a Forester and an active nationalist. O’Casey, Sean, *Plays, vol 1, with introduction by Arthur Miller*, (Faber & Faber, London, 1998).

<sup>240</sup> Buckley, Anthony D., ‘‘On the Club’: Friendly Societies in Ireland’, in *Irish Economic and Social History*, XIV, 1987, 39-58. *LC* 17 Mar 1852, 22 Mar 1856, 31 Jan 1867.



some developed musical bands.<sup>241</sup> Occasions when all three elements of fraternal conviviality were combined included the Foresters' excursion to Glenstal in County Limerick in 1878, and to Ennis five years earlier.<sup>242</sup>

The involvement of Friendly Societies in sport or games was limited to the attendance of the Foresters' Band at occasional sporting events.<sup>243</sup> The Friendly movement does, however, share a number of common features with the late nineteenth century sports movement. Both had their origins in Britain, both suffered splits (the division of sport into Gaelic and Anglo camps accompanied the secession of the Irish National Foresters from the Ancient Order), and the conviviality and fraternity both forms of voluntary association offered were crucial to their appeal. The male bonding associated with modern sports also had a counterpart in the Friendly Societies' very pronounced use of the terms brother and brotherhood to publicly emphasise their collegiality.<sup>244</sup> The practice of not admitting candidates for membership over the age of forty also pointed to a membership drawn from the ranks of those in their third and fourth decades, the same pool from which the emerging sports clubs were to draw their members. Regular influxes of 'young blood' were required by Friendly societies, their contributions and low call on benefits were necessary to pay the benefits of older members. Friendly societies thus offered conviviality and insurance to young men with discretionary, if limited income, and were therefore complementary to and rival to the sports club that offered the former, but not the latter.

Another area of comparison between some Friendly brothers and sportsmen was the use of costumes and the historical resonance of the clothing; the green livery of the

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<sup>241</sup> LC 22 Mar 1856, 15 Jan, 8 June 1859, 6 June 1865, 28 Aug 1866, 5 Dec 1867. Cunningham, Hugh, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, (1980), 84. Nead, Lynda, 'Drinking the World Away', *BBC History Magazine*, 2:6 (June 2001), 30-33.

<sup>242</sup> LC 2 July 1867, 17 June 1873, 22 Aug 1878.

<sup>243</sup> LC 9 May 1874, 11 Nov 1879.

<sup>244</sup> LC 26 Sept 1865, 6 Aug 1867.

Foresters extolled the exploits of the expert archer Robin Hood while the heraldic imitation of sports costumes (complete with club badges echoing a medieval coat of arms) matched the use of effulgent language which compared cricketers to ‘Knights of the Green’ and shooting gentlemen to ‘Knights of the Trigger’.<sup>245</sup>

Common occupational background was a major incentive towards voluntary association for work-related and business reasons, but the pragmatic fraternity thus established did not end there.<sup>246</sup> In the case of Limerick city’s grocers’ and drapers’ assistants, the desire for more leisure time was one of the impulses behind the movement to organise a body to represent them.<sup>247</sup>

Most organisations catering for groups – from the business elite to semi-skilled operatives (urban and rural) – incorporated a leisure dimension to their activities.<sup>248</sup>

The most conspicuous providers of leisure time pursuits were the ‘respectable’ working class, artisans, skilled tradesmen, retail functionaries and self-employed figures such as fishermen.<sup>249</sup>

Recognising the inextricable links between agriculture and horse racing the Limerick Farmers’ Club was urged in 1874 to host a combined agricultural show and race meeting.<sup>250</sup> Agricultural societies also mixed educational and practical concerns with contests of skill such as ploughing matches – events with both earnest and sporting

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<sup>245</sup> LC 17 June 1865, 2 Jan 1866, 26 Aug 1873, 11 Sept 1879. Griffin, Brian, ‘Cycling and gender in Victorian Ireland’, paper given at Annual Conference of Society for the Study of Nineteenth Century Ireland, University of Southampton, April 2001.

<sup>246</sup> LC 4, 25 Jan 1851, 29 Dec 1852, 18 Aug 1860, 17 June, 9 Nov, 19 Dec 1865, 6 Feb 1866, 5 Mar 1867. Park, Roberta A., ‘Sport, Gender and Society in a Transatlantic Victorian Perspective’, in Mangan, J.A. and Park, Roberta A., eds., *From ‘fair sex’ to feminism: sport and the socialization of women in the industrial and post-industrial eras*, (Frank Cass, London, 1987), 69. Thackeray, W. M., *The Irish Sketch Book, 1842*, (1985), 271-2.

<sup>247</sup> LC 5, 9, 16 Nov, 3, 14, 24 Dec 1867.

<sup>248</sup> LC 15 Oct 1851, 5 Aug 1871, 30 Mar, 17 Apr 1875, 2, 21 Nov, 28 Dec 1882, 20 Feb 1883.

<sup>249</sup> LC 18 Oct 1851, 16 June 1874, 23 Aug 1887. Lysaght, William, *The Abbey Fishermen*, (Reprint – Shamrock, Limerick, 1999).

<sup>250</sup> LC 10 Oct 1874.

dimensions.<sup>251</sup> It was from the Royal Dublin Society's Horse and Ram Show that the sport of show jumping emerged in the 1860s.<sup>252</sup> Another poultry show in Limerick in 1867 included a section for pigeons, revealing that some boys were looking after pigeons, and though no pigeon-racing club emerged from this tradition, the unmet potential was there.<sup>253</sup>

Mid-century occupational voluntary associations were significant elements of the sports infrastructure. Fishermen were key contributors to a local rowing tradition while cricket teams drawn from common professions included Bankers, Government Officers and the Munster Bar – not to mention the large number of military and police sporting outfits.<sup>254</sup>

Workingmen began to organise sports clubs only at the end of the eighth decade of the century.<sup>255</sup> In 1880 commercial gentlemen who were unable to gain entry (via the ballot system) to the city's existing rowing clubs formed the Commercial Boat Club.<sup>256</sup> Exclusively workplace-sponsored teams were a late addition to this leisure menu and began to appear in significant numbers in the mid to late 1880s, long after the crystallisation of the organised sports movement.<sup>257</sup> A large group of Postal and Telegraph clerks formed their own rugby union football club, Post Office FC, in 1890.<sup>258</sup> Three years earlier, the grocer's assistants had sufficient numbers to muster two Gaelic football teams.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> LC 26 Jan 1861, 5 Feb, 21 Sept, 26 Oct, 17, 19 Dec 1867, 18 Feb, 7 Mar 1882, 2 Oct 1883.

<sup>252</sup> Slavin, Michael, *Showjumping Legends: Ireland, 1868-1998*, (Wolfhound, Dublin, 1998).

<sup>253</sup> LC 19 Dec 1867.

<sup>254</sup> LC 6 Aug 1872, 16 July 1874, 1, 13 July 1875.

<sup>255</sup> LC 19 Aug 1879.

<sup>256</sup> LC 5, 12 June 1880.

<sup>257</sup> LC 3, 5, 10 Nov 1881, 15 Mar 1887.

<sup>258</sup> LC 21, 28 Oct, 4 Nov 1890.

<sup>259</sup> LC 30 Aug 1887.

Political associations and their attendant recreational, social and sporting spin-offs were significant features of nineteenth century Irish life. The response of the community in Fenagh (County Carlow) to the unopposed election of a local man as a Member of Parliament was to host a celebratory horse race and athletic meeting.<sup>260</sup> Comerford has noted the use of sports in the 1860s as an agent to attract young men into circles in which they could be politicised and then drawn towards active Fenianism.<sup>261</sup> The attractions of sport, camaraderie and male society in groups like the Fenians were key additions to the core attraction of voluntary political association.<sup>262</sup> Owens noted an earlier, similar combination of adventure, patriotism, comradeship, good times and sport in the nationalist Confederate Clubs of the late 1840s.<sup>263</sup> In an Orwellian twist, the coalition of politics and sport wrought by the Gaelic Athletic Association in 1884 had an antecedent in the 1848 activities of the Irish Confederates.

Comerford's patriotism as pastime thesis is a persuasive argument, but the mix of political mobilisation and sport he identified in Waterford, Kilkenny, and Tipperary in the 1860s was absent in the mobilisation attempts of Limerick Fenians.<sup>264</sup> Without doubt, the threat posed by sportsmen moving between districts was palpable to many law-agents – hurling matches, races, and patterns were sometimes viewed, as Vaughan put it, as 'blinds for serious trouble-making'.<sup>265</sup> There was, however, an element of

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<sup>260</sup> LC 12 Aug 1862.

<sup>261</sup> Comerford, R.V., 'Patriotism as pastime: the appeal of fenianism in the mid-1860s', in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol.XXII, no.87, March 1981, 239-50.

<sup>262</sup> Boyd, Andrew, 'Jim Connell and *The Red Flag*', *History Ireland*, 9:2 (Summer 2001), 8-9. Elliott Marianne, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence*, (Yale University Press, London, 1989), 36.

<sup>263</sup> Owens, Gary, 'Popular mobilisation and the rising of 1848: the clubs of the Irish Confederation', in Geary, Laurence M., (ed.), *Rebellion and remembrance in modern Ireland*, (Four Courts, Dublin, 2001), 51-63.

<sup>264</sup> My colleague, Tom McCarthy's, study of fenianism in Limerick in the late 1860s and early 70s has not uncovered any of the connections between sport and fenianism which Comerford has identified in Waterford, Kilkenny, and Tipperary. (Incomplete and unpublished MA thesis). Newsinger, John, 'Comment: Fenianism revisited: Pastime or Revolutionary Movement?', *Saothar*, 17 (1992), 46-52. Comerford, R.V., 'Comprehending the Fenians', *Saothar*, 17 (1992), 52-6.

<sup>265</sup> Vaughan, W.E., *Landlords and Tenants*, (1994), 181. *IT* 2 Sept 1865.

hysteria in official responses to the perambulations of young sportsmen.<sup>266</sup> One County Limerick JP, writing to the police about ‘strangers from different directions meeting’ under the pretence of hurling matches, adverted to a recent assault and implicated the visiting players. The police, in reply to the JP’s communication, agreed that the situation should be monitored, yet nonetheless attributed the assault to locals while protesting their [relative] lack of powers to prevent games proceeding.<sup>267</sup>

Whereas Fenians sought the destruction of the state and many of its institutions, their contemporary opponents demonstrated a remarkable link between sport and political institutions.<sup>268</sup> In the early 1880s the advance of Home Rule ideas was seen to demand a loyalist response and Conservative clubs with social, literary and political objectives that could provide ‘an effectual barrier against the encroachment of anarchy and sedition’ were proposed.<sup>269</sup> At the sharp end of the power spectrum the inseparability of sport and politics was best illustrated by the coincidence of Grand Jury and local authority membership and elite Hunt Club membership.<sup>270</sup> The threats to ex-officio guardians in Limerick not to vote for a particular candidate, on pain of withdrawal of popular assent for hunting privileges was not an idle one.<sup>271</sup> On a number of occasions the calling of a Grand Jury or petty sessions was seen as an ideal opportunity to hold a hunt club meeting, taking advantage of the presence of the huntsmen in one place, for one purpose, to carry out another (more agreeable) task.<sup>272</sup> Limerick Town council

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<sup>266</sup> There is a late twentieth century parallel to such fears (even if strict comparisons are not justified) with the attachment of extreme right wing groups to association football crowds in Britain, Italy and Germany, most notably to Chelsea and Lazio football clubs.

<sup>267</sup> National Archives, Outrage papers, Limerick, 1852/182.

<sup>268</sup> *LC* 17 Apr 1866.

<sup>269</sup> *LC* 10 Mar 1883.

<sup>270</sup> Hoppen, K. Theodore, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), 110-27. *LC* 11 Dec 1850, 7 Mar 1872, 28 Apr 1881, 17 Dec 1885.

<sup>271</sup> *LC* 29 Apr 1881, 9 Jan 1883, 18 Apr 1885.

<sup>272</sup> The adjourned meeting of the Co. Tipperary Foxhounds took place in the Grand Jury Room in Clonmel Courthouse, a case of the sporting, judicial and executive branches of government in step with each other, *LC* 8 June 1882, 9 June 1883. The counterpoint of this intersection of politics and sport came in the shape of the rival Land League – which saw the potential to squeeze reforms from the landlord class by interfering with gentry hunting, *LC* 11 Oct 1881. Curtis, L.P., ‘Stopping the Hunt, 1881-2’, in Philpin, *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland*, (1987), 349-402.

meetings at the beginning of November were also invariably adjourned for the lack of a quorum, the call of the woodcock trumping the political demands of the day.<sup>273</sup> The signification of social power (a requisite for all political leaders) that field sports participation accorded was a vital element of the sport's appeal.

Women's voluntary association was the least visible and most restricted branch of voluntary associational culture in nineteenth century Limerick.<sup>274</sup> A meeting to promote the cause of women's rights was later declared a 'novelty' when it was held in Limerick in 1874.<sup>275</sup> Attempts following the meeting to form a local society to advance the cause of women's rights (including a petition signed by two hundred women) were not crowned with obvious success and the gender war the meeting presaged was later overshadowed by land and constitutional wars.<sup>276</sup> Nevertheless, those latter political conflicts subsequently became two key sites for voluntary association by women. There emerged associations, some peopled by women solely – including the Ladies' Land League, while its conservative and unionist rival, the Primrose League, accommodated women in a political enterprise with men.<sup>277</sup>

Though exclusively women's associations did not appear in Limerick until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, women, in line with their public status as adjuncts of men, were previously accommodated in male associations in two ways, as full or associate members. An example of full association was the admission of women to the essay and debating classes of the LPYMA at the beginning of 1876.<sup>278</sup> The same association a decade earlier demonstrated how women were associates of an

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<sup>273</sup> Town Council Minute Books, 1869-1872.

<sup>274</sup> Luddy, Maria, 'Women and politics in Nineteenth Century Ireland', in Valiulis, Maryann Gialanella, and O'Dowd, Mary, (eds.), *Women and Irish History*, (Wolfhound, Dublin, 1997), 89-108.

<sup>275</sup> *LC* 7, 26 May, 4 June 1874.

<sup>276</sup> *LC* 7, 14, 19 May 1874.

<sup>277</sup> *LC* 3 Mar 1881, 11 June, 17 Dec 1885.

<sup>278</sup> *LC* 8 Jan 1876.

organisation – without the possibility of membership, via social events like conversaciones and tea and recitation socials.<sup>279</sup> Between the late 1860s and the late 1870s women moved from being associates of the LPYMA to becoming members, indicating the potential of one form of association to develop into a deeper, more formal type of membership. Generally, however, for most clubs women were akin to ‘satellites’ – not in the member’s circle, but inhabiting its circumference.

Women were integral to musical, theatrical, philanthropic and recreational associations. Immediately upon its formation in November 1850, the Limerick Harmonic Society accepted the membership request of the internationally renowned singer and local, Catherine Hayes.<sup>280</sup> The role of women in mid-century musical and theatrical circles was constrained, however, by ideas about the propriety of women’s participation in theatre.<sup>281</sup> Early in her career Hayes had to overcome some resistance to her transition from concert singer to a theatrical opera singer.<sup>282</sup> That even a woman at the peak of her artistic endeavours could encounter disapproval and censure points to the even greater pressures on Limerick’s society *grandes dames* to conform to orthodox ideas of femininity. The leisure avenues women exploited to escape such restrictions were squeezed into a rational and earnest character whose tone matched the re-creation of the sports infrastructure into a rational, earnest and orthodox superstructure.

The input of women to the work of charitable associations was, in contrast, considerable and, if not undervalued, possibly more subject to pedantic scrutiny than that of their male counterparts. An observer once reprimanded women for selling raffle

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<sup>279</sup> LC 5 August 1857, 19 Jan 1867.

<sup>280</sup> LC 23 Nov 1850, 4 June 1851.

<sup>281</sup> *The Shamrock*, XV:595 (9 Mar 1878), 364-5.

<sup>282</sup> Walsh, Basil, *Catherine Hayes: The Hibernian Prima Donna*, (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 2000), 30. LC 12 Nov 1851, 20 Aug 1887.

tickets at a Protestant Orphan Society event.<sup>283</sup> Women's volunteering efforts were acknowledged, however, in a less judgemental tribute – one 1867 editorial contrasted men's poor attendances and organisational contribution to charitable events with that of Limerick women.<sup>284</sup> Given the social restrictions many women laboured under there remains the possibility that their philanthropic endeavours, work to our eyes, was, in fact, a form of leisure – and the ancestor of the label – 'ladies who lunch.'

Recreational associations that welcomed women's participation included the LPYMA and some short-lived groups with literary and entertainment objectives.<sup>285</sup> A group promoting 'Penny Readings' in Rathkeale appeared to give to women's contributions a status equal to the men's.<sup>286</sup> The town of Rathkeale provided a number of firsts in male sports in County Limerick, with cricket and rugby football clubs established there long before other districts. The town also provided a first in women's leisure with the establishment, in 1887 of the Rathkeale Young Women's Christian Association to cater for women's non-sporting leisure needs.<sup>287</sup>

The sports ethic of the second half of the nineteenth century marginalised women, but their exclusion from sporting associations was not total.<sup>288</sup> Archery, skating, lawn tennis and fox hunting were among the sports where women participated in the life of clubs.<sup>289</sup> The only sport in which women were the sole organisers was archery.<sup>290</sup> They were, of course, women with means. Archery, skating, lawn tennis and fox hunting were resource rich sports and the expense of participation restricted access to women possessing finances in equal proportion to their desire for associational and sporting

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<sup>283</sup> *LC* 25 Apr 1860.

<sup>284</sup> *LC* 23 Nov 1867.

<sup>285</sup> LPYMA, *Five Pamphlets*, (Limerick, various dates). *LC* 9 Sept 1876, 23 Jan 1883.

<sup>286</sup> *LC* 22 Nov 1887.

<sup>287</sup> *LC* 30 July 1887.

<sup>288</sup> *LC* 13 June 1874.

<sup>289</sup> *LC* 11 Aug, 8, 10 Sept 1863, 9 May 1865, 7 Sept 1867, 17 Jan 1871, 20 Apr 1875, 6 Dec 1879.

<sup>290</sup> *LC* 24 Apr 1873.



opportunities. The Rink Club formed to use the facilities of the Limerick Skating Rink in 1879 was described as ‘exclusive’, had 120 members – women and men – and to emphasise its exclusivity the club proposed to hire the rink on Thursdays when admission was possible for members only.<sup>291</sup> Any consideration of the lack of a gender-based coalition of interest to advance the cause of women in the world of sport must, therefore, acknowledge the fact that men and women did associate together in a sports environment and must also acknowledge the lack of a cross-class, religion blind, apolitical coalition of interest among women themselves.<sup>292</sup> It is interesting that archery, skating, tennis and hunting were open to women in a way that they were not to some men, not just those with the means, but those without the social status commensurate with the requirements of elite sporting (and social) clubs.<sup>293</sup>

The demands upon Limerick’s leisure infrastructure in the third quarter of the nineteenth century became immense and the opportunities for sporting leisure more and more came to be seen as inadequate.<sup>294</sup> Dissatisfaction with the level of sports and recreation provision in Limerick may be discerned by the frequency of calls for ‘something to be done’ about the ‘the want of’ clubs, facilities, events and spectacles.<sup>295</sup> At the inception of the Limerick Boat Club in 1870, the Mayor and its first president, William Spillane, said ‘it is a wonder that one had not been started and established long since’.<sup>296</sup> An editorial welcoming the formation of the Limerick County Cricket Club (1871) similarly noted his ‘surprise that the efforts formerly made to start a club proved unsuccessful’.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> *LC* 23, 30 Jan, 8 Feb 1879.

<sup>292</sup> *LC* 6 Dec 1879.

<sup>293</sup> *LC* 31 July 1883.

<sup>294</sup> *LC* 24 June, 1 Aug 1871, 27 July 1872, 7 July 1874.

<sup>295</sup> *LC* 5 Oct 1850, 6 Aug 1851, 3 June 1865, 5 May, 5, 9, 14, 16, 21 June 1866, 14 Mar, 25 June 1868, 20 Feb, 1 July 1869, 19 Aug, 9 Oct 1873, 23 May, 6, 10 Oct, 26 Nov 1874, 7 July 1877, 21 May, 11 July 1878, 9 Sept, 4 Nov 1882, 19 May, 6, 13 & 23 June 1885, 22 Apr 1886.

<sup>296</sup> *LC* 5 Feb 1870.

<sup>297</sup> *LC* 15 Apr 1871.

The second indicator of the shortage of sport and leisure activities was the relative lack of space devoted to such concerns in the local press. There was an unmistakable growth, beginning in the early 1870s, in both the number of reports of sports and leisure, and in the amount of space devoted per edition to sporting concerns. The small numbers of reports up to this point may be reasonably be assumed to reflect a smaller sport and leisure infrastructure at mid-century.

Limerick's leisure and sporting infrastructure was heavily scrutinised (and criticised), many structural deficiencies were identified, and the calls for action became louder and grew in frequency. 'Adolescens' even claimed in 1867 that there was the 'absence of everything in the shape of physical recreation' in Limerick.<sup>298</sup> His claim was demonstrably untrue when it was made, but his criticism had some validity when it is considered that such sport as existed was not available to large sections of the population. Social, financial, practical, legal and political barriers had to be negotiated by large numbers of people with an interest in sporting pursuits.

Hare coursing, for example, the most popular of 'illegal recreations', was particularly handicapped.<sup>299</sup> Legislation demanded that owners of greyhounds have freehold qualifications that precluded all but the rich; landowners whose rights were given the full support of law guarded game jealously; gambling associated with the sport tainted its practice in the eyes of many; the stakes required to be put up front at a meeting were high; meetings in Limerick averaged out at two or three per season, and finally, poachers were liable to huge fines and imprisonment.<sup>300</sup> Ethical arguments against

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<sup>298</sup> *LC* 11 May 1867.

<sup>299</sup> *LC* 22 Apr 1865, 27 Feb 1886.

<sup>300</sup> *LC* 25 May 1850, 15 Oct 1870, 11, 25 May 1872, 23 Nov 1878, 9 Dec 1882.

field sports also emerged and a small but growing revulsion at field sports developed.<sup>301</sup>

There was no sport that was free from financial, legal, social, ethical and practical restrictions. Fox hunting may have been respectable, but it was expensive; shooting was cheaper than horse borne hunting pursuits, but access to firearms was restricted in an Ireland where revolutionary groups could claim considerable allegiance; and though folk football (*caid*) was popular, it was viewed by many in authority as an excuse to hold political gatherings – and could, therefore, not receive official approval.<sup>302</sup> The lack of establishment goodwill towards some sports was incredibly important in an age when patronage was a key conduit for money and practical support for social and sporting endeavours.<sup>303</sup>

The question of the adequacy of Limerick's sports infrastructure may be considered under a number of sub-headings: availability, access, regularity, expense, legality, respectability, and political or official approval.

The practical barriers limiting the availability of sport were time, space, motive, agents and rules – addressing respectively the questions when, where, why, by whom and how sport could be enjoyed.

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<sup>301</sup> LC 18 Sept 1866, 9 Sept 1871, 20 Aug 1872, 22 Jan 1876, 12 Mar 1881, 30 Mar, 4, 8, 20 Apr, 20, 30 May 1882, 23 Jan 1883, 21 Aug 1886. *The Shamrock*, XV:604 (11 May 1878), 512. Daniel, Laurent, 'Hare Coursing: An Irish National (British) Sport', paper given at 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of British Society of Sports History, St. Martin's College, Lancaster, April 2001.

<sup>302</sup> LC 7 Mar 1882.

<sup>303</sup> Vaughan, W.E., *Landlords and Tenants*, (1994), 119. Kellet, Mark Alan, 'The Power of Princely Patronage: Pigeon-Shooting in Victorian Britain', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 11:1, (Apr 1994), 63-85. Queenly and princely discouragement from curling and live pigeon shooting were powerful, if not decisive, social forces too, LC 22 Jan 1876, 23 Jan 1883.

Time for leisure was a key issue for those with an interest in sport and recreation.<sup>304</sup>

Just how crucial time could be as a factor in sport has been noted by Hardy who outlined the immense disadvantage cricket had in relation to baseball in American sports development. Whereas the former could take two days, the latter could be concluded in a few hours. An escape from work could be engineered for some hours, but for clerks, for example, absences from work of a day or more were impractical.<sup>305</sup>

Similarly, it was noted that many of ‘those in business’ could not avail of the first day of a cold snap in 1886 when the ice at Loughmore outside Limerick could support a skating spree.<sup>306</sup>

The imbalance in the time required for work and for leisure was most obvious in urban employments.<sup>307</sup> Most of those people fortunate to have employment were both wages and time ‘takers’. Grocers’ and drapers’ assistants were particularly subject to long hours with late finishing times – precluding time for little recreation or sport except on Sundays.<sup>308</sup> Some people were convinced the concession of more leisure time would be spent in ‘vicious amusements’, though this view was countered strongly.<sup>309</sup> The decision, in 1866, of two Limerick retailers to close at six o’clock on Saturday evenings was seen by others as an advance and as an example to other employers.<sup>310</sup>

Despite this modest victory over leisure time begrudgers, for half of the year darkness fell even before that time, and this excluded most outdoor recreations – even to those people with some disposable or discretionary incomes.<sup>311</sup> Demands by the retailing assistants for increased leisure time grew and the campaign for improved conditions

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<sup>304</sup> LC 15 June 1859, 14, 24 Dec 1867. Parratt, Catriona M., ‘Little means or time: Working-class women and leisure in late victorian and edwardian England’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 15:2 (August 1998), 22-53.

<sup>305</sup> Hardy, Stephen, *How Boston Played*, (1982), 131-2.

<sup>306</sup> LC 29, 31 Dec 1870, 17 Jan 1871, 7 Dec 1875, 6 Dec 1879, 13 Jan 1881, 9 Dec 1882, 15 Jan 1885, 18 Dec 1886.

<sup>307</sup> LC 12 Jan 1859.

<sup>308</sup> LC 16 May 1867.

<sup>309</sup> LC 3 Oct 1871.

<sup>310</sup> LC 1 Feb 1866.

<sup>311</sup> LC 26 June, 20 Nov 1850, 3 May, 13 Dec 1851.

was a vital impetus to the voluntary association of young men for trades union purposes.<sup>312</sup>

Professionals such as medical men, lawyers and businessmen were more time-fortunate. Though they may have had to spend as much or more time at work, they had, however, more discretion about when they could work.<sup>313</sup> For these upper-middle class men an occasional half-day away from toil during the week was easily capable of organisation – lawyers on the Munster circuit for instance, in the early 1870s fielded a cricket team which played on weekdays.<sup>314</sup> Not all cricket players had total control over their working hours though, and at the 1874 general meeting of the Limerick County Cricket Club it was agreed to extend practice hours to eight o'clock in the evening to accommodate members 'engaged in business.'<sup>315</sup>

Agricultural workers and farmers also had some discretion with their work time. This was especially true if there was a novel or spectacular event to be enjoyed.<sup>316</sup> On one such occasion many 'country people' abandoned their work to join an unusual riparian hunt for otters in east Limerick in 1870, and on another thousands of 'rustics' left their hillside fastnesses to observe a rare football match between rural south Tipperary's finest and a military selection at Clonmel in 1866.<sup>317</sup>

Women with means were limited participants in sport, but enjoyed a lot of sport vicariously as spectators.<sup>318</sup> Women's time for leisure was a function of household wealth. The variety, quantity and quality of women's sports experiences diminished as

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<sup>312</sup> *LC* 16 Nov 1867.

<sup>313</sup> *LC* 18 June 1885.

<sup>314</sup> *LC* 27 July 1865, 22 July 1871, 16 July 1874.

<sup>315</sup> *LC* 25 Apr 1874.

<sup>316</sup> *LC* 21 Feb, 8 Mar 1880.

<sup>317</sup> *LC* 6 Feb 1866, 11 June 1870.

<sup>318</sup> *LC* 17 June 1865, 13 Aug 1870, 1 June 1871, 11 Sept 1879, 12 Aug 1882.

their means reduced and grew as their income rose. The decorous and languid lifestyle of upper class women was a tribute to the economic worth of the male head of household.<sup>319</sup> In theory, the practice by Limerick men of business and resources of sending their household *en bloc* to the leisure resorts of Kilkee, Ballybunion and Lahinch provided limitless leisure hours for women of means.<sup>320</sup> One paean to the attractions of Kilkee noted that men could find many attractions there, with sports foremost among them. The tribute neglected to suggest that women could also avail of those facilities, and actually placed the pursuit of women among the same list of sporting attractions.<sup>321</sup> In reality, those prosperous women (and children) had a restricted diet of bathing, walking, croquet, and later, lawn tennis – a limited range of activity that suggests sporting initiative and gender barriers were more restricting than time, space or resources.

The space to enjoy leisure was another significant barrier to sporting pursuits.<sup>322</sup> The question of demarcating public spaces for sport and recreation was a key factor behind moves to establish a public park for Limerick city and to develop purpose built bathing places.<sup>323</sup> Similarly, in Lahinch in 1859 the lack of a secluded spot in which women could bathe was regretted.<sup>324</sup> As with the time constraint, workingmen were also among the first to cooperate to secure the space to pursue their sporting interests. In 1867 a group of tradesmen in the North Kerry town of Listowel sought permission from a local noble to rod fish the River Feale.<sup>325</sup> Perhaps the most instructive example of the importance of space, means and opportunity to the holding of sports events also occurred in Listowel. In the winter of 1880–81 the River Feale froze over and the

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<sup>319</sup> LC 9 July 1868.

<sup>320</sup> LC 19 July 1851, 4 July, 13 Aug 1859, 8 June 1861, 23 July 1865, 18 May 1867.

<sup>321</sup> LC 4 July 1859.

<sup>322</sup> LC 28 Jan 1879.

<sup>323</sup> LC 2 May 1860, 22, 24 June 1871, 9 Mar, 29 June 1872, 16 June 1874.

<sup>324</sup> LC 31 Aug 1859.

<sup>325</sup> LC 5 Mar 1867, 15 Apr 1873.

chance to hold sports on the ice was seized with abandon by locals. Over the course of a week there was skating, tennis, athletics, a bicycle race, and even a one hundred a-side football game (*caid*).<sup>326</sup> Without this exceptional temporary surface it is doubtful if such a sporting festival would have been held at that time of year and it certainly couldn't have occurred on frozen ground.

In completely different meteorological conditions, cricket required access to a well-groomed sward – at exactly that time of year (the summer) when such resources in rural areas were required for agriculture. The importance of suitable venues for sport was emphasised by the fact that attempts to secure a ground for the bat and ball game hindered the progress of the sport in Limerick for many years.<sup>327</sup> Previous to the purchase and development of specialist sports grounds by cricket clubs the game was played in the demesnes of the ‘big house’ – the only suitable grass surfaces dedicated to pleasure and leisure and not required for utilitarian agricultural purposes.<sup>328</sup> Access to demesnes and ‘big house’ lands for sport was, however, achieved via patronage, and the propriety of the intended sport and the character of the sportsmen were consequently subject to the tacit approval of the landowner.<sup>329</sup> Permission to use lands for sport was fraught with difficulties. In 1887 one Tipperary landowner refused permission to two respectably dressed young men to course for hares over his demesne; for his pains the men disturbed flower beds and broke some windows in his home.<sup>330</sup> Not all landlords were uncooperative with those seeking such amusement. In 1877 one landowner allowed a group of five hundred men to hold a coursing meeting (on a Sunday) on his lands near Newport.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> *LC* 25 Jan 1881.

<sup>327</sup> *LC* 15 Apr 1871.

<sup>328</sup> *LC* 28 Aug 1852, 30 Aug 1851.

<sup>329</sup> *LC* 27 Aug 1851, 27 Mar 1869.

<sup>330</sup> *LC* 22 Sept 1887.

<sup>331</sup> *LC* 27 Nov 1877.

The issues of time and space in which to enjoy sport were not mutually exclusive.<sup>332</sup> A legal dispute in north Tipperary in 1873 highlighted the link between the twin difficulties of time and space in the practice and development of sport. Roscrea (Roman Catholic) Young Men's Association secured the use of a local demesne for athletic and other sports on Sundays. Some local magistrates questioned this unsabbatarian practice and both sides sought legal advice. The case was resolved in favour of the young men after consultation with, among others, Isaac Butt. The fact that the ground used was on private land left it outside the remit of the law under which the prohibition was sought.<sup>333</sup>

Intending sportsmen were hemmed in by restrictions of time and space – by sabbatarian laws and police scrutiny and by uncertain access to land for recreation. However frequent, calls for action to suppress Sunday sporting activity were quite often ignored by police with better things to do; nevertheless some laws remained on the statute book, apparently more honoured in the breach than the observance.<sup>334</sup>

The marked difference between Roman Catholic and Protestant observance of the Sabbath had tremendous implications for the growth of sport in late nineteenth century Ireland. Protestants were effectively prohibited from participating in sports that the Roman Catholics enjoyed on Sundays, and because Sunday was the chief day of leisure for most Roman Catholics a religion-blind sporting tradition was inhibited, at the outset, from developing.

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<sup>332</sup> LC 28 Jan, 4 Feb 1852. National Archive, Outrage Papers, Limerick, 1852/182.

<sup>333</sup> LC 18 Sept 1873.

<sup>334</sup> LC 11 Aug 1860, 20 Aug 1863.



Another barrier to the pursuit of sport was that of a motive or justification for investing time and resources in play. Fun and excitement were the greatest attractions of sport.<sup>335</sup>

Non-ludic reasons for sports participation included extravagant display marking social status, financial gain, gambling, the outworking of rivalries, and the search for social outlets. For the rich expenditure on sporting extravagances was a marker of wealth and influence.<sup>336</sup> While the merely rich could continue to enjoy expensive recreations such as hunting and shooting over one's estate, the super-rich developed new playthings such as yachting and intercontinental game shooting trips.<sup>337</sup> In the reporting of hunts there was a strict practice of listing those attending in descending order of social standing, nobles first, followed by gentry, clergy, military, the professions and men of business – if some farmers evaded social radar to attend they were not noted.<sup>338</sup>

Farmers did not enjoy social equality with the nobility and gentry and they had not the same wealth and influence, but their occasional inclusion in hunting circles was a marker that they had outpaced their social inferiors.<sup>339</sup> Sport was thus a signifier of inclusion, and by implication, exclusion.<sup>340</sup>

Entire industries such as horse racing and the nascent industry of hare coursing depended on the breeding of more and of superior quality animals; objectives that were facilitated by the pecuniary inducements offered through success at race and hunt meetings.<sup>341</sup> Beside the honour and laurels attending success on the turf the financial rewards gained by possessing a prize or champion animal were considerable

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<sup>335</sup> Elias, Norbert, and Dunning, Eric, *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986).

<sup>336</sup> Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants*, (1994), 132-3.

<sup>337</sup> Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, (1994). *LC* 9 Mar, 11 Nov, 4 Dec 1869, 24 Mar 1870, 17, 20 Mar, 6 Nov, 4 Dec 1873, 27, 29 Jan, 18 Apr, 16 June, 24 Oct 1874, 11, 30 Nov 1875, 24 Nov 1877, 22, 26, 29 Jan, 7, 12, 19, 23 Feb 1878, 26 Aug 1880.

<sup>338</sup> *LC* 4, 16 Nov, 7 Dec 1880. *IT* 9 Feb 1880.

<sup>339</sup> *LC* 21 Nov 1882, 22 May 1883.

<sup>340</sup> *LC* 10, 31 Jan 1882.

<sup>341</sup> *LC* 10 Oct 1874.

attractions. But, it was not even necessary to possess bloodstock to gain financially from sport.

Commercial interests recognised the drawing power of sports events.<sup>342</sup> One of the first entrepreneurs to promote athletics events as commercial enterprises in Dublin was John Lawrence, a sports goods retailer and outfitter in Grafton Street.<sup>343</sup> He organised athletics events with military band accompaniment and fireworks to crown the day's amusement.<sup>344</sup> Later he moved into the collation and publication of sports annuals and was conspicuous in all things sporting in Dublin social life.<sup>345</sup> Ambitious men operating collectively could also gain financially from the possession of a leisure infrastructure and from the hosting of sports events; a race meeting could be very lucrative for the publicans, restaurateurs, hoteliers, cab drivers and railways of a host town.<sup>346</sup>

Gambling gave another impetus to sporting pursuits. One suggestion for the provenance of modern pedestrianism and athletics was the practice of nobles and gentry pitting their footmen's running prowess against each other for gambling and one-upmanship purposes.<sup>347</sup> Such *ad-hoc* private challenges for large amounts of money frequently captured the public imagination, and handball, athletic, rowing and horseracing contests attracted huge crowds.<sup>348</sup> Beside the prize money staked by the participants, there were huge amounts wagered by onlookers.<sup>349</sup> In addition to the financial interest of spectators, such contests often had the extra spice of pitting rival

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<sup>342</sup> *LC* 18 Aug 1885.

<sup>343</sup> *IT* 28 Aug 1865.

<sup>344</sup> *IT* 19, 22 & 25 July 1865.

<sup>345</sup> *IT* 20 Sept 1865. *IT* 12 Oct 1865.

<sup>346</sup> *LC* 18 Aug 1885. *LC* 24 Apr 1886. *LC* 4 July 1859. *LC* 1 May 1884.

<sup>347</sup> Anderson, Earl, 'The running footmen of nineteenth century England', in *Running Times*, (March 1981), 17-20. Brailsford, *A Taste for Diversions*, (1999), 28-30.

<sup>348</sup> *LC* 15 June, 7, 11 Sept, 2, 12 Oct 1850, 14 Sept 1869, 30 Nov 1871, 1 April 1876, 26 May 1877, 11 July 1878.

<sup>349</sup> *LC* 4 June 1851, 10 Aug 1872, 30 Oct 1877, 7, 28 May 1878, 26 July 1881, 20 Apr 1882.

nationalities, occupations and classes against each other.<sup>350</sup> In his famous novel, *Knocknagow* (1879), Kickham established plebeian Matt the Thresher's virtue through a contest of throwing ability against aristocratic Captain French.<sup>351</sup> Contests between local sportsmen and those from further away also stoked the fires of local pride.<sup>352</sup>

More prosaic, but perhaps more significant rivalries lay behind the sporting contests of fishermen, tradesmen, students and estate workers. With fewer exploitable differences within those homogeneous groupings individual pride, family or district honour and local pre-eminence were potent incentives to achieve sporting success.<sup>353</sup> The occupational or local community aspect of these sporting gatherings made them attractive as hubs for larger social gatherings involving all the family and all ages.<sup>354</sup>

The social value of sport was a tremendous incentive to its practice.<sup>355</sup> Sport was often just one element of multi-faceted social occasions, the excuse for them possibly, but it was not the only attractive aspect. Coursing, croquet and tennis were integrated into garden parties where food, socialising, music, dance and perhaps fireworks were significant additional attractions.<sup>356</sup>

The question of agency was another hurdle to be overcome by those wishing to enjoy sports. If 'something must be done' who will do it? Horse racing demanded a lot of commitment from sportsmen and organisers, a commitment that was not always forthcoming.<sup>357</sup> Rathkeale let its local race meeting lapse for forty years before its

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<sup>350</sup> LC 16 Aug, 20 Sept 1851, 24, 26 Aug 1865.

<sup>351</sup> Kickham, Charles, *Knocknagow (or The Homes of Tipperary)*, (Gill & Son, Dublin, 1962 - first edn. 1879), 439-58.

<sup>352</sup> LC 13 Aug 1851, 22 Mar 1856, 22 July 1871, 16 July 1872, 9 Sept 1882.

<sup>353</sup> LC 4 June 1851, 16, 27 June 1874, 2 Nov 1882, 24 July 1883.

<sup>354</sup> LC 21 May 1851, 16, 23 Aug 1887.

<sup>355</sup> Hone, William Patrick, *Cricket in Ireland*, (Kerryman Press, Tralee, 1955), 86.

<sup>356</sup> LC 9 July, 3 Sept, 3 Oct 1868, 1 July 1871, 8 Apr 1876, 25 Apr 1878.

<sup>357</sup> LC 9 Oct 1875.

revival in 1880.<sup>358</sup> Without the backing of subscribers and the effort of sports enthusiasts, few sports, no matter how popular could go ahead.<sup>359</sup> Rathkeale also spawned the first rugby football club in County Limerick, but its short-lived existence may also be attributed to a lack of human resources to sustain it.<sup>360</sup> In contrast, cricket in Rathkeale had been played since at least 1850, due in no small measure to the patronage and participation of local gentry figures.<sup>361</sup> One report attributed the progress of the willow-bat game in Ireland to ‘high example and noble patronage’.<sup>362</sup>

The importance of agency in the nurturing and promotion of sport from an *ad-hoc* or informal existence to a modern organised one is undeniable. Quite simply, until the advent of the Gaelic Athletic Association in 1884, hurling, though a popular sport, was rudderless, rule-less and ill equipped to adapt to a rapidly changing Ireland. In the pre-sports club era sport was the property of individuals solely or the whole community acting in concert.<sup>363</sup> A landlord could shoot over his preserves while all (or part of) a community could engage in noon till dusk hurling games.<sup>364</sup> Both forms of sporting arrangements were traditional, taking their reference from custom, but as Irish society underwent the late century upheavals of Famine, emigration, agricultural rationalisation, and to an extent, urbanisation and industrialisation, new forms of sporting arrangements were demanded. Hurling was played in Limerick city, but it did not thrive. Despite the fact that it was cheap, popular and exciting there was no recognisable framework in which it could be practised – except a traditional rural one.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> *LC* 31 Mar, 1 May 1866, 14 Sept 1880.

<sup>359</sup> *LC* 3 June 1865.

<sup>360</sup> *LC* 28 Nov 1874, 25 Jan 1876.

<sup>361</sup> *LC* 17 Aug 1850, 13 Aug 1870.

<sup>362</sup> *ISF* 14 May 1870.

<sup>363</sup> *LC* 25 Aug 1868, 25 Jan 1881.

<sup>364</sup> *LC* 27 Dec 1877.

<sup>365</sup> *LC* 28 Jan, 4 Feb 1852.

Increasingly, it became an essential precondition for sports to be held that some forms of community leadership exist – from which the personnel and resources could be drawn to run sports events, and to sustain those sports in new social conditions. In the early stages of the modernisation of sport such leaderships emerged by election or selection to organise a single event and were disbanded straight afterwards. Whether those organising committees were representative, reliant on patronage or even competent, this form of organisation had a semi-feudal character with advertisements for sports events often reading like local versions of ‘Who’s Who’.<sup>366</sup> Later, some of these *ad-hoc* committees were transformed into standing committees organising the same event year to year, thereby assuming a semi-modern characteristic. When they finally assumed the constitution and mode of organisation of a club the transformation was complete and this modern club now assumed responsibility for those events on a year to year and year round basis. This transformation from temporary committee to standing committee to responsible club represented, in a way, the privatisation of sport.

The final barrier limiting the availability of sport was the question of what sport appealed to people, and how that sport could be practised? Hurling, for instance, was variously organised: one version defined victory in terms of bringing the ball to one’s home goal area and another version demanded that a goal had to be scored by bringing the ball to one’s opponents goal area.<sup>367</sup> Variations in the rules, numbers, equipment, the duration of games and problems of arbitration added to a lack of clarity about what constituted best practice in hurling as in many games and sports. The names used even varied; *scuaibín*, *iomáint* and *báire* were the terms for just three versions of hurling.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> LC 25 Sept 1852, 1 Aug 1860.

<sup>367</sup> Ó’Caithnia, Liam, *Scéal na hIomána*, (Clóchomhar, Baile Átha Cliath, 1980).

<sup>368</sup> O’Maolfabhail, A., *Camán: two thousand years of hurling in Ireland*, (Dundalk, 1973). Ó’Caithnia, Liam, *Scéal na hIomána*, (Clóchomhar, Baile Átha Cliath, 1980). Ó’Caithnia, Liam P., *Micheál Cíosóg*, (Clóchomhar, Baile Átha Cliath, 1982).

Practical issues of time, space, motive, agency and rules limited the capacity of Limerick's sport and leisure infrastructure to cater for contemporary needs, but the range, variety and choice of sports in the culture imposed more limits. The variety of sports was restricted in three ways. The sports infrastructure was over-represented by field sport; most non-field sports were pursued on such an *ad-hoc* basis and under such restrictions as to render them inaccessible, and finally, sport was an overwhelmingly male sphere.

Limerick's sport infrastructure was over-represented by field sports; horse racing, hunting with dogs, coursing, shooting, and angling were practiced widely.<sup>369</sup> In the period 1868 to 1883 at least twenty-six different packs hunted Clare, Limerick and North Tipperary.<sup>370</sup> Horse racing was the most popular sport and drew the largest crowds, most frequently, for any type of sporting event.<sup>371</sup>

Hunting groups came in two categories, either subscription clubs like the County Limerick Foxhounds or owner-run packs such as Mr. Chadwick's Harriers covering east Limerick and west Tipperary. The former represented the modern mode of sports organisation with an elected master, subscriptions, uniform, specialist personnel, dedicated meeting places, and a calendar of events.<sup>372</sup> The latter was almost a remnant of feudalism, a pack of hounds retained by an owner and to whose meets sportsmen were invited to hunt local territory. Up to his death in the 1870s a Mr Chadwick maintained, at his own expense, a pack to hunt East Tipperary – for the enjoyment of

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<sup>369</sup> LC 26 Mar 1856, 27, 29 Jan, 24 Oct 1874.

<sup>370</sup> Clare, Limerick and Tipperary Foxhounds. Limerick Stagounds (aka Gubbins or Taglioni). Limerick, Clare, East Clare, Youghal, Furnell's, Kilmurry, Castleconnell, White Hill, Shannon, Capt. Gubbins', Arravale (aka Mr. Chadwick's), Lemonfield, Glenville, Stackpoole, United, Mr. Westropp's, Tradaree, and Glin and Tarbert Harriers. J. Butler Ievers' Hounds. Lord Muskerry's Stagounds. Herbertstown Stagounds. Beagle packs are less conspicuous in the records, though one such pack was Captain O'Brien's Beagles in Bunratty, Co. Clare.

<sup>371</sup> LC 28 Mar, 24 Apr, 14 Nov 1868, 9, 11 June 1870, 18 Jan 1872.

<sup>372</sup> Wyndham-Quin, W. H., *The Foxhound in County in Limerick*, (Dublin, 1919).

friends.<sup>373</sup> Field sports were beyond the reach of the population who lacked the resources to subscribe to a hunt club and who were outside the society of landlords with well-stocked preserves.<sup>374</sup>

These limitations within field sports, a large body of legislation and a cadre of attentive bailiffs and gamekeepers rendered them, to all intents and purposes, unavailable to most people.<sup>375</sup> The resultant narrow range of sporting pursuits for the average sportsman suggests that the question of variety and choice in sport was also a function of the accessibility of sport.

It may seem perverse to question the range and variety of available sports when one considers the great range of sports for which evidence can be found. In the pre-organised sport era, however, rowing was the preserve of fishermen and watermen, hurling and football were dependent on the existence of a local tradition, many of the sports were cost-exclusive, and some required the presence of an organising agency.<sup>376</sup> So, despite the notional wide range of sports in Limerick's sport infrastructure, the *de facto* variety of sports was considerably less than this list suggests.<sup>377</sup>

Another limit on the variety of sport was that sport was an overwhelmingly male sphere; women were marginalised. Bathing, skating, archery, walking, hunting to hounds and croquet were the principal sports for women, and the nature of many sports limited them to an even smaller group of rich women.<sup>378</sup> There is some evidence for

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<sup>373</sup> LC 9 Apr 1874, 14 & 23 Nov 1878.

<sup>374</sup> Shooting register, 1853 – 1868, Barrington Papers (not catalogued), Glenstal Abbey. NLI, Ms. 14,838, Game book of Edward O'Brien (14th Baron Inchiquin) from Dromoland estate, Co. Clare, Nov 1875 - Jan 1884. LC 22 Sept 1877, 18, 25 Apr 1878. Dooley, Terence, *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland*, (Wolfhound, Dublin, 2001), 258-67.

<sup>375</sup> LC 27 June 1874, 27 Apr 1875. Conner, MacCarthy, *The Game Laws of Ireland*, (2nd edition, Hodges Figgis, Dublin, 1891).

<sup>376</sup> LC 2 Oct 1850, 21 May, 4 June 1851, 24, 26 Aug 1865.

<sup>377</sup> LC 11 May 1867.

<sup>378</sup> Conyers, Dorothea, *Sporting Reminiscences*, (Methuen, London, 1920).

occasional women's athletic and rowing contests, but they were so infrequent as to fit the category of novelty event within the framework of otherwise very male enterprises.<sup>379</sup>

The question of variety and choice was not simply a matter of the existence of a wide range sports – it was tied up with the issues of access and participation. Restricted access meant a curb on the actual as distinct from the notional variety of sports available to many people. Access was a function of the desire and the ability to participate in sports. The desirability of more and better sports provision was debated more frequently and with greater volume than any opposing views indicating there existed a vocal battalion of thwarted sportsmen and spectators.<sup>380</sup> The same debates, however, give less prominence to those for whom sport was not an attractive prospect.<sup>381</sup> There were many for whom hunting was barbaric, horse racing was corrupt (and an invitation to dissolution), and who were repulsed by the irruptions of violence in hurling.<sup>382</sup> It is even possible that this half of the sports debate represented the majority view. The nineteenth century sport revolution involved moves towards rationality, the curbing of violence, the taming of sport's associated vices, and the transfer of the control of sport from customary and traditional practices to voluntary associations and clubs. This rationalisation of sport was analogous to the 'disciplining' of the pub by social, religious and legislative forces and the suppression of other forms of popular culture (including events like the Donnybrook Fair) in the same period.<sup>383</sup> In sport's unrefined state, therefore, there was a tendency among many to view sport

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<sup>379</sup> *LC* 19 Aug 1879, 4 Aug 1887.

<sup>380</sup> *LC* 15 Apr, 22 June, 1 Aug, 3 Oct 1871, 25 Aug 1874, 26 Aug, 26, 28 Oct 1876, 7 July, 6 Oct 1877, 11 July 1878, 17 June 1879, 11 Oct 1881, 9 Sept 1882, 6 June 1885.

<sup>381</sup> *LC* 20 Aug 1859.

<sup>382</sup> *LC* 28 Jan 1852, 30 Aug 1862, 26 Oct 1865, 22 Jan 1876.

<sup>383</sup> Malcolm, Elizabeth, 'The Rise of the Pub: A Study in the Disciplining of Popular Culture', in Donnelly, James S. Jnr., and Miller, Kerby A., (eds.), *Irish Popular Culture 1650 - 1850*, (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1998), 50-77. Ó Maitiú, Séamus, *The Humours of Donnybrook: Dublin's Famous Fair and its Suppression*, (Maynooth Studies in Local History 4), (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1995).



negatively as illustrated by the attempts to reform it.<sup>384</sup> This negativity impacted on the desirability of a sporting life – one man found even the organised, rule-bound game of rugby union was contributing to ‘moral degradation’ – what must he have thought of the unregulated version?.<sup>385</sup>

Complementing existing negative perceptions of sport were sport’s inbuilt exclusion mechanisms.<sup>386</sup> Participation in sports was limited. The most glaring example was the marginalisation of women. With the exception of women from the elite in society, who enjoyed foxhunting and garden sports such as croquet and archery, women were spectators and not participants.<sup>387</sup> Neither did all men participate in sport; as a rule of thumb, the higher one’s position in the social scale the more one enjoyed access to sporting outlets.<sup>388</sup> The development of the gentleman amateur ethic, particularly in rowing, was an elite class attempt to build a sporting *kraal* impenetrable by unapproved persons. This was a self-policed system requiring potential members of Limerick’s boat clubs to submit their name for ballot.<sup>389</sup> It was not the only exclusion mechanism.

Other methods of denying access to sport included hosting meetings and events at inconvenient times, pricing potential sportsmen out of the sports-market, and the denial of practical support and patronage for some sporting enterprises.<sup>390</sup> While these exclusionary methods precluded the recognition of upward social mobility through the means of sport, contrary impulses prevented higher socio-economic groups from

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<sup>384</sup> LC 16 June 1874, 4 June 1878, 21 Aug 1883.

<sup>385</sup> LC 12 May 1866, 11 Dec 1877.

<sup>386</sup> LC 31 July, 20 Oct 1883.

<sup>387</sup> LC 28 Dec 1865.

<sup>388</sup> Veblen’s concluded that four employments were proper to members (men) of the ‘leisure class’; war, government, religion and sport, Veblen, Thorstein, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, (Penguin Books, London, 1994, 1st edition 1899). *The Limerick Club Centenary: A Short History of a Hundred Years of Club Life*, (Hodges Figgis, Dublin, 1913 [?]), 42-3. LC 6 May 1873.

<sup>389</sup> LC 20, 25 May, 3 June 1882.

<sup>390</sup> LC 17, 22 July 1880, 19 July, 5 Nov 1881, 16 Sept 1884.

enjoying the pursuits of those from lower groups.<sup>391</sup> The gentry had patronised hurling and football games in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but by 1850 they were inimical to both sports.<sup>392</sup>

The frequency and regularity with which sports were held was an important aspect of the existing infrastructure. Except for field sports and horse racing, sport was an infrequent, irregular affair.<sup>393</sup> While hunting was an invariable fixture, a regular and frequent set of horse racing fixtures could not always be assumed.<sup>394</sup> Only the more prosperous regions and towns were able to support a regular racing calendar.<sup>395</sup>

Another cause of failed meetings was the lack of a venue which was, both suitable for racing, and which could accommodate the large crowds that attended.<sup>396</sup> Regattas were another popular entertainment that frequently lapsed: the prestigious Limerick regatta failed often in the 1880s, arrangements and prizes were expensive and with so many expensive cups and plates leaving town in the hands of ‘foreign’ crews local reserves of patience and support sought more successful means to demonstrate local patriotism.<sup>397</sup> This was also the period in which Garryowen FC became the chief city sporting representative institution, illustrating the role that inter-sports competition had on each discipline.

Regular and frequent consumption of sports was, to a large degree, a function of means; a full sporting calendar catered for the nobility and gentry – for some there was more sport than time. The disappointment at the refusal of the Lord Lieutenant to extend the open season on woodcock, snipe, ducks and plover in 1877 was particularly

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<sup>391</sup> *LC* 22, 24 June 1871.

<sup>392</sup> Ó’Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomána*, (1980).

<sup>393</sup> *LC* 5 Apr 1851.

<sup>394</sup> *LC* 9 May 1872.

<sup>395</sup> *LC* 18 Sept 1852.

<sup>396</sup> *LC* 20, 22, 24 June, 4 July 1871, 19 May, 20, 23, 25 June, 22 Aug 1874, 20 Mar 1877.

<sup>397</sup> *LC* 15 July 1886, 26 Apr 1887.

acute.<sup>398</sup> One complaint about the 1871 Limerick regatta was that it was arranged at such a time as to clash with the grouse season leading to the absence of its aristocratic patrons.<sup>399</sup> The ‘twelfth’ of August, cub hunting in September, the first of February, the circuit of race meetings, athletics and regattas (Trinity Races, the Derby and Henley or local imitations) completed a comprehensive sporting diary, a round of sporting events that became the secular sporting equivalent of earlier religious holidays.<sup>400</sup> Hobsbawm’s ‘invention of tradition’ thesis has been interpreted as a process allowing the invention of the nineteenth century Social Season ‘for urban plutocrats who wanted a bit of Old Posh’.<sup>401</sup> In a meteorological sense, a new elite meeting a declining, yet significant old elite, created an occluded front of elites that required new rituals and spaces, a calendar to set them by, and a means by which their new power accord could be legitimated in the eyes of the public – where else to source such totems than in a reinvention of the hippodrome and the circus of ancient Rome?

The peasantry, meanwhile, could enjoy the sports at any number of wakes or communal celebrations during the year, though the predictability of those ‘sports meetings’ was unreliable.<sup>402</sup> More reliable were those calendar festivals such as Christmas and harvest time when work was substituted by amusement.<sup>403</sup> The day after Christmas, which ‘from time immemorial [has] been observed as a day of general amusement by all classes and creeds’ was, therefore, deemed ideal for an athletics meeting near Newmarket–on–Fergus, Co. Clare in 1877.<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> LC 10, 15 Nov 1877.

<sup>399</sup> LC 27 July 1871.

<sup>400</sup> LC 25, 27 Aug, 5 Sept 1868, 4 Sept 1873, 24 Jan, 3 Feb 1874, 17 June 1876, 11 May 1878, 28 Apr 1881 18 Sept 1884.

<sup>401</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric, and Ranger, Terence, (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000). York, Peter, ‘It’s the old, old story of class’, *Independent on Sunday*, 3 July 2011, p. 39.

<sup>402</sup> Ó Súilleabháin, Seán, *Irish Wake Amusements*, (Mercier, Dublin, 1997). LC 8 Apr 1869.

<sup>403</sup> LC 1 Jan 1859, 19 Aug 1879.

<sup>404</sup> LC 19 Dec 1865, 3 Nov, 27 Dec 1877, 18 Oct 1884.

The expense of many available sports meant that only those in the upper echelons of society could regularly participate in sports, while those further down the scale participated less and less, in accordance with their means.<sup>405</sup> Contrariwise, occupants of the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder enjoyed other, cost-free sports such as nude bathing, with those further up the scale participating less and less – according to their means.<sup>406</sup> The most expensive sports were sailing and field sports. Within those categories there were further gradations of sporting grandeur, membership of a County Foxhounds trumping that of a harrier club and Royal Yacht club status outbidding association with a mere boat club.<sup>407</sup> Yachts, moorings, club subscriptions, stables, horses, preserves, the employment of gamekeepers, compensation to landowners for the existence of predatory game like foxes and for damage to property following hunts were all considerable claims on a gentry with diminishing economic power.<sup>408</sup> Illustrating the contrasts between sports for the rich and the poor was the approach to skating and bathing. Skating required boots that did not cost as much as hunting apparatus, but the ‘season’ (if such it could be called, and assuming that it did freeze sufficiently) was of such a short duration as to make their cost prohibitive for many people.<sup>409</sup> The city’s retailers’ supply of skates was once exhausted following one run on the gear, but most people, however, simply enjoyed the ice without the benefit – or expense, of blades.<sup>410</sup> Bathing was another activity that highlighted the different approaches of rich and poor to sport; the former enjoyed the privilege of lodges, bathing costumes, and the freedom to travel many miles to resorts to obtain a

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<sup>405</sup> Dunraven, 4th Earl of, *Past Times and Pastimes*, (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1922). *LC* 18 Apr, 16 June 1874, 8 June, 1, 8 Aug, 19 Sept, 7, 10 Oct 1876, 6, 9 Jan 1877, 26 June 1886.

<sup>406</sup> *LC* 8, 19 Aug 1871, 30 July 1872, 22 May 1875.

<sup>407</sup> *LC* 24 June 1884.

<sup>408</sup> Vaughan, W.E., *Landlords and Tenants in Ireland, 1848-1904*, (Studies in Irish Economic and Social History, 2), (Dundalgon, Dundalk, 1994). Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants*, (1994).

<sup>409</sup> *LC* 25 Jan 1881.

<sup>410</sup> *LC* 29 Dec 1870, 25 Jan 1881.

refreshing dip.<sup>411</sup> The latter could enjoy the sport nude, *alfresco*, and locally, within the confines of the cities and towns.<sup>412</sup>

The cost to participants in sport was variable, but the cost for organisers was no less varied. One of the largest components of cost was the expense of the provision of facilities and the apparatus of sport. Even the army, the largest body of young men with money, and with state backing, did not have dedicated sports grounds.<sup>413</sup> The lack of suitable dedicated venues was the biggest obstacle to club formation and development of sports.<sup>414</sup> One get out from this straitjacket was the development of existing resources using existing facilities. Making a virtue of necessity, Limerick, like many port, riverside or coastal towns developed its aquatic sport culture.<sup>415</sup>

The take-over of rowing by gentleman amateurs, sealed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and the subsequent marginalisation of fishermen and boatmen, was most clearly signalled by the contrast in the apparatus and, therefore, the cost of rowing.<sup>416</sup> Rowing and boat clubs in Limerick built club houses, adopted uniforms, organised elaborate, expensive regattas, hired professional trainers, and bought the latest in racing boat technology, including eights craft and boats with sliding seats.<sup>417</sup> While the adoption of new rowing technologies was justified on pure sporting terms, its contribution to a process of ‘pricing’ potential rowers out of the rowing scene cannot be gainsaid.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> *LC* 26 July 1866, 8 July 1871.

<sup>412</sup> *LC* 27 July 1865, 30 July 1872, 10 Aug 1882, 15, 20 July 1886, 21 June 1887.

<sup>413</sup> *LC* 10 June 1865.

<sup>414</sup> *LC* 15 Apr 1871.

<sup>415</sup> Wigglesworth, Neil, *The Social History of English Rowing*, (Frank Cass, London, 1992). *LC* 4, 11 Aug, 15, 22, 23, 25 Sept 1852, 3, 6, 22, 24 June 1871, 19 May, 23, 25, 27 June, 6, 8, 11, 25 Aug 1874, 4, 11 Sept 1875, 17 Dec 1878, 19 Aug 1880.

<sup>416</sup> *LC* 16 June 1874, 5, 19 Aug 1879, 23 Aug 1887.

<sup>417</sup> *LC* 5 Feb, 19 Mar, 2, 4, 16 Aug 1870, 4, 6 July, 1, 3 Aug 1871, 21 May, 29 June, 30 July 1872, 16 June, 9 July 1874.

<sup>418</sup> *LC* 24 Aug, 5 Sept 1872, 2 Nov 1882.

Archery was another well-resourced sport.<sup>419</sup> The Rathkeale and Castleconnell archery societies were able to maintain separate existences requiring the duplication of club apparatus and other costs such as maintenance and replacement of equipment and event organisation expenses.<sup>420</sup> Apart, those societies were financially secure, but in sporting and social terms they were insular.<sup>421</sup> The rationalisation of the various competing societies into a single umbrella society, the Munster Archers, therefore, sought to boost the sport and increase their sociability while simultaneously creating a larger pool of resources.<sup>422</sup> The benefits of a greater number of participants (and their subscriptions), economies of scale that reduced ongoing expenses, and the increased social circle the society now embraced also provided greater social opportunities, more exciting events, more valuable (and more) prizes for competition, and an increase in the quality of the sport.<sup>423</sup>

Sport was extremely adaptable to both financial constraints and abundance, and as the rationalisation of archery also shows, the total amount spent on a sport was not directly proportional to the value obtained; a more effective and focussed use of resources could achieve surprising results in terms of the sociability, competitiveness and spectacle of sport.<sup>424</sup>

Sport had a fraught relationship with the law. The law and its guardians impacted on sport in four ways; prohibiting sporting gatherings, suppressing gambling, imposing blanket prohibitions on some sports, and finally, through the operation of game laws, laws on trespass and of open and closed seasons.

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<sup>419</sup> *LC* 3 Aug 1861, 7 June 1866, 3 Sept 1867.

<sup>420</sup> *LC* 5 July, 6 Aug 1864, 15 Sept 1865.

<sup>421</sup> *LC* 17 June 1865.

<sup>422</sup> *LC* 22 July 1865.

<sup>423</sup> *LC* 3 Aug, 23 Sept 1865, 7 June, 5, 19, 21 July 1866.

<sup>424</sup> *LC* 26 Oct 1876.

Comerford's analysis of late 1860s Fenianism illustrated the contemporary fears among the authorities about large numbers of men gathering together, ostensibly for sporting reasons, but it was feared, with more nefarious ends in sight.<sup>425</sup> Political mobilisation through sport was one concern, but more mundane concerns predominated.<sup>426</sup> Complaints about hurling, playing with hoops and kite flying were couched in terms of the impact of these recreations on issues of horse traffic, public safety and public order.<sup>427</sup> The constabulary (and in Limerick, the official Night Watch) was responsible for inhibiting much sport and amusement.<sup>428</sup> Though not always relying on statutes expressly forbidding sports such as handball and football, the authorities more usually relied on laws on breach of the peace and creating a nuisance to inhibit the practice of many games.<sup>429</sup> The most frequent cause of nuisance and injury to public morals was, however, nude bathing, a perennial concern to lawmen, local authorities and bashful citizens.<sup>430</sup>

Laws covering nuisance, urban amusements, and sport on the Sabbath were vital instruments for imposing values and disciplining society.<sup>431</sup> Many howls of outrage about sports on the Sabbath were appeals to the authorities and to the Roman Catholic clergy – as pastors to the miscreants – to preach and to act against such outrages to sabbatarian values.<sup>432</sup> The call for clerical action implied an expectation that police vigilance was not sufficient to halt such games.<sup>433</sup> Often the custodians of the law decided that discretion was the better part of valour in many sporting situations.

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<sup>425</sup> *IT* 2 Sept 1865. National Archives, Outrage papers, Limerick, 1852/182. Comerford, R.V., 'Patriotism as pastime: the appeal of fenianism in the mid-1860s', in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol.XXII, no.87, March 1981, 239-50. *LC* 18 Feb, 7 Mar 1882.

<sup>426</sup> *LC* 3 May 1851, 16 May 1860, 18 Sept 1861, 22 Jan 1867.

<sup>427</sup> *LC* 23 Oct 1850, 20 Nov 1880.

<sup>428</sup> *LC* 8 June 1859, 15 June 1872.

<sup>429</sup> Radford, Mark, 'Black-enamelled Peelers: Policing Victorian Belfast', paper given at Annual Conference of Society for the Study of Nineteenth Century Ireland, University of Southampton, April 2001.

<sup>430</sup> *LC* 26, 28 July 1866, 1 Aug 1871, 25 Aug 1874, 22 May 1875, 14 Mar 1876, 17 June 1879, 3 July 1880, 10 July 1884, 21 June 1887.

<sup>431</sup> Griffin, Brian, *The Bulkies: Police and Crime in Belfast, 1800-1865*, (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1998).

<sup>432</sup> *LR* 1 May 1840. *LC* 4 Feb 1852.

<sup>433</sup> *LC* 29 Jan 1859.

Whereas individuals could be, and were penalised for indulging in sport on the Sabbath, large groups were generally broken up, but not prosecuted.<sup>434</sup> One account of a Dublin prize–fight in 1887 even noted the police’s prudence in not arresting the protagonists. The contest was to arranged to begin in Henrietta Street, sandwiched by police surveillance and crowd encouragement the pugilists were compelled to fight their rounds ‘in instalments’ between there and Artane where it was completed.<sup>435</sup>

Gambling on sporting challenges was another focus of legal action.<sup>436</sup> Pitch and toss, cards and billiards were particular targets.<sup>437</sup> One court case involving a ‘sporting auctioneer’ in Limerick city provided almost as much amusement as the games of dice in which he was involved – the court was full ‘to inconvenience’ with all classes of sportsmen to witness the imposition of a hefty £25 fine.<sup>438</sup>

Bathing and billiards were legal sports that only attracted attention because of the foregoing of bathing costumes by swimmers and associated gambling respectively, but other sports were banned specifically because of their nature.<sup>439</sup> The law prohibited field sports such as animal fighting and broke up cockfights etc. where and when intelligence was received.<sup>440</sup> But humans were no more entitled to face each other in pugilistic combat, so boxing remained a similarly shadowy sport.<sup>441</sup> Legal prohibitions from the era of William the Third were even trotted out to bolster a particular case against non–field sports and other amusements on the Sabbath. Hurling, football,

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<sup>434</sup> *LC* 13 Aug 1859.

<sup>435</sup> *LC* 6 Oct 1887.

<sup>436</sup> *LC* 6 Dec 1851, 30 Aug 1862.

<sup>437</sup> *LC* 17, 28 July 1866, 22 Aug 1874.

<sup>438</sup> *LC* 2 May 1860.

<sup>439</sup> *LC* 12 June , 7 Aug, 11 Sept 1850, 13 Aug 1851, 22 Mar 1870.

<sup>440</sup> *LC* 22 Apr 1865.

<sup>441</sup> *LC* 9, 12 Jan 1861, 7 May 1867.



handball, wrestling and any other game, sport or pastime, it was asserted, left the player liable to a 12d fine and costs.<sup>442</sup>

The final point of contact between the law and sport was in the operation of game laws, the policing of open and closed seasons and enforcement of the laws of trespass.<sup>443</sup> The conflict between poacher (erstwhile illegal sportsman) and landowner that was weighted so heavily in favour of the latter and that so disgusted the father of Irish republicanism, Wolfe Tone, in the 1790s, remained imbalanced a century later.<sup>444</sup> The voluminous and comprehensive legislation on game was testament to that.<sup>445</sup> There were extremely prohibitive laws for sportsmen to contend with.<sup>446</sup> Qualifications for greyhound ownership outlawed participation in hare coursing to those not possessing a freehold of at least £100 a year or holding the astronomical figure of £1,000 in a bank.<sup>447</sup> These financial hurdles, systems of licensing and the threat of prosecution for poaching all worked to curb the sport of anglers and those interested in coursing and shooting.<sup>448</sup> The use of rod and line and guns out of season was also heavily penalised.<sup>449</sup>

Coursing, angling and shooting were made even more problematic for some practitioners by the necessity to trespass on land in pursuit of game.<sup>450</sup> The need to trespass on land (one did not own or rent) to pursue game with hounds (to which one was not qualified) trapped plebeian sportsmen in a legal double-lock.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> LC 11 Aug 1860.

<sup>443</sup> LC 10 Oct 1860.

<sup>444</sup> Elliott, Marianne, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence*, (Yale U. Press, London, 1989), 167-8.

<sup>445</sup> Conner, MacCarthy, *The Game Laws of Ireland*, (2nd edition, Hodges Figgis, Dublin, 1891, first edn. 1889).

<sup>446</sup> LC 27 Nov 1873.

<sup>447</sup> LC 14 Feb 1867, 9 Dec 1882.

<sup>448</sup> LC 16 Mar, 4 Sept 1875, 19 Sept 1876, 15 Mar 1879.

<sup>449</sup> LC 18 Nov 1876, 23 Sept 1879.

<sup>450</sup> LC 13 Apr 1869, 25 Feb 1870, 25 Apr, 13 Aug 1878, 23 Aug 1879.

<sup>451</sup> LC 15 Oct 1870, 11 May 1872, 9 Dec 1882.

It is unsurprising that the tenets of respectability which applied within society were brought to bear on sports, with the result that a hierarchy of sport and recreation developed by which one recreation was designated decorous and another not. Ideas about the propriety, status, respectability and value of sports were not static, and were keenly contested in public debate.<sup>452</sup> Foxhunting was, for some, a depraved activity, but opponents of the chase were, in turn, accused of ‘maudlin sentimentality’.<sup>453</sup> In the swirl of debate a media consensus emerged in which respectability was assigned to sports in three ways. Some sports were simply deemed respectable (or not), other sports were designated respectable, but only under certain conditions, and in many cases sports were deemed respectable, but not for all of their practitioners.

Blanket designations of sports as possessing (or lacking) status and respectability were consistent with other markers of social standing, particularly class and cash.<sup>454</sup> By the code of established society sports lacking in ‘gentility’, like hurling and folk football, were deemed savage and were never associated with strength or skill.<sup>455</sup> In contrast, the tone of reports of establishment approved sports resembled classical accounts of Greek and Roman gods at play.<sup>456</sup>

Sports could also be categorised as respectable or disreputable depending on the circumstances in which they were pursued; caveats were attached to their respectability. Bathing was one activity whose respectability was ambiguous. Its respectability depended on where it occurred, and whether a swimming costume was worn.<sup>457</sup> The lack of suitable bathing places scandalised the public who happened upon

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<sup>452</sup> *LC* 11 Sept 1862, 22 Jan 1876, 23 Jan 1883.

<sup>453</sup> *LC* 22 Jan 1876, 23 Oct 1883.

<sup>454</sup> *LC* 10 May 1851, 24 Mar 1866, 4 Mar, 5 June 1873, 20, 29 Nov 1877, 23 Mar 1878, 12 Apr 1879.,

<sup>455</sup> *LR* 1 May 1840. *LC* 28 Jan, 4 Feb 1852, 22, 24 June 1871, 27 Dec 1877.

<sup>456</sup> *NG* 26 July 1873. *LC* 17 June 1865, 26 Aug 1873, 29 June 1878, 27 Dec 1884. Limerick Boat Club AGM report for year 1899, p.6.

<sup>457</sup> *LC* 1, 8, 15, 19 Aug 1871, 9 Mar 1872, 25 Aug 1874, 14 Mar, 9 May 1876, 12 Sept 1885, 15 July 1886.

groups of men and boys in canals, rivers and at the seaside, in and out of bathing costumes.<sup>458</sup> The scandal worked both ways and some of the more bashful males objected to women working or walking close by their bathing haunts.<sup>459</sup> Billiards was another sport that was reputable in certain situations and not in others.<sup>460</sup> As a simple game it was popular among many men, especially the young, but the gambling with which it was sometimes associated poisoned its character in the eyes of many.<sup>461</sup> Fortunately for the game it began to escape its previous bad reputation in the 1870s, but its new-won respectability was, however, contingent on it retaining an exclusive character.<sup>462</sup>

Billiards was a respectable sport (for men) in certain situations, but if women played the game all status and respect usually accorded to players would evaporate. Not everyone could assume their participation would accord them the requisite respect. Who the sportsman (or woman) was, mattered. Taboos were effectively placed on the participation of women in sports deemed too masculine or too injurious to bodies or their morals.<sup>463</sup> There was, therefore, a limit to which any sport could be practiced and remain a respectable activity.<sup>464</sup> But, not all sports were off-limits to women. Skating was deemed a trial of their 'moral qualities', though less concern was shown for their corporeal development in such acknowledgments.<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> *IT* 5, 7, 8, 10 Aug 1868. *LC* 4 Sept 1869, 18 May 1875.

<sup>459</sup> *LC* 25 July 1874, 10 June 1876, 22 May 1879.

<sup>460</sup> Gaskell, Elizabeth, *Wives and Daughters*, (First published 1866), (Penguin, London, 1996), 444.

<sup>461</sup> *LC* 30 Aug 1862

<sup>462</sup> *LC* 25 Mar, 16 Dec 1865, 27 Sept 1870, 22 Apr 1871, 28 June, 28 July, 15 Aug 1874, 2 June 1883, 27 Nov 1884.

<sup>463</sup> Vertinsky, Patricia A., *The eternally wounded woman: women, exercise and doctors in the late nineteenth century*, (University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago, 1994). Parratt, Catriona M., 'Making Leisure Work: Women's Rational Recreation in Late Victorian and Edwardian England', in *Journal of Sport History*, 26:3 (Fall 1999), 471-88.

<sup>464</sup> *LC* 9 May 1865.

<sup>465</sup> *LC* 17, 26 Jan 1871.

Women were not the only potential sportspeople to fail normative tests of sporting respectability. The development of the gentleman amateur ethic precluded plebeian sportsmen from reaping the respect their exploits may have deserved.<sup>466</sup> The clearest expression of this rule was the distinction, in cricket, between gentlemen and players. The former were amateurs, the latter professionals, and, therefore, involved in lowly ‘trade’.

Views on the respectability, status and value of sport and the sportspeople who enjoyed them were not static; they were constantly fought over. The outcome of one clash between sacred and profane forces in Ennis concerning a forthcoming race meeting demonstrated the power of local business interests over the ministrations of a local priest.<sup>467</sup> The evils of drink, the violence within (and associated with) many race meetings, and gambling were easy targets for those critical of such events.<sup>468</sup> So respectability was, for many people, a function of the extent to which an otherwise agreeable sport allowed identified social evils to be associated with the sport.<sup>469</sup>

An interesting aspect of the attachment of status and respect to sports was the formation in 1879 of an exclusive Rink Club to rent out the skating rink in Limerick for the use of its members only (men and women).<sup>470</sup> This elite class secession from the commercial and social free-for-all that pertained in the rink to that point was an attempt to put the *hoi aristoi* at a distance from the *hoi polloi*.<sup>471</sup> By distancing themselves from the masses the exclusive club members could reclaim the status that rubbing shoulders with ‘the help’ could otherwise erase.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> LC 19 Aug 1876.

<sup>467</sup> LC 16 June 1874.

<sup>468</sup> Hoppen, K. Theodore, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), 124. LC 12 May 1866, 27 June 1874, 28 Aug 1880, 16 June 1883.

<sup>469</sup> LC 4 June 1878, 21 Aug 1883.

<sup>470</sup> LC 23, 30 Jan, 8 Feb 1879

<sup>471</sup> LC 17 June 1876.

<sup>472</sup> LC 18 July 1874.

The threat of access by the masses to commercially available sports promoted a *kraal* mentality where screening people for sports club membership became the norm.<sup>473</sup> Tennis, it was asserted in 1883, must remain aristocratic and not be ‘vulgarised’.<sup>474</sup> A similar concern was voiced about access to rugby football; it was suggested that the Limerick FC introduce balloting for membership to relieve the captain of the ‘disagreeable duty of rejecting objectionable members’. This move, it was asserted, would be ‘beneficial to the tone of the club’.<sup>475</sup> The desire for exclusive, members only sports clubs with the correct ‘tone’ was an incentive to more rule-bound organisation of sports. This suggests that respectability in sport was a function of the level of organisation of a sport and *vice versa*.

In his fantastic 1939 literary debut Flann O’Brien sought to buck the convention of novels containing a single beginning by arranging for his surreal masterpiece, *At Swim Two Birds*, to have three beginnings.<sup>476</sup> One might similarly suggest there were twice times three beginnings to the late nineteenth century sports culture. ‘Older’ organised sports, informal and celebratory sports structures, school and army traditions, and the leisure output of non-sporting associational culture were the components of Limerick’s mid nineteenth century leisure infrastructure. While there were five plus one components to sports ‘supply’, there were five components to sport ‘demand’.

In Limerick, mid nineteenth century expressions of dissatisfaction with the existing leisure infrastructure identified five related deficiencies; ‘something after toil’ was demanded, within that ‘something’ certain pursuits were sought more than others,

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<sup>473</sup> LC 5, 12 June 1880.

<sup>474</sup> LC 31 July 1883.

<sup>475</sup> LC 20 Oct 1883.

<sup>476</sup> O’Brien, Flann, *At Swim Two Birds*, (Pantheon, New York, 1951).

more numerous sports provision was another demand, new sporting enterprises were then called for, and finally, greater excitement was expected from the sports on offer.

Calls for something to be done about recreation and jeremiads about the paucity of leisure provision provide considerable evidence of a desire for suitable ‘employments’ outside of work.<sup>477</sup> Specific requirements for certain types of recreation and sport illustrated a process of discrimination between sports based on their appeal, value, rationality, cost, access, frequency, and social status.<sup>478</sup> The demand for increased leisure provision was an indication of the lack of access and the lack of development of the existing sport and leisure infrastructure. The interest in new sporting enterprises was a fourth element of demand; the fashions and fads in sporting culture testify to a pursuit for novelty.<sup>479</sup> The final component of sports demand was for more exciting enterprises – the fate of croquet upon the introduction of lawn tennis illustrates the superior appeal of vigorous recreations over less strenuous games.<sup>480</sup>

The demand for sport was not simply a demand for more play, but a demand for more numerous and more structured social opportunities. Sports varied in their levels of excitement, but sports events also contained varying levels of excitement in their non-sporting retinues. The most exciting events, horse races, hurling games, regattas, coursing and boxing were all attended by alleged social evils that meant severe curbs had to be placed on the amount of fun that was to be had.

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<sup>477</sup> LC 3 Oct 1874.

<sup>478</sup> LC 21 July 1860.

<sup>479</sup> LC 27 July 1872.

<sup>480</sup> LC 29 July 1875, 16 Sept 1876, 29 June, 26 Sept 1878. Elias, Norbert, and Dunning, Eric, ‘The Quest for Excitement in Unexciting Societies’, in Lüschen, Günther, (ed.), *The Cross-cultural Analysis of Sport and Games*, (Stipes Publishing, Champaign, Illinois, 1970), 31-51. Elias, Norbert, and Dunning, Eric, *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986).

Excitement, within and surrounding sport and sports events, was a force which contributed to sport's popularity. The difficulty faced by sports entrepreneurs in the process of organising sport and leisure, therefore, was how to contain the spontaneity and exuberance of early century sports events and how to reconcile that exuberance with the late century demands for rationality, organisation and respectability. Sports entrepreneurs had to modify informal sporting traditions into a rational organised sports infrastructure, but without sacrificing the elements within the traditions that ensured the sport's popularity and appeal. It is arguable that the various football codes achieved this transition far more successfully than cricket and athletics, for instance.

Sport, via the associational possibilities of the club was able to cater for these social 'assets'. Crucially, these social assets were less accessible to women. Women had difficulties escaping the domestic sphere into voluntary associations of any kind. Without the initial contact between women in voluntary associations, workplaces, pubs and societies the opportunities to develop traditions of shared leisure and sport that could subsequently evolve into organised sports clubs were severely circumscribed. The contrasting fates of two clubs illustrate the advantage men enjoyed in terms of better sports and leisure provision while marking the vital contribution of non-sporting associational culture to sports development. The LPYMA formed in 1853 as a Christian character promotional agency evolved, in 1887, into the sponsor of a tennis and cricket club. In the same (latter) year the Rathkeale Young Women's Christian Association began its work with young women in the district, and had it similarly survived for thirty-four years as a focus for women's voluntary association and as a leisure provider it is not fanciful to suggest it too could have provided the impetus for the development of women's leisure and sporting possibilities.<sup>481</sup> In these circumstances women only schools were perhaps one of the few sites of female

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<sup>481</sup> LC 30 July 1887.

association, and it is interesting that this source was to become a key venue for the popularisation and the practice of physical exercises and sports among women as the nineteenth century segued into the twentieth.

Sport was not simply able to cater for the demands of people for entertainments, social outlets, associational possibilities and symbols of social status; it was in a better position than any other cultural idiom to provide them. A sports event could include music, food, drink, fireworks, gambling, social intercourse on a great or a small scale, spectacle, pageantry, novelty and performance. Sports clubs that performed amateur theatricals in winter and sport in summer could be contrasted with theatrical companies with no sporting output. Sports had sufficient variety of form to fit most social events; the 'fete for the Brethren' hosted by Charles Burton Barrington at Glenstal Castle in 1892 for Limerick Freemasons included food, drink, music from a military band and a golfing competition.<sup>482</sup> The mason's fete was, in many ways, of a piece with the sports of Sunday School outings thirty years earlier, and it is not fanciful to suggest that many of Barrington's Freemason brethren were first introduced to sport at one of those earlier outings.

Sport was, therefore, socially and culturally promiscuous.<sup>483</sup> From freemasonry sports clubs took the practice of balloting for membership; from gentlemen's clubs the traditions of dining, drinking and an atmosphere of conviviality and clubbability; from theatrics was inherited a propensity to display and performance; from the military came models of organisation and the language or jargon of sport; temperance and various religious and political movements provided justifications and ideologies to the

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<sup>482</sup> Barrington Papers, Glenstal Castle, Co. Limerick, (not catalogued).

<sup>483</sup> Reflecting a contrary impulse, the Chinese Badminton Club of San Francisco (formed 1937) changed into the Chinatown Badminton Club in 1950. Though it exists yet its principal activity is ball-room dancing and badminton has not been played there for years, Zieff, Susan, 'Using Visual Evidence to "Write" A History of Chinatown Recreations', paper given at North American Society for Sports History Conference, Banff, Alberta, Canada, May 2000.



practice of sport and were rewarded in return with access to a huge audience (via sporting rituals) for the values and objects they promoted. The promiscuity of sport as a cultural idiom left it in an ideal position to grow. Sport possessed an evolutionary advantage over other cultural forms and how it utilised that advantage is the subject of the next chapter.

# Chapter 2

Organisation and  
development; logic  
triumphant.

The patterns of sport practice and organisation were transformed in the second half of the nineteenth century in a way that is described as development. The use of terms like development to describe the many changes that occurred in the world of sport should not, however, lead to any conclusions that the ‘pre-developed’ age of sports was somehow lacking in value, or that it was not sufficient to meet contemporary demand. The use of the term development also does not express a value judgement on the merits of pre-formally organised sports, but instead describes the process by which sports practices and patterns of organisation changed their forms.

New forms and structures of sport were adopted that were more utilitarian, disciplined, bourgeois, rational, organised and formal, and were less customary, informal and *ad-hoc*. It is more difficult to assess whether the new system for sport provided more fun and excitement or less. It is questionable, however, if a modern organised association football match on a regulation pitch with fancy attire provided more enjoyment to its practitioners than the one hundred a side folk football game, on ice, between the representatives of two rival rural parishes in Kerry in 1881.<sup>484</sup>

The increasing importance of sport and culture to politics was one factor that led to the greater visibility of sports in the historical record. In its customary form sport exerted, at best, a weak influence on discourses in public life and it is perhaps no surprise that when sport became organised, more respectable and more integrated into public life that sporting metaphor would increasingly enter the language. It was at this time that clichés such as ‘political football’ entered the lexicon (and we are listening to it ever since).<sup>485</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> LC 25 Jan 1881.

<sup>485</sup> LC 25 Nov 1882, 10 June 1886. Beard, A., *The Language of Sport*, (Routledge, London, 1998).

Because sport was also moving from a local towards a nationally standardised format with the accepted trappings and symbols of that entity, however contentious and ill-defined, sport was obliged to adopt lowest common denominator symbols in its rituals and symbols – usually compatible with the trinity of church, state and family. Sports links to these institutions gave it a prominence and significance above mere play and also contributed to its growing importance to cultural life, further increasing its historical visibility.

‘Who is conceited enough to imagine that he can actually devise ideal institutions? The only people who think they can are those who believe that nothing significant was ever done before their own time, that their generation will be the first to achieve anything worthwhile, people who are convinced only they and their current idols possess the truth, and that anyone who doesn’t agree with them is a fool or a knave.’<sup>486</sup>

The great conceit of any age, and the bane of historical understanding, is a perception that twenty first century standards, in this case of sports provision, mark the ideal and that past levels of provision were less than satisfactory.<sup>487</sup> Such conceit hinges on falsely associating current demand for sports with past levels of either demand or provision. It must be conceded that late nineteenth century Limerick people were more in tune with their sporting needs than historical observers and that they may even have deemed their sports provision to be excellent.<sup>488</sup> In 1884, for example, the formation of a Hare and Hounds Club to cultivate athletics in Limerick was heralded with the suggestion that (for some) the amount of rugby union played at the time was sufficient for existing demand – the running club’s paper chases it was hoped would ‘prove a pleasant change from football.’<sup>489</sup>

There was a loose, inchoate, but considerable sport infrastructure in existence in mid nineteenth century Limerick. That sports infrastructure encompassed organised, informal, celebratory, school and army sports traditions and it was linked to a vibrant voluntary associational culture. Limerick’s sports infrastructure supplied much of the

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<sup>486</sup> Varsonifiev in *August 1914* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, (Bantam, New York, 1974), 472.

<sup>487</sup> Such commonplaces in the language as living in the ‘Dark Ages’ and ‘medieval’ are generally used in a pejorative sense, and establish an ahistorical assumption of supremacy on the speaker’s part. For an interesting use of the term ‘Dark Ages’ in a rant about sports administration in Ireland, Curtis, Roy, *Sunday World*, 14 Apr 2002, 103.

<sup>488</sup> The lack of leisure time of the grocers’ assistants, clearly enunciated by one of their number in 1867, meant that the initial demand of many urban workers was for free time for mental recreation first and the chances for bodily renewal second – *LC* 14 Dec 1867.

<sup>489</sup> *LC* 27 Sept 1884. There may have been an assumption that rugby union was a gentleman’s game and that, therefore, once their sporting needs had been catered to there was no need to extend the benefits of the game to the rest of the population. If so, it would allow that rugby football, if not at the limit of its potential was, however, at the limit of its ‘proper’ potential. In addition to some assessments that the amount of sport available was sufficient there were negative assessments of the value of some sports as they were then constituted; one view held that rugby football allowed brute force to overcome pluck and skill thereby negating the supposed transformation of the game from a rough and tumble scramble to a science, *LC* 11 Dec 1877.

recreational and leisure needs of the community, but because expressions of dissatisfaction are invariably more frequent (and louder) than those of contentment, the possibility of a historically inaudible expression of satisfaction with contemporary sports provision is tantalising.<sup>490</sup> The Essay and Debating Class of the LPYMA could even debate, in 1879, a motion proposing, heretically to our ears, that ‘Athletics, as at present, are productive of more harm than good.’<sup>491</sup>

It is possible that there was much satisfaction with contemporary levels of sports provision, but even if the lack of recreational opportunities was identified as a problem it does not follow that sport was the only activity for which demand was growing.<sup>492</sup> Criticism of the perceived lack and of the adequacy of recreational and leisure outlets in Limerick should not be interpreted simply as demands for that deficit to be remedied by the development, only, of sports clubs.<sup>493</sup> That sports clubs did subsequently experience tremendous growth was an indicator of the ability of the sports club model to provide the requisite fun, excitement, spectacle, social milieu and associational possibilities that people sought within their leisure time and, in time, this process of expansion was labelled a ‘spirit of emulation’.<sup>494</sup> Limerick’s mid-century sports and cultural entrepreneurs provided as much sporting leisure as contemporary demand called for, and in the forms with which people were familiar.<sup>495</sup> Working in their present they provided a service that, by its lights, was sufficient, but the amount of

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<sup>490</sup> The lower middle and labouring classes rarely enjoyed the same level of sporting provision as their public school counterparts. Anderson has noted in contemporary Scotland a force that was equally at work in Ireland, that sport in schools was a ‘luxury which could be indulged in schools whose pupils had an assured future’ – meanwhile the grim business of passing examinations remained the priority. Anderson, Robert, ‘Secondary Schools and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth Century’, in *Past and Present*, 109 (Nov 1985), 176-203. In this circumstance sport was a luxury good whose absence, if it was noted, was of little consequence to many students.

<sup>491</sup> *LC* 30 Jan 1879. It may simply have been a purely intellectual exercise and may not have reflected the real views of the members, but the fact that sport was not a sacred cow – as it surely would be categorised today – is instructive.

<sup>492</sup> Readings: *LC* 5 Sept 1872, 15 Nov 1877.

<sup>493</sup> *LC* 15, 19, 24 Sept 1885, 2 Mar 1886.

<sup>494</sup> *LC* 28 May 1881, 16, 20, 23 Oct 1883.

<sup>495</sup> Ambrose Hall’s sailing ‘confessio’, *LC* 3 June 1865.

sport and the form in which it was packaged was under constant review and was increasingly subject to change.

Though sports provision may have been adequate for many, the late nineteenth century witnessed huge changes in the forms of sports practice and in sports organisation. It is a moot point whether an assessment that there was more play, games and sport in comparison with earlier periods is accurate, but the increased commercialisation, organisation and value laden importance of sport represented a seismic shift in the world of sport.<sup>496</sup> In this atmosphere it was even claimed, with a straight face, that skating represented a ‘trial of the moral qualities of women’.<sup>497</sup> Nancy Struna has identified an important proviso when assessing change in the past. Instead of seeing change as a move towards a final goal, she conceives of change as moving away from past practices. From Struna’s perspective cycling emerged from an early tradition of hobbyhorses via intermediate stages to the velocipede. The direction of change was away from an imitation of the movement of a horse to an entirely different model of locomotion.<sup>498</sup> It is a convincing argument; the imagination required to produce imitation land-based surfing toys has led to the development of the sport of skateboarding, while the varied influences of surfing and skiing led to attempts to adapt a similar physical challenge to an ice surface has produced the sport of snowboarding.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Guttman, Allen, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1978). Guttman, Allen, Review of; Elias, Norbert, and Dunning, Eric, *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, in *Journal of Sport History*, 14:2 (Summer 1987), 226-8. Guttman, Allen, *A Whole New Ball Game: An Interpretation of American Sports*, (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1988). Guttman, Allen, *Women’s sports: a history*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1991). Guttman, Allen, *The Olympics: A history of the modern games*, (University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago, 1992). Guttman, Allen, *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1994).

<sup>497</sup> LC 17, 26 Jan 1871.

<sup>498</sup> Struna, Nancy L., ‘Reframing the Direction of Change in the History of Sport’, *IJHS*, 18:4 (Dec 2001), 1-15.

<sup>499</sup> Booth, Douglas, *Australian Beach Cultures: The History of Sun, Sand and Surf*, (Frank Cass, London, 2002). Brooke, Michael, *The Concrete Wave – the History of Skateboarding*, (Warwick, 1999). Humphreys, Duncan, ‘Snowboarders: Bodies out of Control and in Conflict’, *Sporting Traditions*, 13:1 (Nov 1996), 3-23.

The direction of change in the form of sports and of sports organisation, provision and consumption was away from traditional, customary, *ad-hoc* and informal models towards more formally organised and more rational models. The impact of economic, social, cultural and political developments on Irish society (and the lack of impact in the case of a stagnating industrial sector) led to two currents of change, currents that were, however, out of sync. The first current of change in sports organisation involved the increasing role of voluntary associations and a consequent decreasing level of customary sports activity. In the industrial cities of Great Britain and North America models for sports organisation and consumption had to yield to forces of industrialisation, urbanisation, law and other social and religious norms.<sup>500</sup> While social, legal and religious orthodoxies impacted on Irish city life the relative poverty of Irish industry meant that in a key respect Irish sports development could not match that of the neighbouring isle.<sup>501</sup> Voluntary associations were important agencies in Irish sport, but in the absence of a thriving industrial base and extensive urbanisation, Irish sports development was more in tune with rural rhythms of life than urban ones. Even in Limerick city one was never far from the countryside where most people enjoyed to walk swim, skate and later, to cycle.<sup>502</sup> Cork patterns of leisure matched the Limerick

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<sup>500</sup> Hardy, Stephen, 'The city and the rise of American sport: 1820-1920', in *Exercise and Sports Science Reviews*, 9 (1981), 183-219. Hardy, Stephen, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915*, (Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1982). Riess, Steven A., *City Games: the evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports*, (University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1989). Garnham, Neal, 'Both praying and playing: 'Muscular Christianity' and the YMCA in north-east county Durham', *Journal of Social History*, Dec 2001. Finn, G.P.T., 'Racism, religion and social prejudice: Irish Catholic clubs, soccer and Scottish society - I. The historical roots of prejudice', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 8:1 (May 1991), 72-95. Finn, G.P.T., 'Racism, religion and social prejudice: Irish Catholic clubs, soccer and Scottish society - II Social identities and conspiracy theories', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 8:3 (December 1991), 370-97.

<sup>501</sup> Clark, Samuel, 'The importance of agrarian classes: agrarian class structure and collective action in nineteenth-century Ireland', in Drudy, P.J., (ed.), *Irish Studies, 2. Ireland: Land, People and Politics*, (Cambridge, 1982), 11-36. Dunning, Eric, 'Industrialization and the Incipient Modernization of Football: A Study in Historical Sociology', in *Stadion*, 1:1, 103-37. Goulstone, John, 'The Working-Class Origins of Modern Football', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 17:1 (March 2000), 135-43.

<sup>502</sup> *LC* 5, 9 Dec 1871, 25 Aug 1874, 7 Dec 1875, 25 Jan, 17 June 1879, 3 July 1880, 13, 15 Jan 1881, 15 Jan 1885, 18, 21, 23 Jan 1886.



one, with the added attraction there of road bowling competitions to generate further excitement.<sup>503</sup>

The difference between the forces behind sports organisation in Ireland and Great Britain was complemented by a disparity in the motives and values underpinning sports movements in both countries.<sup>504</sup> In the case of rugby and association football the aim was to develop new games free of the violence, spontaneity, insecurity and chaos of folk-football.<sup>505</sup> This was a move away from traditional, customary practice, but Irish nationalist sports entrepreneurs sought not to escape the past, but to embrace it.<sup>506</sup> The Gaelic Athletic Association was formed in 1884 to 'preserve' Irish games and pastimes; in doing so it brought its sports into a new future, but its initial mission statement, if not anti-change, was pro-heritage. Nationalist cultural movements conceived of changes in the form of sports organisation in a different way than their loyalist counterparts. Increasingly both these groups also judged sports and sports organisation in terms of the example set in Great Britain. To loyalists progress was gauged in accordance with which Irish practice matched the British model, while nationalist Ireland determined that the extent to which Irish sports were practised and organised in opposition to British standards as a good. In one area the emerging sports

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<sup>503</sup> Cronin, Maura, *Country, Class or Craft? The Politicisation of the Skilled Artisan in Nineteenth Century Cork*, (Cork University Press, Cork, 1994). Murphy, Maura, 'The working classes of nineteenth century Cork' in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, LXXXV, 241, 242, Jan-Dec 1980. O'Sullivan, Donal Gerard, 'Sport, Leisure and Social Class in Cork, 1870-1939', M. Litt., (National University of Ireland, Galway, 2002).

<sup>504</sup> Baker, William J., 'The making of a working-class football culture in Victorian England', *Journal of Social History*, 13:2 (Winter 1979), 241-51. Cunningham, Hugh, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, (Croom Helm, London, 1980).

<sup>505</sup> Dunning, Eric and Sheard, Kenneth, *Barbarians, gentlemen and players: a sociological study of rugby football*, (New York University Press, New York, 1979). Reid, Douglas A., 'Folk-football, the Aristocracy and Cultural Change: A Critique of Dunning and Sheard', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 5:2, (Sept 1988), 224-38. Garnham, Neal, *The origins and development of football in Ireland; being a reprint of R.M. Peter's Irish Football Annual of 1880*, (introduction by Garnham), (Ulster Historical Foundation, Belfast, 1999). Mason, Tony, *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915*, (Harvester Press, Sussex, 1980). Mason, Tony, (ed.), *Sport in Britain - a social history*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>506</sup> Garvin, Tom, 'Priests and Patriots: Irish Separatism and the Fear of the Modern, 1890-1914', in *Irish Historical Studies*, 25:97 (May 1986), 67-81.

traditions of Ireland and Great Britain were broadly similar, an emphasis on national chauvinism and prescriptive codes of masculinity.<sup>507</sup>

“From Sparta in the fifth century BC to Athens (Georgia) in the twenty first century AD, you will find plenty of vocal support for the view that war fosters, tempers and gives the ideal arena for the greatest human virtues: physical and moral courage, obviously, and self-sacrifice, and fraternity, loyalty, patriotism, piety (if your culture goes in much for gods or God), hardiness, discipline, skill with horse and sword and gun. And only the callow or the irredeemably cynical would question that these are indeed virtues. That gentle soul William Morris thought that physical courage was the virtue of all virtues, the one on which all others depend.”<sup>508</sup>

The substitution of the word war with sport would not have changed the thrust, meaning or sense of this piece to most sufferers of *dementia athleticus* or acolytes of the cult of athletics in the late nineteenth century.<sup>509</sup> The sheer scope of sport’s promise to its practitioners and its observers may be discerned in its simultaneous ability to encompass Christian and martial values.<sup>510</sup> This facility to run with the hare of religion and to hunt with the hounds of war is remarkable and more evidence of the ‘promiscuity’ of the sports infrastructure of late nineteenth century Limerick.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>507</sup> Dunning, Eric, ‘Sport as a male preserve: notes on the social sources of masculine identity and its transformations’, in *Theory, Culture and Society*, 3:1 (1986), 79-90.

<sup>508</sup> Jackson, Kevin, *Independent on Sunday*, (Review), 17 Nov 2004, 13.

<sup>509</sup> Dewey, Clive, ‘Socratic teachers: part 1 - the opposition to the cult of athletics at Eton, 1870-1914’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12:1 (April 1995), 51-80. Dewey, Clive, ‘Socratic teachers: the opposition to the cult of athletics at Eton, 1870-1914 Part II - the counter-attack’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12:3 (December 1995), 18-47.

<sup>510</sup> McDevitt, Patrick F., ‘Muscular Catholicism: Nationalism, Masculinity and Gaelic Team Sports, 1884-1916’, in *Gender and History*, 9:2 (Aug. 1997), 262-84. Holt, Richard, ‘Contrasting Nationalisms: Sport, Militarism and the Unitary State in Britain and France before 1914’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12:2 (August 1995), 40- 54. Hall, Donald E., (ed.), *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994). Brown, David W., ‘Muscular Christianity in the Antipodes: some observations on the diffusion and emergence of a victorian ideal in Australian social theory’, in *Sporting Traditions*, 3:2 (May 1987), 173-87. Brown, David W., ‘Criticisms against the value-claim for sport and the physical ideal in late nineteenth century Australia’, in *Sporting Traditions*, 4:2 (May 1988), 150-61.

<sup>511</sup> LC 13 June 1876, 4 June, 21 Dec 1878, 27 Dec 1884, 15 May 1886.

The ‘promiscuity’ of the sports club model means it is uniquely, and paradoxically, placed to represent all the virtues and offer services to members and followers that few other associations could match. The sports club was the jack of all clubs.<sup>512</sup>

Temperance groups could out-Christianise the muscular Christians of the sports world. Pub dwellers could drink their sporting fellows under the table and allow for more convivial, bawdy and a more edgy atmosphere in which transgressive masculinity could be advertised. Gentlemen’s clubs could out-class and out-finance their sporting club equivalents and were the venues for business and social networking on a scale a sports club could not match. Theatrical troupes offered more and better quality performances of drama, comedy, music and satire than could sports clubs amateur efforts. Though there were advantages to all other forms of association – and each form of non-sporting association had great advantages over sports clubs – only the sports club could offer something of all these possibilities.

The later scouting and guiding movements (of blue and red hues) offered variations on this theme.<sup>513</sup> Baden-Powell’s accidental innovation was to create a network of troops dedicated to the spiritual, mental, social, intellectual and physical development of boys utilising the patrol, the basic unit of the Scout movement, in much the same way a rowing crew or football team was the basic unit of a sports organisation. The scouts, however, declared, in an open, conscious fashion, the aims of their movement and

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<sup>512</sup> LC 1 July 1871, 23, 30 Mar, 2, 6, 11, 13 Apr, 27 July, 9 Nov 1872, 13, 18 May, 19, 26 Aug 1876.

<sup>513</sup> Baden-Powell, Lord Robert, *Rovering to Success*, (Herbert Jenkins, London, 11th printing, revised edition 1930). MacDonald, Robert H., *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890-1918*, (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1993). Leslie, W. Bruce, ‘Creating a socialist scout movement: The Woodcraft Folk, 1924-42’, in *History of Education*, 13:4 (1984), 299-311. MacLeod, David I., ‘Act Your Age: Boyhood, Adolescence and the Rise of the Boy Scouts of America’, in *Journal of Social History*, 16:2 (Winter 1982), 3-20. Prynne, David, ‘The Woodcraft Folk and the Labour Movement, 1925-70’, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18:1 (Jan 1983), 79-96. Springhall, John; Fraser, Brian; & Hoare, Michael, (eds.), *Sure and Steadfast: A History of the Boys’ Brigade, 1883-1983*, (Collins, London, 1983). Voeltz, Richard A., ‘The Antidote to ‘Khaki Fever’? The Expansion of the British Girl Guides during the First World War’, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27:4 (Oct 1992), 627-38.

these trumped sports promoters' claims for the benefits of sports to youth.<sup>514</sup> However, whereas the sports club could not, rationally in any case, point to the content of its sport curriculum that produced certain outcomes in boys' development, the Scout troop could point exactly to those areas of activity it promoted were calculated to produce desired values and outcomes in their young charges.

The growth and development of organised sport in late nineteenth century Limerick (as with the scout movement) occurred in an evolutionary and not a revolutionary way.<sup>515</sup>

The process may be divided into four phases – customary, festival, *ad-hoc* organisation (proto-club) and formal organisation (club). In practice there was little distinction between each category, but they remain useful labels.

Sport evolved from a customary to an organised form through intermediate phases, and became the preserve of clubs in the community as distinct from the customary model where a community clubbed together for its sport. This process was the key marker of the modernisation of sport. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries most sport was practised on a customary basis, was locally organised and promoted and coincided with calendar festivals, religious holidays and spontaneous events of local significance.<sup>516</sup> At a later stage, especially in towns and cities, sports were part and package of modified community festivals. These events were less spontaneous and more ritualised than in the customary phase of sports organisation and often held according to a new, emerging sporting calendar. Another vital difference between the customary and festival sports packages was the leadership and organisation of each.

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<sup>514</sup> Messner, Michael, 'Boyhood, organised sports and the construction of masculinity', in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 18:4 (1990), 416-44. Messner, Michael, *Power at play: sports and the problem of masculinity*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1992). Rosenthal, Michael, 'Knights and Retainers: The Earliest Version of Baden Powell's Boy Scout Scheme', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15:4 (Oct 1980), 603-18.

<sup>515</sup> Jeal, Tim, *Baden-Powell*, (Yale University Press, London, 2001). Gaughan, J. Anthony, *Scouting in Ireland*, (Kingdom Books, Kerry, 2006).

<sup>516</sup> Anderson, Earl, 'The running footmen of the nineteenth century England', in *Running Times*, (March 1981), 17-20. Brailsford, Dennis, *A Taste for Diversions: Sport in Georgian England*, (Lutterworth, Cambridge, 1999).

Customary sports were ends in and of themselves, part of local tradition and thus owned by the community. Festival sports were, however, instigated by local leaderships according to their desires and tastes and with both implicit and explicit objectives. That customary sport practice lacked the professionalism and efficiency of sports festivals was one reason for the increasing appeal of the more organised format, but this ‘pull’ factor was complemented by other ‘push’ factors. The push factors driving sports practice out of the customary phase of organisation were economic, social, religious and legal developments. The greater implementation of legal statutes concerning breaches of the peace bolstered by religious and cultural bodies were key means by which sports were pressurised into adopting less contentious, more disciplined forms.<sup>517</sup>

The transition from festival to ad-hoc organisation was the next stage in the development of sports. Festival committees were occasional, self-appointed and usually exclusive bodies. Appointed for a single event the festival organisers returned to their other concerns for the rest of the year. The Clare Militia provided a good example of this pattern: following annual training a thorough inspection was typically followed by sports; in 1865, for instance, these included steeplechases and athletics.<sup>518</sup> After some time where a tradition of annual sporting events existed it was likely that a large number of experienced sports entrepreneurs could constitute a standing committee in waiting. When such people were identified in the local mind with sports organisation they, in essence, existed as the leadership of an unacknowledged club. Even where such local leaderships emerged for one sporting purpose, the events they

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<sup>517</sup> Malcolm, Elizabeth, ‘The catholic church and the Irish temperance movement, 1838-1901’, in *Irish Historical Studies*, XXIII, no. 89, (May 1982), 1-16. Malcolm, Elizabeth, ‘Popular recreation in nineteenth-century Ireland’, in MacDonagh, O., Mandle, W.F., and Travers, P., (eds.), *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750-1950*, (St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1983), pp. 40-55. Malcolm, Elizabeth, *Ireland Sober, Ireland Free: Drink and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1986). Malcolm, Elizabeth, ‘The Rise of the Pub: A Study in the Disciplining of Popular Culture’, in Donnelly, James S. Jnr., and Miller, Kerby A., eds., *Irish Popular Culture 1650 - 1850*, (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1998), 50-77.

<sup>518</sup> LC 17 June 1865.

designed and executed were ideal vehicles onto which smaller, less notable athletic contests could be loaded. The organisers of a programme of horse races at the sand hills in Lahinch, County Clare unwittingly generated the festival atmosphere and drew a crowd that allowed some local people to arrange a separate throwing contest in 1873.<sup>519</sup>

When sportspeople advanced to the next stage in their endeavours and constituted a club, with the requisite formalities, constitution, symbols and rules, the journey from customary practice to formal organisation was complete and the ownership of sport had gone through an effective ‘privatisation’ process.<sup>520</sup>

The sports infrastructure in Limerick in the late nineteenth century evolved from the large, and growing, voluntary associational culture of the time and, in a sense, the sports club model grew so tall in the forest of societies at the time that it formed a canopy overshadowing them. This tree growth reference is not simply an allusion. There was a real similarity between the evolution of clubs from earlier sports clubs in a like manner to the evolution of many and varied plant and animal species from a single common ancestor. The Limerick County Cricket Club was one such parent and grandparent to other clubs. Lawn tennis was introduced to this club in early 1875 and was such a success that the grounds on which cricket was once the only sport played today hosts tennis only.<sup>521</sup> In addition, from the cricket clubhouse on the Ennis Road a group of young men set out on various Hares and Hounds running events.<sup>522</sup> This group was the nucleus of a local, formally organised athletics tradition.<sup>523</sup> Limerick

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<sup>519</sup> LC 18 Oct 1873.

<sup>520</sup> Muammar al-Gaddafi, the ‘sage’ of Tripoli, in his *Green Book*, gives some consideration to modern, western, commercial sports culture and berated the ownership of sport by the few and the confinement of the many to a passive role as spectators.

<sup>521</sup> LC 20 Apr, 29 July, 2 Sept 1875, 29 Jan, 9, 16 Sept 1876.

<sup>522</sup> LC 27 Jan, 30 Mar 1876.

<sup>523</sup> See Limerick Cathedral Grammar School Athletics Sports *et al*, LC 6, 9 Sept 1877.

Football Club together with Limerick Boat Club and its rival, the Shannon Rowing Club, on occasion, also organised athletics evenings for their memberships and this approach bolstered the athletics output of the city.<sup>524</sup> Within a few years athletics had sufficient critical mass to set up its own structures and to act independently of its sponsoring and parent traditions and clubs and the Limerick Amateur Athletic Club flew from its cricketing, boating, footballing and running chrysalis in 1878.<sup>525</sup>

The organisational innovations did not cease there, however, a modest cycling tradition existed in the city from late 1874; this *sui generis* Limerick Bicycle Club enjoyed a limited appeal and profile and began to thrive only after the cyclists came under the umbrella of the athletics club in 1880, to form the Limerick Amateur Athletic and Bicycle Club.<sup>526</sup> This single super-club benefited from the vital, churning processes of sharing and mutating ‘sports DNA’ that was the principal feature of the development of sport in 1870s Limerick.<sup>527</sup> Griffin’s work on cycling in Ireland details the energy, humour and variety that were characteristic of the explosion of interest in recreational and sport cycling in that decade, while acknowledging the key role played by technological developments in fostering greater feats of speed and endurance that made it attractive to participants and spectators alike.<sup>528</sup>

It is possible to see the role of the early GAA movement as an attempt to place a degree of order and coherence on this maelstrom of sports development and not simply as a reaction to British national sporting enterprise.<sup>529</sup> In effect, the GAA took over existing community and gentry sponsored sports programmes, culled the gentry

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<sup>524</sup> LC 19 Aug, 2 Sept 1876.

<sup>525</sup> Bruce Murray, a man synonymous with Limerick Boat Club was also the man most associated with the club of this name when it first emerged in the spring of 1878, LC 11 June 1878.

<sup>526</sup> LC 29 Dec 1874, April, May, June 1876 *passim*, 29 Mar, 22 May 1877, 20 Apr 1880.

<sup>527</sup> LC 19, 26 Aug, 2, 14 Sept 1876, 8 May, 14, 16, 21, 23 June 1877, 9 Mar 1882.

<sup>528</sup> Griffin, Brian, *Cycling in Victorian Ireland*, (Dublin, Nonsuch Press, 2006). Griffin, Brian, ‘Cycling and gender in Victorian Ireland’, paper given at Annual Conference of Society for the Study of Nineteenth Century Ireland, University of Southampton, April 2001.

<sup>529</sup> LC 8 Nov, 16 Dec 1884, 24 Feb, 14, 18, 21, 23 July, 1, 8, 11, 22 Aug 1885.

dimension and finally, put its own brand on Limerick's sports infrastructure – another case of sports evolution 'red in tooth and claw'.

The rate and direction of progress of this evolutionary process varied between sports and even within many sports there were fluctuating rates of expansion and contraction. Archery experienced a short-lived 'bubble' in the mid-to-late 1860s.<sup>530</sup> Cricket was formally organised in the 1850s, but it had advanced little by 1870; the sport made rapid advances in that decade before a retrenchment in the early 1880s.<sup>531</sup> In contrast, organised athletics showed a uniform rate of growth over two decades. Lawn tennis was introduced to England in the spring of 1874 and was an immediate success in Limerick; the Limerick County Cricket Club made it one of their attractions for the 1875 season of activities.<sup>532</sup>

The evolutionary character of the sports world at this time may also be discerned by the language and customs of older sport intruding into its newer forms. Thus, from horse racing, a furlong (220 yards) became a unit of athletics competition. Similarly, the jargon of the earlier cock-fighting tradition seeped into pugilism and bantam indicated a boxer of a certain weight. From game shooting came a term for two goals in field games, a brace, linking a pair of rabbits with two successful attempts at scoring in association football.<sup>533</sup>

The pattern of the evolution of sport is illustrated in the following two figures. Figure One charts the branch of the evolutionary tree for athletics. Figure Two describes, in general terms, the entire evolutionary tree for all sports in Limerick in mid to late

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<sup>530</sup> The second grand meeting of the 1868 season, it was hoped would 'revive' the sport, following liberal support in the previous year and the attraction of \$120 prizes for this single meet; *LC* 5 Sept 1868. The hopes were unfulfilled.

<sup>531</sup> *LC* 10 May, 19, 30 July, 6, 9, 13, 16, 23, 27, 30 Aug 1851.

<sup>532</sup> *LC* 20 Apr, 29 July, 2 Sept 1875.

<sup>533</sup> *LC* 21 Aug 1884.



nineteenth century. Sports development occurred in a series of evolutionary stages that may be (teasingly) termed palaeoludic, mesoludic, neoludic and megaludic, corresponding to the customary, festival/informal and formal stages of sports evolution, respectively.

Palaeoludic (customary) sports of eighteenth and nineteenth century Ireland existed as part of folk tradition, custom, carnival, ritual, and celebrations and as a focus for gambling.<sup>534</sup> As with most customary practices, games were played as they always had been and it was assumed they would always continue. The level of deliberation about the purpose of the sport – little or none – was in inverse proportion to the element of irrationality present. Sport was fun. Many games were played on holy days and their place in the calendar of each community was understood, perhaps too well, to the extent that it could be taken for granted. Sport was, in this phase of development, a creature of its sponsoring community. The worlds of society, work, ritual and sport were seamless and the place of sport and leisure in life was well understood.

The mesoludic (festival and informal) era of sports organisation and development is defined by a greater element of deliberation about the practice and meaning of sport. Once-off organising committees in time led to standing committees that ran events. Sport remained the property of its sponsoring community in this stage, but it is difficult to separate a committee for one purpose in one year from a standing committee over many years from a later proto-sports club. More deliberation and conscious effort were the hallmarks of sports entrepreneurship in this period. There was less irrationality and a more rational approach to games. Sport was more consciously celebrated as an escape from work, indicating that a more rigid separation of society, work and leisure was emerging. The formality of sports practice increased in this stage of development.

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<sup>534</sup> Danaher, Kevin, *The Year in Ireland: Irish Calendar Customs*, (Mercier, Dublin, 1972). Ó Súilleabháin, Seán, *Irish Wake Amusements*, (Mercier, Dublin, 1997).

The best example of this essential stage in the move to codify and commodify sports was in Newmarket-on-Fergus in 1877.<sup>535</sup> Efforts by a local committee to organise athletic sports at Christmas time were a tremendous success with up to 6,000 spectators from Limerick and Clare present, in atrocious weather, to witness the spectacle. The result of this extra deliberation, good planning and public support was a cash surplus to make a summer meeting in the following summer possible.<sup>536</sup> The pre-GAA hurling and football infrastructure described by O’Caithnia and O’Maolfabhail also belong to this stage of those sports developments.<sup>537</sup>

By the neoludic (club) stage of sports development clubs proper became the agents of sports ownership and management. Rationality finally supplanted irrationality in the justifications for sport and such justifications were now deemed necessary where once they were assumed.<sup>538</sup> Such justifications were often blatantly myopic and self-serving i.e. the rhetoric of health was severely contradicted by sports many associations with alcoholic drink. Sport was now a formal affair and this formality was timely given the now clearer distinctions between work and leisure, particularly in urban environments and in industrial sectors. The community in Newmarket-on-Fergus, after the success of the 1877 and 1878 meetings sponsored a club called the Tradaree Amateur Athletic Club (1879), but little is known of this entity suggesting the precariousness of the transition from mesoludic/informal to neoludic/formal stages of development.<sup>539</sup> This club was defunct five years later when locals had to start from scratch to organise athletics and boat races to celebrate the reclamation of slob lands there.<sup>540</sup> This event occurred a month before the formation of the GAA in Thurles and in 1885 this local

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<sup>535</sup> LC 3, 20, 27 Nov, 13, 27 Sept 1877.

<sup>536</sup> LC 17 Jan, 4, 27 July 1878.

<sup>537</sup> Ó’Caithnia, Liam, *Scéal na hIomána*, (Clóchomhar, Baile Átha Cliath, 1980). O’Maolfabhail, A., *Camán: two thousand years of hurling in Ireland*, (Dundalk, 1973).

<sup>538</sup> Bailey, Peter, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885*, (Methuen, London, 1978).

<sup>539</sup> LC 26 Apr 1879.

<sup>540</sup> LC 18 Oct 1884.

athletics tradition was subsumed under the banner of the Newmarket-on-Fergus GAA club.<sup>541</sup>

Megaludic describes the emergence of the modern sports club as the basic unit of the sports infrastructure and the process by which those clubs coalesced to form larger entities – national bodies or megaclubs.<sup>542</sup> Justifications and explanations of the worth of sport were so frequent and so apparently necessary at this time that it is possible to say the sports entrepreneurs could be accused of protesting too much the value of their movements. The sports edifice constructed was more rigid and exclusive and needed to be sure of its values; the first mention of the national body for rowing as an issue of concern in Limerick was the deputation sent by the LBC to the Irish Amateur Rowing Association meeting convened to make an important decision on its most cherished value, amateurism.<sup>543</sup>

The final, polit–ludic, stage in the development of sports philosophy, organisation, management and practice may be mentioned here, but will not otherwise be treated. This stage was marked by the co–option of sports to the political exigencies of the day by the political superstructure of its host society.<sup>544</sup> It is facile to describe this process in those totalitarian societies of twentieth century notoriety, but it was no less powerful, though more subtly manipulated even in liberal democratic polities.<sup>545</sup> The

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<sup>541</sup> LC 7, 17 Nov 1885.

<sup>542</sup> LC 8 Nov 1884 (GAA), 24 Feb 1885 (IAAA).

<sup>543</sup> LC 28 Feb, 15 Mar 1884.

<sup>544</sup> Carlin, John, *Playing the enemy: Nelson Mandela and the game that made a nation*, (Atlantic, London, 2008). Arbena, Joseph L., ‘Generals and Goles: Assessing the Connection Between the Military and Soccer in Argentina’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 7:1 (May 1990), 120-30. Allison, Lincoln, (ed.), *The Politics of Sport*, (University of Manchester Press, Manchester, 1986). Goksoyr, Matti, ‘Popular pastimes or patriotic virtues? The role of sport in the national celebrations of nineteenth-century Norway’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 5:2 (September 1988), 239-45. Windhausen, John D., and Tsyapkina, Irina V., ‘National identity and the emergence of the sports movement in late imperial Russia’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12:2 (August 1995), 164-82.

<sup>545</sup> Grundlingh, Albert, ‘Playing for power? Rugby, Afrikaner nationalism and masculinity in South Africa, c.1900-70’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 11:3 (December 1994), 408-30. Sörlin, Sverker, ‘Nature, Skiing and Swedish Nationalism,’ in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12:2 (August

bidding game for the rights to host the modern Olympic games and the various World Cups and Championships has brought sports bodies and government into a remarkably close embrace.<sup>546</sup> Even in those societies without the means to host such enormous caravans (a telling point in itself) the popularity of sport has been a boon to populist politicians of all political creeds *viz* Bertie Ahern in twenty-first century Ireland. Sport has become gigantic, rigid, commercial, loud, rational and shallower. The more distance between sportspeople and their audience – facilitated by television – the more inauthentic the sporting experience has become.

A further post-polit-ludic phase of sports development may now be observed in reaction to this inauthenticity. Though no sports ambassador, liberal turned conservative *doyenne* of the commentariat, Mary Kenny, opines that ‘the artificial always brings more status to the authentic.’<sup>547</sup> In search of the authentic a new generation of sportspeople now eschews the gruel of televised football for the elation of surfing or the joys of *parkour*. Twenty-first century extreme sports experiences are analogous to the experiences of eighteenth and early nineteenth century sportspeople in the palaeoludic phase described earlier; sport connected to place, informal, self-defined and outwardly chaotic.<sup>548</sup> For many components of contemporary sport it is a case of back to the future.

The privatisation of sport was achieved completely in the late nineteenth century. The devolution to clubs of what was once the organic responsibility of a community – the organisation and development of sport – is a clear case of privatisation of a public

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1995), 147-63. Guttman, Allen, *The Olympics: A history of the modern games*, (University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago, 1992).

<sup>546</sup> Guttman, Allen, *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1994).

<sup>547</sup> Kenny, Mary, *II* 9 Feb 2008, 16.

<sup>548</sup> Anderson, Earl, ‘Footnotes more pedestrian than sublime’, in *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 14, (Fall 1980), 56-68. Anderson, Earl, ‘The running footmen of the nineteenth century England’, in *Running Times*, (March 1981), 17-20.

asset. Though the club mechanism provided efficiency, clarity, regularity and discipline for sportspeople and supporters it had the effect of placing sport at a slight distance from non-club members.<sup>549</sup> Many clubs, particularly those with longevity, sought to reduce this distance between club and community, but the act of requiring rules of membership, rolls and dues placed the sports dilettante at a remove and a disadvantage from the aficionado. One exception to this rule was W.L. Stokes's stewardship of the Limerick FC; the *Chronicle* once suggested a set of procedures to make membership more difficult to achieve and that this would relieve him of the duty of refusing membership to certain characters – suggesting his membership policy was too lax.<sup>550</sup>

Where once people could dip in and out of sporting events according to their needs or desires, now sport required a gatekeeping intermediary between the practitioners and the audience – the administrator.<sup>551</sup> Stokes was the administrator *par excellence* in this period and he left nothing 'undone' to secure the progress of Limerick FC while also acting as treasurer of the Limerick Amateur Athletic and Bicycle Club.<sup>552</sup> Crucially, since the new entrepreneurs and administrators of sport were overwhelmingly male the result was the institution of a new secular 'priesthood' for sport. This sporting, counter 'Reformation' priesthood led the multitudes in sporting worship, in contrast to the Protestant Reformation's attempts to remove the 'middle man' between worshipper and God. The cult of the coach is the highest expression of this tendency, but the long walk to the commodification of association football, for instance, has placed early

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<sup>549</sup> *LC* 5, 12 June 1880.

<sup>550</sup> *LC* 20 Oct 1883.

<sup>551</sup> *LC* 24 Feb, 20 Oct 1877, 21 May 1878, 18 Feb, 12 Apr, 6 Nov 1879 (D.V. Roche & Foxhunting), 19 June 1879, 28 May, 11, 14 June 1881, 14 Aug 1883, 26 Apr, 24, 26, 28 June, 22 July 1884, 14 Mar, 7 May, 13 June 1885, 10, 12, 17, 26 June 1886, 30 Apr 1887 (C.H. Gubbins & LAABC).

<sup>552</sup> *LC* 14 Aug, 16, 20, 23 Oct 1883.

twenty-first century ownership of the highest expression of the game in the hands of oil sheikhs, oligarchs and media moguls.<sup>553</sup>

In nineteenth century Ireland sport became more than a private asset to its practitioners and administrators, the creation of clubs, national governing bodies and growing commercialisation led to its increasing corporatisation. Sport lost its earlier rudimentary context and became a preserve, a reserved function of the new sporting class.<sup>554</sup> Though sport became more sophisticated and cosmopolitan these developments were accompanied by further divisions and the creation of sporting ‘reservations’. Where once a football game between two parishes involved everyone willing to partake, now a new structure emerged whereby youths played youths and adult males played adult males and schoolboys played schoolboys.<sup>555</sup> This could be categorised as not merely a process of privatisation, commercialisation and corporatisation, but of ‘ghettoisation’. Boarding school football, cricket and athletics practices may resist the designation ‘ghetto’, but a posh reservation is still a ghetto, however salubrious.

The process of privatisation was most apparent in the sport of rowing. Men whose job involved rowing, fishermen and other workers required to use boats in trade, were easily denied access to the new gentleman’s sport.<sup>556</sup> Limerick’s boat clubs excluded such characters from membership by a rule requiring prospective members to undergo a ballot and be blackballed – all but one of a large number of applicants to the

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<sup>553</sup> Lombardi, Vince, *What it takes to be no. 1: Vince Lombardi on leadership*, (McGraw-Hill, 2003). Maraniss, David, *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi*, (Simon & Schuster, 2000), Goldblatt, David, *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Soccer*, (Riverhead Trade, 2008).

<sup>554</sup> Garnham, Neal, *The origins and development of football in Ireland; being a reprint of R.M. Peter’s Irish Football Annual of 1880*, (introduction by Garnham), (Ulster Historical Foundation, Belfast, 1999). D’Arcy, Fergus A., *Horses, Lords and Racing Men: The Turf Club, 1790-1990*, (Turf Club, Kildare, 1991). Griffin, Padraig, *The Politics of Irish Athletics, 1850-1990*, (Marathon, Ballinamore, County Leitrim, Ireland, 1990).

<sup>555</sup> *LC* 21 Nov, 23 Dec 1876, 6, 10, 17 Feb 1877, 3 Dec 1881, 18 Mar 1882, 15, 25, 27 Nov, 16, 18 Dec 1884, 1, 3, 5 Mar 1887 – inter-schools rugby. Ballylanders ‘juvenile’ sports, *LC* 14 Aug 1886.

<sup>556</sup> *LC* 5, 12 June 1880,

Limerick Boat Club was refused in May 1882.<sup>557</sup> This elitism was reinforced during a debate on a plan to liberalise the admission system of the club that summer; the plan was easily defeated.<sup>558</sup>

The elite clubs' adoption of better, faster, sleeker boats – boats that could never perform a trading function, allowed rich clubs to exploit their technological advantage over the workingmen's more prosaic craft and create further distance between the two rowing classes.<sup>559</sup> The cost of these craft were easily borne by the clubs because the clubs always had a large dues paying membership most of whom did not utilise the club's boats for competitive sport.<sup>560</sup> This means that the elite crews of the top clubs could access the money of other members to buy better and faster craft with which fishermen could not compete. Tradesmen could only dream of such a resource and were left to their own meagre devices. Sports were divided by the question of resources, finance and exclusivity in membership. The true meaning of 'amateur' was, therefore, a lover of sport with one's own kind. The Limerick Commercial Rowing Club was formed in 1880 and immediately became the largest in Limerick. It was formed because the members, workingmen, were unable to breach the ballot for entry to the established clubs.<sup>561</sup>

One significant concession to the tradesmen was the inclusion of a tradesmen's race at the Limerick regatta, but even then the *Irish Times* stated that they were 'unimportant, being open races for sailors and fishermen'.<sup>562</sup> Another telling vignette of the distance between gentlemen rowers and men of trade was the practice of loaning their swifter,

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<sup>557</sup> LC 20 May 1882, 7 Feb 1884.

<sup>558</sup> LC 25 May, 3 June 1882.

<sup>559</sup> LC 30 July 1872, 9 July 1874, 12 Aug, 25 Sept 1875, 1 July 1879.

<sup>560</sup> LC 27 Mar 1877, 26, 28 July 1881

<sup>561</sup> LC 5, 12 June 1880.

<sup>562</sup> IT 22 July 1880.

lighter boats to workmen for their regattas.<sup>563</sup> The organisers of the Plassey Regatta in 1887, for example, thanked the Limerick Boat Club heartily for the use of their top class craft.<sup>564</sup> The generosity of such gestures cannot be gainsaid, but it does confirm a thesis that all the rowers of Limerick were deemed equal, but separate.

The development of sport also saw, as part of the privatisation process, increasing involvement of commercial interests. Commercialism was not new to sport, gambling and the supply of horses to armies and the agricultural and distribution industries were two key interests of the horse set, but sport was, in another echo of modern television rights deals, to become more ‘pay per view’.<sup>565</sup> Access to sport was increasingly regulated by admission charges to sports grounds, and for the wealthy the option of a steep surcharge for entry to a grandstand was enough to guarantee the exclusion of the *hoi polloi*.<sup>566</sup> Sport’s oft repeated claim that it brings people together and offers a sunny diversion from every day life, such as is celebrated in Percy French ballads like ‘Sweet Marie’, ‘Rafferty’s Racin’ Mare’, ‘The Girl on a Big Black Mare’ and ‘No More of Yer Golfin’ for Me’, is rarely subjected to sufficient scrutiny for its role in keeping people apart.<sup>567</sup>

The rationalisation of sport also led to the consolidation of smaller clubs into larger more rooted clubs. In this process a number of invisible clubs could form a single visible one. Size was a factor in this move as may be seen in the transition from Castle Connell Archery Society and others to the much larger and more visible, Munster

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<sup>563</sup> LC 24 July 1883.

<sup>564</sup> LC 23 Aug 1887.

<sup>565</sup> LC 19, 26 Aug, 2, 14 Sept 1876, 12 June, 19, 22, 24, 26, 29 July 1884.

<sup>566</sup> LC 11, 14, 16, 18, 25 July, 4 Aug 1874, 4, 16, 18 Sept 1880, 15 July 1882, 24 Aug, 4 Dec 1886.

<sup>567</sup> The Galway Races, held in August at Ballybrit racecourse (on the city’s periphery) is one of many Irish sports events that do, however, retain something of a nineteenth century feel. Healy, James N. *The Songs of Percy French*, (Mercier Press, Dublin, 1983). O’Dowda, Brendan, *The World of Percy French*, (Blackstaff Press, Dublin, 1981).



Archers.<sup>568</sup> This was a clear case of expanding the ‘territory’ of a small number of loosely linked archery practitioners to one that contained a sufficient number of approved potential members. In such a process where a territory was not able to support a club then, rationally, the need to expand the territory to one that would become necessary. Any moves to expand the appeal of the game within the existing locality would have contravened the tenets of respectability that were often placed above local feeling.<sup>569</sup>

Another outstanding feature of sport in this phase of development is that it became extra-local and almost immediately went global. Castlegarde CC played a game against ‘Strangers’ in July 1871 and it was typical to describe inter-club football games as late as 1882 as ‘foreign’ matches.<sup>570</sup> Limerick had an input to some important international sporting contacts in the 1870s beginning with the presence of the Mayor at a reception for Ireland’s shooting team fresh from their match with the USA in 1875. A year later, the Barrington brothers of Glenstal castle participated on the Trinity squad, and therefore, represented Ireland at the centennial regatta, in the US.<sup>571</sup> Lieutenant Henn from Co. Clare also participated in perhaps the biggest international sporting event, the America’s Cup in 1886 – an event the Earl of Dunraven had the time and resources to devote to two later unsuccessful attempts to wrest the cup from the New York Yacht Club.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>568</sup> LC 4 May, 8 July 1865.

<sup>569</sup> LC 23, 30 Jan, 8 Feb 1879, 20, 25, 27 May, 3 June 1882, 31 July, 20 Oct 1883.

<sup>570</sup> LC 22 July 1871, 9 Sept 1882.

<sup>571</sup> LC 1 July 1875, 1, 8 Aug, 19 Sept, 7, 10 Oct 1876, 6, 9 Jan 1877.

<sup>572</sup> LC 26 June 1886. Bricknell, Louise G., ‘Fickle winds and treacherous feelings: Anglo-American relations and the early challenges for the America’s Cup’, in *Sporting Traditions*, 9:2 (May 1993), 16-30. Dunraven, 4th Earl of, *Past Times and Pastimes*, (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1922).

Sports sprinted from being a local affair in the 1840s to a national business in the 1860s to a global concern at the first modern Olympic summer games in 1896.<sup>573</sup> This rate of expansion qualifies as a boom and is linked to the expansion of trading and economic activity in the same period.<sup>574</sup> The speed with which sport expanded globally was partly a function of its capacity to exploit those forces within disparate societies and political systems and another pointer to the promiscuity of this cultural idiom.<sup>575</sup>

Organised sport was competitive in its purposeful, swift and broad expansion across countries and cultures and this development was matched by the increased competitiveness within individual sports. The impressive cash prizes and considerable expense of the many silver cups and plates for coursing, racing, rowing, athletics, rugby union, shooting and even archery was outstanding and a pointer to the seriousness of the organisers and competitors; prizes worth £120 were on offer at the Limerick Amateur Athletic and Bicycle Club sports in 1884, exactly the cost of the prizes offered in 1868 with the aim of reviving archery.<sup>576</sup>

Sport moved towards greater competition and further from its ritual, fun and spontaneous roots. This spurred increasing concentration on the elite athlete at the expense of the recreational athlete. To this earnest pursuit of excellence was added the

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<sup>573</sup> Bale, John, 'The Adoption of Football in Europe: An Historical-Geographic Perspective', in *Canadian Journal of the History of Sport and Physical Education*, 11:2, (December 1980), 56-67. Bale, John, 'International Sports History as Innovation Diffusion', in *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*, XV:1, (May 1984), 38-63.

<sup>574</sup> Mullan, Michael, 'The devolution of the Irish economy in the nineteenth century and the bifurcation of Irish sport', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 13:2 (August 1996), 42-60. Swiencicki, Mark A., 'Consuming Brotherhood: Men's Culture, Style and Recreation as Consumer Culture, 1880-1930', in *Journal of Social History*, 31:4 (Summer 1998), 773-808. Riess, Steven A., *City Games: the evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports*, (University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1989). Wheeler, Robert F. 'Organized Sport and Organized Labour: The Workers' Sport Movement', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13:2 (April 1978), 191-210.

<sup>575</sup> Mason, Tony, 'Football on the Maldan: cultural imperialism in Calcutta', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 7:1 (May 1990), 85-96. Martin, Scott C., 'Don Quixote and leatherstocking: hunting, class, and masculinity in the American south, 1800-40', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12:3 (December 1995), 61-79. Marschik, Matthias, 'The Sportive Gaze: Local v. National Identity in Austria 1945-50', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 15:3 (December 1998), 115-24.

<sup>576</sup> *LC* 5, 9 1868, 25, 27 July 1870, 2, 14 Sept 1876, 31 Jan 1880, 13 Sept 1881, 30 Mar 1882, 18, 20 Mar, 14, 19 June 1884, 12, 30 Jan 1886.

competition between sporting codes for popularity. Competition was important; cricket, a sport like bullfighting, proposes that the manner in which in man performs is more important than the result, and with such a Corinthian spirit lost out to those team games that emphasised the reverse – even lawn tennis offered more trophies and cups for participation than did the cricket branch of the Limerick County Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club and tennis's subsequent growth may partly be attributed to its regular offerings of trophies and tight competition.<sup>577</sup>

The organisation of voluntary associations, societies and clubs was the outstanding feature of late nineteenth century sports development. In the mid-nineteenth century the word club had a number of meanings from informal to formal groups of people with lesser or greater degrees of cohesion or of purpose.<sup>578</sup> At a formal level the Limerick Club and Clanwilliam Club (Tipperary) were examples of gentlemen's dining clubs which were social in purpose but which each later spawned a rugby football club.<sup>579</sup> The football clubs in these cases thus assumed the organisational capabilities and cachet of their parent clubs and were essentially, at least in their early days, the gentry and friends at play.

At the informal or barely organised level there were in contrast, groups of people who had not yet adopted a formal structure for their activities and operated on an *ad-hoc* or spontaneous basis. Such groups were also labelled by the press as societies or clubs but did not possess the formal arrangements their labels implied. In reporting a fixture arranged between Newcastle West C.C. and the officers of H.M.S. Valiant to be played

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<sup>577</sup> LC 24 July, 2, 4 Aug 1877, 26 Sept 1878, 19, 28 Aug, 2, 6, 9, 18 Sept 1879, 13, 20, 22, 24, 27 July 1886.

<sup>578</sup> The walking 'club' in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* does not approximate to our understanding of the word, Hardy, Thomas, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, (Macmillan, London, 1970).

<sup>579</sup> LC 14 Oct, 13 Nov 1875, 6 Jan 1880, 10 Mar 1881. County Club, Limerick, *The Limerick Club Centenary: A Short History of a Hundred Years of Club Life*, (Hodges Figgis, Dublin, no date but, assume 1913 as a centenary marker).

at Foynes it was noted that this was the first game of the season for ‘both clubs’.<sup>580</sup> The men of the Valiant may well have loved their cricket, but to describe their occasional aggregation into teams to play as a ‘club’ was fanciful. The meaning attaching to the word club changed rapidly in a short period in the mid nineteenth century. Between the informal and formal systems of sports organisation there was an intermediate phase where club meant less than later definitions would permit and more than earlier definitions would allow, we may call these proto-clubs; they belong to the mesoludic era.

Proto-clubs of the 1860s were informal arrangements between people of similar class or workplace, from the same district, or with social ties like school to bind them; an *ad-hoc* squad of rugby union players at home in Limerick for Christmas in 1884 was variously called the Dublin Holiday Club or Williamson’s Rovers.<sup>581</sup> Teams from these proto-clubs were often called after the chief protagonist i.e. Mr Cantillon’s XI etc.<sup>582</sup> The pool of people combining in such a club was generally very small, this seems the case with Somerville FC, an early rugby union side in Limerick.<sup>583</sup>

The long-term chances for proto clubs were not good because the membership pool was too small and too sensitive to changes such as migration. The membership of such ‘clubs’ was not structured democratically either. They were hierarchical affairs as the naming of these clubs suggests and the effort to sustain the teams and to arrange games and venues were invariably left to the team ‘owner’. If this effort waned or if it was not consistently forthcoming then the club would cease to exist. Proto-clubs may seem lacking in complexity or sophistication but, if they did not have a pre-planned schedule

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<sup>580</sup> LC 15 May 1873

<sup>581</sup> LC 23, 27 Dec 1884.

<sup>582</sup> Mr. Cantillon’s side seems to have developed into the Kilkee C.C. LC 15 July 1865. Rev. Smith XI (cricket), LC 5 Aug 1871, the ‘Stoics’ of the same month similarly qualify, 15 Aug 1871.

<sup>583</sup> LC 8 Nov, 6 Dec 1877.

of events for their season they did have a rudimentary if usually sparse and irregular programme of games for their members. Proto-clubs' most frenetic periods of activity usually coincided with holiday periods and it was not unusual for their activities to be confined to these periods only; in summer this meant cricket and in winter, rugby union.<sup>584</sup>

The great legacy of proto-clubs was the cultivation of a taste for a more regular and more frequent level of sporting activity than these nascent clubs were providing. Players began to seek more games and more contact with a wider slew of clubs and teams. For all the social networks a proto-club 'owner' might be plugged into he could not match the organisational efficiency of a nominated honorary secretary, acting in concert with a committee, having the power to represent the club in dealings with other clubs in the matter of arranging training, matches and hospitalities before and after such fixtures. 'Few understand the secretary's problems'; this was the exasperated reflection of one *Chronicle* contributor about Limerick F C's attendance difficulties in 1883.<sup>585</sup> A month later it was reported that in the secretary's absence no practice took place at all – when that particular cat was away the 'mice' did not play.<sup>586</sup>

Honorary secretaries became the key position holders within clubs. They could initiate contact with other clubs without necessarily knowing personally any of the members of a club with which they sought a fixture. The newspapers and sports magazines of the 1860s and 70s frequently published either lists of names and addresses of honorary secretaries of clubs or noted the name and address of a secretary to whom

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<sup>584</sup> *LC* 6 Aug 1868, 2, 4, 6 Aug 1870, 13 July, 20 Aug 1872, 30 May, 8 June 1876, 28 Nov 1874, 5 Jan 1875, 31 Jan, 23 Feb, 10 Dec 1878.

<sup>585</sup> *LC* 29 Dec 1883, 3, 5 Jan 1884.

<sup>586</sup> *LC* 14 Feb 1884.

correspondence should be sent in connection with his club.<sup>587</sup> The list of honorary secretaries was the key item of interest in any review of the annual handbook of cricket published in Dublin by John Lawrence, a Grafton Street sports promoter and sports goods retailer throughout this time.<sup>588</sup>

While a proto-club owner could act as he saw fit and invite participants to play games that he organised, an honorary secretary had to operate in a more democratic environment. He had to represent the club according to the brief agreed upon by the membership as outlined in their club rules or constitution and had to answer to an annual general meeting.<sup>589</sup> The post of club treasurer was an equally important position whose role was to secure the financial backing necessary for the proper functioning of the club. The process of transferring the leadership of sports societies and organisations from a single individual to a committee was a form of division of labour in the search for greater club efficiency, efficiency was increasingly measured by the frequency and number of games played or sports meetings held.<sup>590</sup> Masters of fox and stag hounds who were very rich often undertook this effort gratis and pumped their own cash in, but if they hit money problems hunt clubs had to resort to committees; in the absence of a hunting supremo the favoured form of hunt club governance was a *troika* of interested hunters.<sup>591</sup>

With the adoption of a formal structure, epitomised by a committee system, the problems experienced by sports clubs did not evaporate, but were at least ameliorated.

There were variable levels of sophistication in the growing number of clubs. The

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<sup>587</sup> Garnham, Neal, *The origins and development of football in Ireland; being a reprint of R.M. Peter's Irish Football Annual of 1880*, (introduction by Garnham), (Ulster Historical Foundation, Belfast, 1999). *IT* 4 May, 2 Oct 1880.

<sup>588</sup> *IT* 7 Oct 1880. Lawrence, John, *Handbook of Cricket in Ireland: No. 15, 1879-1880*, (Dublin, 1880).

<sup>589</sup> *LC* 9 Apr 1872, 25 Apr 1874, 23 Sept 1876, 11 Apr 1878, 4 Mar 1879, 10 Apr 1880.

<sup>590</sup> *LC* 20, 25, 27 Mar 1875, 9 Sept 1882.

<sup>591</sup> *LC* 21 Dec 1872, 21 Feb 1874, 18 Feb, 12 Apr, 6 Nov 1879, 27 Jan 1883.

essential fact of life for even the best and most successful of clubs is that they were often kept on the road through the efforts of one or of a small number of dedicated individuals. Many clubs were held up by their own Atlas figures like Charles H. Gubbins at the Limerick Amateur Athletic Club and W.L. Stokes at the County Limerick Football Club.<sup>592</sup>

The remainder of this chapter offers a narrative of the key issues and developments, sport by sport, in the nineteenth century. Clubs and official sporting events are treated, but the ad-hoc and informal sports and pastimes have not been jettisoned from this consideration: non-formally organised sports continued to be practiced widely while many sports were club-less i.e. they did not need a formal structure in which to be practiced. Angling and bathing were, for instance, two club-less sports, but are considered in this thesis; the number and range of pursuits was surprisingly large.

Then as now non-formal sports continue to be practiced widely. It is arguable that the non-formally organised sporting world in most of nineteenth century Limerick was greater in size than the organised one.<sup>593</sup> In first half of the nineteenth century informal sport definitely outweighed the formal variety, the particular achievement of late century cultural entrepreneurs was to counteract this imbalance. In the early 1880s while hundreds at most could be found in attendance at a formally organised and ritualised cricket game thousands were recorded attending ad-hoc games of folk-football.<sup>594</sup> This chapter aims to add to the historical record the narratives of some of the neglected informal sports and leisure pursuits. The discussion of sports in the

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<sup>592</sup> *LC* 15, 22 July, 19 Aug 1882, 20 Oct 1883, 28 Feb, 26 Apr 1884.

<sup>593</sup> The Mountaineering Council of Ireland had 113 affiliated clubs in 2001 with more than 6,000 registered members. The council's development officer, however, estimated that up to 60,000 hill-walked as a hobby or sport – *IT* 8 Jan 2002, 7. Even if the ten to one ratio between registered and non-registered hill-walkers and mountaineers was an over-estimate, and though the frequency and amount of ad-hoc sport cannot be gauged accurately, the inescapable conclusion is that the informal hill-walking scene was greater than its formal counterpart. The two poles of the Irish surfing scene are similarly marked by the competitive (organised) versus the 'soul' surfers (informal).

<sup>594</sup> *LC* 7 Mar 1882.

following pages includes all those sports and pastimes for which evidence is available, but, ironically, excludes horse racing, hunting and rowing (the most visible and important sports) to avoid an excess of repetition in later chapters on localism and nationalism.

The discussion begins with the free-range sports that are variously known as field or blood sports and includes angling, shooting, falconry and hare coursing. Across these sports was another sport, poaching and this pursuit will also be considered. A second group of ‘battery’ sports, that is sports confined to the demesne and rolled gardens of gentry estates, and which includes cricket, croquet, lawn tennis and archery, follows the hunting, shooting, fishing category. A third category of sports, which may be termed New-Model sports is then discussed and in this group will be found the middle-class’s favourites, athletics, cycling, rugby union football, hurling, Gaelic football and short entries on the modest appearances in this period of baseball and association football. The final group of sports to be discussed is the least institutionally-based form of sport, the informal pursuits of skating, chess, swimming, gymnastics and billiards.

### **Angling**

As well as having cultural and sporting significance, angling played an important part in the economic life of the region.<sup>595</sup> Trouble in Scottish rivers in 1882, for instance, where a disease impacted salmon stocks, was seen as a positive development in Limerick because it would make Shannon side fisheries more desirable among those discommoded fishermen.<sup>596</sup> The economies of the villages on the banks of the River Shannon were boosted each year by the migration of anglers from many parts of

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<sup>595</sup> O’Gorman, *The Practice of Angling Particularly as Regards Ireland*, 2 vols. (facsimile of edition from Wm. Curry Jr., Dublin, 1845 by; Flyfisher’s Classic Library, Devon, England, 1993).

<sup>596</sup> *LC* 2, 18, 21 & 25 Feb 1882.



Ireland and the United Kingdom to hook salmon.<sup>597</sup> Castleconnell was particularly dependent on this bounty and notable fish kills received headlines and comment.<sup>598</sup> The testimony, to their friends, of two gentlemen who left Castleconnell for England having netted 150 salmon in twenty-two days in 1877 would have been extremely positive publicity for the Shannon's fishing stations.<sup>599</sup> The rivers Deel, Maigue and Mulcair were carefully monitored too, with one angler delighted by a sighting of a 'scud' of fish in February 1885 on the Deel.<sup>600</sup>

The 1885 salmon open season commenced on a Sunday. This was enough to encourage most anglers to set out on the Monday, but the lure of the fish was too great for a few linemen who overcame 'qualms of conscience' and went fishing.<sup>601</sup> The 1885 Sabbath 'busters' had less reason to be thwarted in their sport than five fishermen, two decades earlier, whose boldness cost each of them a conviction and a fine for being so loose with the Sabbath.<sup>602</sup> The laxity towards the law and custom was understandable given that land and river owners and enforcement authorities had bigger 'fish' to fry in the turbulent 1880s.

One key economic effect of greater and more formalised sporting practice was the creation of a class of professionals to cater for the sporting appetites of their patrons. The men who fashioned the angling equipment were particularly celebrated for their craft. William Enright of Castleconnell and his father received kudos for the quality of their work.<sup>603</sup> They were among a small, but important group of men whose profession was completely bound up with sport and leisure; ghillies, gamekeepers, whippers-in,

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<sup>597</sup> *LC* 26 Mar 1851, 10 Apr, 19 June 1852, 13 May 1879, 12, 17 Aug 1880.

<sup>598</sup> *LC* 22, 24 June, 9 Oct 1869, 10 May 1873, 11 Apr 1874, 5 Oct 1875, 23 Jan 1879.

<sup>599</sup> *LC* 3 July 1877.

<sup>600</sup> *LC* 4 Mar 1871, 4 Apr 1874, 18 May 1875, 18 Apr 1878, 5 Feb 1885.

<sup>601</sup> *LC* 7 Feb 1885.

<sup>602</sup> *LC* 26 Apr 1866.

<sup>603</sup> *LC* 3 June, 12 Aug 1865, 1 July 1871.

huntsmen, trainers and even billiards markers are among the earliest sports professionals – as distinct from professional sportsmen.<sup>604</sup>

Sports professionals played the role of Sancho Panza to their Don Quixote employers. Some anglers had romantic and affectionate nicknames with reputations to match. One, known as ‘the badger’ was singled out for killing two salmon of twenty–eight and thirty lb weight in Castleconnell in 1851.<sup>605</sup> Another gentleman was praised for catching twenty–four salmon in one day in nearby Doonass in 1866.<sup>606</sup> Others had their most significant catches documented in the press; a Mr. Armstrong of the Crescent in Limerick city was mentioned in dispatches.<sup>607</sup>

### **Shooting**

A large part of the attraction of sport in the nineteenth century was the danger, excitement and risk associated with pursuits involving feats of power, speed and violence. Few sports involved these phenomena to the degree that shooting did.

Unfortunately, for many of its practitioners sport shooting was the pastime most likely to lead to the death of a participant.<sup>608</sup> The frequency and variety of reports of death by shooting is clear, but what is surprising is the number of women and children involved in gun accidents. Some cases are left dangling, unsatisfactorily explained, while others are difficult to credit, if not bizarre. One ambiguous report described in terse, scant detail how an English baronet in Cork for shooting was discovered dead in his room following ‘a gun accident.’<sup>609</sup> In November 1850 Lady Carden was shot in the head when a rifle ‘fell and discharged.’<sup>610</sup> Five months later another gentry woman, Mrs.

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<sup>604</sup> *LC* 2, 6 Mar 1869, 1, 4, 6 July, 7 Sept 1871, 25 Apr 1874, 27 Nov 1884.

<sup>605</sup> *LC* 15 Mar 1851.

<sup>606</sup> *LC* 23 June 1866.

<sup>607</sup> *LC* 11 Aug 1868, 25 Mar 1869, 8 Mar, 28 Apr 1877, 5 Feb 1878, 11 Mar 1879, 16 Feb 1882.

<sup>608</sup> *LC* 9 Nov 1850, 18, 22 Jan, 19 July 1851, 27 Apr, 16 May 1872.

<sup>609</sup> *LC* 11 Feb 1852.

<sup>610</sup> *LC* 6, 13 Nov 1850.

John Delmege, was accidentally shot by a loaded pistol, she recovered, but how four slugs came to be lodged in her is not explained by the report.<sup>611</sup> While both women came from rich and powerful landlord families and could prevent any personally embarrassing details from emerging by a compliant local press, doubt must remain about the proffered explanations in all three cases. Not all reports of shooting accidents are so coy or lacking detail, however: again in 1851 a definite suicide by gun report states the victim had money difficulties; he had been ‘passionately devoted to field sports.’<sup>612</sup> Access to the means of personal destruction is not the deciding factor in suicide attempts, but it is a vital contributing factor.

Another man of passion, Speke, an explorer who discovered the source of the Nile, was killed by a discharge from his gun while climbing a fence during a hunt.<sup>613</sup> Many gun accidents were of such an accidental nature; hunters that failed to break their weapon while stepping over fences, stiles, ditches and gates ran the risk of a fall and an accidental discharge. A man shooting rabbits near Kilrush in 1865 had such an accident and killed himself.<sup>614</sup>

The risks to young people around guns were significant. One farmer’s child was involved in an accidental shooting while cleaning a gun in 1851.<sup>615</sup> A year previously, a 16-year old boy lost a thumb in a ‘gunpowder accident.’<sup>616</sup> The discharge of a fowling piece that killed a son of George Gubbins, Bruff, was said to be accidental.<sup>617</sup> Young people were subject to and sometimes the causes of gun accidents, a 17-year old woman being shot by her little brother in 1851.<sup>618</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> *LC* 5 Mar 1851.

<sup>612</sup> *LC* 14 May 1851.

<sup>613</sup> *BBC History Magazine*, 2:8 (Aug 2001), 29.

<sup>614</sup> *LC* 4 Nov 1865.

<sup>615</sup> *LC* 13 Dec 1851.

<sup>616</sup> *LC* 9 Nov 1850.

<sup>617</sup> *LC* 29 June 1850.

<sup>618</sup> *LC* 17 May 1851.

A more active form of death by shooting was the wayward shot method.<sup>619</sup> In 1850 a policeman shooting sparrows in Sligo shot the son of a postmaster, but at least the boy had a lucky escape.<sup>620</sup> It was another close shave for one Reverend when a young man's wayward shot pierced his window and broke the cup in the clergyman's hand.<sup>621</sup> A case in 1866 of a militia man and his friend illustrated the dangers of guns and the stupidity of some of their owners; while those men were larking about following a shoot 'an accident' occurred and one of them died.<sup>622</sup> The 1851 case of one Dublin man involved in a struggle with a bailiff shows the carelessness of some gun-people. The Dubliner was challenged by a bailiff, who grabbed his gun, it discharged and the bailiff was shot; he survived a few hours then died, an inquest jury acquitted the gun owner.<sup>623</sup> It makes sense that many of these reports were of true accidents, but the possibility of more sinister explanations also exist in the absence of more compelling evidence. What was reported as a shooting accident in Cahirciveen, Co. Kerry in 1851 certainly appears to have been a duel.<sup>624</sup> A Curragh, Co. Kildare, shooting accident had improbable aspects to it as well, of three men who went hunting one day in 1851 one died and one was injured.<sup>625</sup> The story of another gun-trio in 1850 illustrates further the danger of the hunt. This time three Mullingar men visited an island to shoot rabbits, finding few they went angling or to shoot rooks, their boat overturned, however, and they drowned.<sup>626</sup> In addition to the possibility of self-inflicted injury or death, gun owners had to be mindful of the desirability of their rifles to revolutionaries and criminals. Gun thefts occurred with and without violence to their owners, and though the highpoint for such thefts was in the 1880s it was a constant throughout the

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<sup>619</sup> *LC* 1 Jan 1851.

<sup>620</sup> *LC* 23 Jan 1850.

<sup>621</sup> *LC* 7 Jan 1852.

<sup>622</sup> *LC* 9 Jan 1866.

<sup>623</sup> *LC* 18 Oct 1851.

<sup>624</sup> *LC* 22 Jan 1851.

<sup>625</sup> *LC* 11 June 1851.

<sup>626</sup> *LC* 5 June 1850.

century.<sup>627</sup> The frequency of gun accidents and thefts made the sport the most dangerous leisure pursuit of the times, but game and target shooting offered rewards to outweigh the dangers and remained popular among the gun-owning class.

Aristocratic shooting excursions, battues, were a staple of the social and sporting calendar.<sup>628</sup> Hospitality on a large scale, gunmanship, social and business networking and fun were combined in a private setting to demonstrate the fruits of the host's estate and his largesse.<sup>629</sup> The bags from such shooting days out could be significant and highly destructive.<sup>630</sup> West Limerick, East Clare and North Tipperary provided adequate grouse territory while partridge, woodcock and pheasant were also prized prey.<sup>631</sup> As the marginal agricultural land in these districts was transferred from landlord to tenants under the various land acts, the prospects for grouse and partridge shooting slowly diminished and game shooting was squeezed even further back into the landed estates.<sup>632</sup>

Not all game shooting occurred on Irish estates; for the more adventurous and wealthy of the shooting-class trips to Scotland for the grouse season grew in popularity in the last quarter of the century.<sup>633</sup> It is possible the pressure on grouse numbers locally may have been a factor driving the sportsmen to the Scottish glens, but new trends in sporting holidays also emerged; a holiday combining yachting to Scotland and grouse shooting advertised the wealth and power of three Limerick sportsmen in 1880.<sup>634</sup> The

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<sup>627</sup> LC 6 Nov 1852, 6 Jan 1887. Conyers, Dorothea, *Sporting Reminiscences*, (Methuen, London, 1920).

<sup>628</sup> LC 3 Jan 1857, 6 Feb 1873, 19, 24 Dec 1874, 26 Aug 1875, 21 Dec 1876, 29 Dec 1877, 15 Aug 1882.

<sup>629</sup> LC 28 Dec 1850, 1 Feb, 20 Aug 1851, 5, 9 Sept 1865, 25 Aug 1866, 25, 27 Aug, 5 Sept 1868, 25 Aug 1870, 9 Jan, 27 Nov 1877, 18, 27 Dec 1879, 23 Dec 1882, 10 Nov 1883, 6 Dec 1884, 7 Nov 1885.

<sup>630</sup> LC 25 Aug 1866, 24 Dec 1874, 26 Aug 1875, 21 Dec 1876, 22 Sept 1877, 13, 18, 27 Dec 1879, 12 Jan 1882.

<sup>631</sup> LC 25, 27 Aug, 5 Sept 1868, 25 Aug 1870, 27 July 1871, 29 Sept 1874, 17 Aug, 21, 30 Sept 1875, 15, 19 Aug 1876, 9 Jan, 10 Nov, 29 Dec 1877, 23 Dec 1882, 10 Nov, 22 Dec 1883.

<sup>632</sup> LC 21, 30 Sept 1875, 29 Aug 1878, 3 Sept 1881.

<sup>633</sup> LC 12 Aug 1879, 24 July 1880.

<sup>634</sup> LC 12, 26 Aug 1880.

super-wealthy Earl of Dunraven outshone even those shooting gentlemen with his frequent trips to the American Rocky Mountain range in the 1870s.<sup>635</sup>

The elite class base of the game shooting community may also be gauged by the wry observations in press reports that the people's 'rulers and governors' have gone grouse shooting (1851) and that the 1871 grouse season opening clashed with the Limerick regatta causing the aristocrats to desert 'the river for the moor'.<sup>636</sup> The romantic pretensions of some of this class is evident in the occasional use of the term 'Knights of the Trigger' to describe shooting gentlemen.<sup>637</sup> A simple perusal of the shooting reports also links the sport to the elite estates; Dromoland, the home of Lord Inchiquin, Glenstal, the seat of the Barrington family, the Vandeleur estate in Kilrush and the Earl of Dunraven's Adare estate were some of the many well-stocked, relatively secure and bountiful preserves.<sup>638</sup> Limerick Town Council's minute book also shows a remarkable pattern in meetings arranged for 1 November, the opening day of the season for pheasant; in the years 1869 to 1879 all meetings scheduled for that date were adjourned because no quorum could be mustered. The meeting of 1 November 1880, curiously, had a quorum, but its business was adjourned to the following day. This was a tiny marker of the changing profile of town councillors, with a cadre of more earnest and ruthless Home Rule operators on the cusp of a complete takeover of local politics.<sup>639</sup> These councillors were not about to declare 'two barrels bad, no barrels good', but their awareness of and attachment to the symbolism and status of field sports was less romantic and more flexible than their gentry opponents; they were also required to be more politic and public relations conscious and many would have

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<sup>635</sup> LC 20 Mar 1873, 18 Apr, 16 June 1874. Dunraven, 4th Earl of, *Past Times and Pastimes*, (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1922).

<sup>636</sup> LC 16 Aug 1851, 27 July 1871.

<sup>637</sup> LC 26 Aug 1873.

<sup>638</sup> LC 24 Dec 1874, 9 Jan, 22 Sept, 29 Dec 1877, 13, 18, 27 Dec 1879, 12 Jan, 15 Aug, 23 Dec 1882.

<sup>639</sup> Town Council Minute Book, 1 Nov 1869, 1870 etc.

preferred the soubriquet ‘dynamitard’ to ‘knight’ – though the loyalist *Chronicle*, in 1883, more readily offered the insult ‘coal porters and corner boys’.<sup>640</sup>

Battues represented the private, reserved element of gun sport, but after 1860 public shooting competitions outside the walls of the estates grew in popularity.<sup>641</sup> Early competitive shooting matches such as the Elcho Shield in Great Britain and U.S.A. versus British team challenges offered an elite competition model of the sport to a wide audience and these competitions spurred an alternative middle class sport–shooting infrastructure involving clubs, target shooting and local and national competitions. The Elcho Shield, held in Wimbledon, attracted an Irish team throughout the 1860s and 1870s, that eventually won it in 1873, and competition for this shield provided the impetus to the formation of Irish rifle clubs, many of which date to the late 1860s.<sup>642</sup> The following year, 1874, saw a match between Ireland and the U.S.A. in America and the return visit of their team to Dublin in 1875 became a sensation, the nineteenth century equivalent of the 2006 Ryder Cup golf tournament in County Kildare.<sup>643</sup> The Irish team again visited the U.S.A. for a match in that country’s centennial year, 1876, and these contacts and the publicity they attracted ought to have propelled the sport much further than its subsequent meagre position warranted.<sup>644</sup>

The Irish Rifle Association’s fourth annual meeting in 1870 places the formation of that body in 1867.<sup>645</sup> The Ulster Rifle Association/Club also dates to 1867, placing clubs in the east and north-east at the forefront of target shooting in the country.<sup>646</sup> No local rifle clubs emerged before the establishment of the Irish Rifle Association; so like

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<sup>640</sup> *LC* 8 Sept 1883, 31 May, 2, 12 Aug 1884.

<sup>641</sup> *LC* 18 Sept 1866.

<sup>642</sup> *LC* 1 June 1865, 22 July 1873.

<sup>643</sup> Their visit received huge coverage – including pictures – in the *Irish Times*. *IT* 4 May to 5 July 1875. *LC* 1 July 1875.

<sup>644</sup> *LC* 15 Apr, 1, 10 Aug 1876. Interestingly, the Scottish National Rifle Club refused to join a British team to compete against the U.S.A. in 1876 and planned to send its own team, *LC* 12 Feb 1876.

<sup>645</sup> *LC* 26 May 1870. 8<sup>th</sup> annual meeting in 1874, *LC* 27 June 1874, also 3 July 1875.

<sup>646</sup> *LC* 17 June, 11 Oct 1873. Also *LC* 7 Sept 1871.

the GAA, North Munster's shooting enthusiasts only organised into clubs after a national body, and to a certain extent, a basic international infrastructure, was put in place. In 1873 a rifle club was finally established in the region in Ennis, variously called the Ennis or Clare Rifle Club.<sup>647</sup> Contests were held between members and outsiders such as RIC men and military men based locally.<sup>648</sup> In 1874 a challenge cup was instituted to promote the sport outside these elite, society, police and military confines, but it seems not to have been crowned with success.<sup>649</sup> An All Ireland Challenge Shield soon followed and was won by the Dublin Shooting Club in 1877.<sup>650</sup>

Sport shooting in Limerick city remained an informal affair. The aristocratic live pigeon shooting match for a pig in 1866 had a humorous, feck-making character and the practice of using live birds as targets was discontinued in the 1870s. When resumed in 1882 such live pigeon contests immediately met with condemnation.<sup>651</sup> One pigeon shooting match in 1882 was left undecided because the competitors shot all the birds; with nothing to separate the parties a rematch was arranged.<sup>652</sup> Such destruction of birds without a decisive result was noteworthy, and was almost certainly one of the proximate causes of the formation of a branch of the SPCA in the city in that year.<sup>653</sup>

A novel approach to the cruelty problem was a competition to shoot at 'artificial' pigeons in Cork in 1872.<sup>654</sup> In 1881 a further innovation was the use of glass balls as targets in a match between the United States and England shooting teams over ten

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<sup>647</sup> Ennis Rifle Club practice, *LC* 17 May 1873, same as Clare Rifle Club that hosted an eight a side shooting match between RIC men and eight of the club, *LC* 25 Oct 1873, this club hosted a dinner in honour of the honorary secretary, *LC* 20 Nov 1873.

<sup>648</sup> Challenges to local constabulary, *LC* 18 May 1874, 18 May 1875, the 46<sup>th</sup> regiment, 1, 10 Aug, 16 Sept 1876, the 82<sup>nd</sup> regiment, 29 Sept 1877.

<sup>649</sup> *LC* 29 Sept 1874, 17, 28 Aug, 11, 18, 23, 25 Sept 1875. During the Land War sport shooting was associated with the security services and landlordism and the rifle contest in New Pallas between five RIC men and five of the Landlord Defence Association with prizes and ammunition provided by a landlord was not atypical of the sport in these years, *LC* 13 Sept 1881.

<sup>650</sup> *LC* 30 June 1877.

<sup>651</sup> *LC* 18 Sept 1866, 4, 8 Apr 1882, 23 Jan, 27 Feb 1883.

<sup>652</sup> *LC* 9 Sept 1871.

<sup>653</sup> *LC* 4 Apr, 8 June, 19, 26 Sept, 28, 30 Nov 1882, 18, 25 Nov 1884.

<sup>654</sup> *LC* 20 Aug 1872.



days.<sup>655</sup> This technology caught on and when the GAA emerged even it could find a space for shooting in its sporting programme with one glass ball–shooting contest at an 1886 tournament.<sup>656</sup> The GAA’s adoption of shooting in its competition did not presage a full–scale commitment to the sport and another chance for the growth of sport shooting was lost.

It is not clear why Limerick sportsmen did not adopt the target shooting practices of their Clare fellows or even organise into a club for the development of the sport. The sporting aristocrats had self–contained shooting ranges in their estates and vast numbers of people were precluded by law from owning or possessing firearms, leaving a small middle–class from which a club might emerge to foster the sport. In the absence of such a club the sport remained the property of the soldier, the policeman and the landowner, beyond question, an unhappy triumvirate in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Ireland; where they prospered, the sport prospered – in Ulster and Dublin.

Sport shooting, therefore, joined the list of big house sports such as croquet and archery that were unable or unwilling to ‘jump’ the demesne wall and reach a wider membership. Its administrators spurned the tremendous promotional possibilities of the 1870s Ireland versus USA matches and the significant legal barriers to gun ownership in nineteenth century Ireland. These self–imposed and external limits on shooting in Ireland illustrate the strength of many of the barriers to the development of sport in a century that was otherwise so important for the development of new forms of sport.

## **Falconry**

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<sup>655</sup> *LC* 12 Mar 1881.

<sup>656</sup> *LC* 21 Aug 1886.

A falconry group attached to the Limerick military appeared in 1874 and was part of a minor fad for the sport in the region. For three days a small attendance witnessed a fine demonstration of hawks pursuing magpies and pigeons at Newcastle racecourse and at Ballinacurra, both suburbs of Limerick city. Ladies hats were decorated with the tail feathers of the downed birds. Capt. Dugmore and Mr. Bair, the club falconer, were the key figures and others were behind a drive to secure civilian and military subscribers for the formation of a Limerick Falconry Club.<sup>657</sup> Despite a follow up hawking meeting at O'Brien's Bridge almost a year later there is no evidence the attempts to establish a club were successful.<sup>658</sup> The reliance on another sporting Atlas, Mr. Bair, who left Limerick in that year, again emphasises the role of important individuals in maintaining and developing a sport culture.<sup>659</sup>

### **Coursing**

Exclusivity, conviviality, sporting thrills and gambling opportunities made mid-century coursing meetings very attractive to their aristocratic patrons. An extensive and exclusive meet at Derry Castle, just outside Ballina, County Tipperary in 1853 was marked by the 'elegant and substantial *dejeuner* provided.'<sup>660</sup> Forty gentlemen enjoyed coursing and a 'sumptuous luncheon' at another meeting.<sup>661</sup> Thirty gentlemen from the Southern Coursing Club in Cork enjoyed a dinner *sans* hare courses in 1851 while the same club put on another dinner for a member leaving for Dublin in the same year, again out of sight of a coursing field.<sup>662</sup> The report of yet another dinner for forty by the club later that year revealed that the club was in its second season, suggesting it was formed in 1850.<sup>663</sup> It hardly seems necessary to note that in post-famine Ireland

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<sup>657</sup> LC 27, 29 Jan 1874.

<sup>658</sup> LC 24 Oct 1874.

<sup>659</sup> LC 29 Jan 1874.

<sup>660</sup> LC 1 Jan 1853.

<sup>661</sup> LC 14 Jan 1857.

<sup>662</sup> LC 5 Apr, 21 May 1851.

<sup>663</sup> LC 22 Nov 1851.

the combination of banquets, sport and money had political resonances marking the club apart from most of society.

Coursing clubs existed and were formed throughout Munster in the early 1850s. The Southern Coursing Club in Cork and the Tipperary, Kilkenny and Waterford Club, called variously the Tipperary and Waterford and simply, the Tipperary Coursing Club each pre-date 1850.<sup>664</sup> Limerick Coursing Club was formed early in 1852 with suitably, a meet and dinner for fifty gentlemen at Glenstal Castle.<sup>665</sup> The LCC made immediate arrangements for issues such as the law and gamekeeping, the issue of certificates and the staging of competitions – so the ad-hoc days of the sport were officially over.<sup>666</sup> After the formation of the Kilrush Coursing Club in 1852 no new club emerged in Limerick or Clare until the Limerick Fox Terrier Coursing Club in the 1880s.<sup>667</sup>

The elite membership, legal barriers, cost and the need for extensive preserves to enjoy the sport meant that even middle-class sportsmen had difficulty accessing the sport of coursing in mid-century. The cost of entering a dog in the ‘Clorane Champion Stakes’, a 32 dog tournament, in 1880 was £6 10s.<sup>668</sup> For many the only way then to enjoy the sport was in an illegal fashion i.e. poaching, or as mere spectators – and even this was somewhat restricted given that most meets were held in the private spaces of landlords’ estates.

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<sup>664</sup> *LC* 20 Feb, 28 Dec 1850, 10 May 1851, 31 Mar, 30 Oct 1852.

<sup>665</sup> *LC* 31 Jan, 21 Feb, 10, 20, 31 Mar, 3 Apr 1852.

<sup>666</sup> *LC* 3 Apr, 6 Oct 1852.

<sup>667</sup> *LC* 13 Mar 1852, 25 Mar 1880. Limerick Fox Terrier CC, *LC* 7, 14, 16, 30 Jan, 4, 6, Feb, 2 Mar 1886.

<sup>668</sup> *LC* 13 Mar 1880.

In the early period of organised coursing it was a big house sport and practised in private spaces.<sup>669</sup> The meaning of the word club then was closer to our understanding of a gentleman's club, hence the extravagant repasts, but the later 1870s version of club had lost some of this elitism and became leavened by more middle class values. Initially, Glenstal Castle, Derry Castle, Clorane, Coole and Castle Ievers were among the estates favoured by the 'lovers of the leash' for the sport and entertainments.<sup>670</sup> Clorane eventually became a favourite venue; it was celebrated as not just one of the best in Ireland, but as 'second to none in the United Kingdom.'<sup>671</sup> Accompanying this growth in Clorane's reputation was an expansion of its spectator base; no longer were matches watched by tens of spectators, but by many hundreds. A large crowd also attended a private coursing match at South Hill House, Limerick in 1886, demonstrating how some of the sport's early numerical exclusivity had faded while underpinning its retained gentry control and administration.<sup>672</sup> While the *hoi polloi* increasingly attended coursing meetings at the big houses more excited supporters of the status quo were inspired to claim that the peasantry and aristocracy were at one in their enjoyment of the sport.<sup>673</sup> Such claims for class harmony in the sport are, however, a case of coursing gentlemen protesting too much. The sports' administrators were obliged by the changes in the national organisation of the pursuit to reach wider into society for supporters and adherents.

The expansion of the sport locally was a function of a diminution in external interest in regional meetings requiring a need to appeal to a wider local audience. As the sport expanded nationwide the opportunities for the owners of the best dogs grew and they could afford to be more selective in their choice of meeting. This was apparent when a

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<sup>669</sup> Private meeting reports, LC 8 Apr 1876, 25 Apr 1878.

<sup>670</sup> LC 21 Feb, 3, 10, 17 Apr, 6, 16, 27, 30 Oct, 10, 20, 24, 27 Nov, 4 Dec 1852, 1 Jan 1853, 13, 23 Jan 1866, 9 Jan, 3 Apr, 27 Nov 1873.

<sup>671</sup> LC 27 Nov 1879, 20 Mar 1884.

<sup>672</sup> LC 25 Nov 1886.

<sup>673</sup> LC 16, 21 Aug 1866, 6, 8 Nov 1877.

drop off in interest from Dublin sportsmen hit the 1881 Clorane meeting quite badly.<sup>674</sup> The Clorane meeting two years later was equally shorn of quality and support and had to be reduced to a one day affair because of the many desertions by greyhound owners.<sup>675</sup> In 1886 the entire meeting was abandoned because there were not enough nominations i.e. owners with the inclination or cash to satisfy the code of the LCC.<sup>676</sup> As the best dog owners of the country developed almost discrete coursing circuits around the major urban centres only the best dogs were brought around the country and sent to course in Britain. Shorn of the competition of out of town dogs the middling kind of coursing gentleman was then required to find competitors in his own locality – and this necessitated a look down the social scale to sportsmen previously denied that title.

In the late 1880s coursing was at a crossroads. Coursing for hares with greyhounds remained an elite preserve, but its appeal was declining, locally at least. Meanwhile a popular desire for coursing was being satisfied by poaching and by a cheap, illegal and well organised mutation of the original sport, poaching, and the public was responding to its claims. It must be inferred from the late twentieth century success of coursing as a sport for all classes that between the late 1880s and the 1980s a realisation dawned on both sporting parties that they needed to hang together or to hang separately. That they chose the former accounts for the vibrancy of the sport in early twenty first century Ireland, when it has been banned in Great Britain. It is ironic that coursing, though not an intrinsically Irish sport, must today be considered as such, there being no other haven for the sport.<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>674</sup> LC 17 Nov 1881.

<sup>675</sup> LC 15 Mar 1883.

<sup>676</sup> LC 20 Mar 1886.

<sup>677</sup> Daniel, Laurent, 'Hare Coursing: An Irish National (British) Sport', paper given at 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of British Society of Sports History, St. Martin's College, Lancaster, April 2001.

Some consideration needs to be given here to the variety of ways those excluded from participating in field, blood or free-range sports found a way to satisfy their sporting desires – by poaching. This pursuit cut across the hunting, shooting, fishing and coursing categories, but ought to be treated separately for the light it throws on the attitudes of lower socio-economic groups to field sports.

### **Poaching**

Some poaching activity in the second half of the nineteenth century may be classed as a leisure pursuit and sport. An 1886 editorial of the *Limerick Chronicle* declared simply that poaching was among ‘the most popular of illegal recreations.’<sup>678</sup> It was an attractive, yet dangerous sport. Poaching inspired the republican socialist Jim Connell sufficiently to write a 1903 paean to the craft, while the 1881 painting ‘The Wounded Poacher’ by Henry Jones Thaddeus highlighted the conflict, often terribly violent, between poacher and gamekeeper.<sup>679</sup> It is tempting to analyse Connell’s avid attraction to the very activity his father, a gamekeeper, sought to stamp out, in the light of Synge’s ‘Playboy’ story or of Freudian theory, then in the course of development in Vienna, but it is much more likely that, for Connell and many poachers, the sheer fun of transgressing a man-made boundary added spice and piquancy to a meal of poached game. Since fun and trickery are hallmarks of pre-formally organised sport it seems only fair to allow that poaching, when not for survival needs, qualifies as a sport. Many poachers exhibited daring and shrewdness like the characters that stole live pheasants from Glenstal Castle estate in 1850 and another band that took the bags from a shoot that were stored overnight in a Tipperary house in 1884.<sup>680</sup>

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<sup>678</sup> *LC* 27 Feb 1886.

<sup>679</sup> Connell, Jim, *Confessions of a poacher*, (Lilliput, London, 2004). Thaddeus, Henry Jones, ‘The Wounded Poacher’, National Gallery of Ireland.

<sup>680</sup> *LC* 19 Oct 1850, 4 Dec 1884.

Before the political and land agitations of the 1880s, what may be termed ‘classical poaching’ exhibited sporting, survival and commercial elements, but the land wars added a political spice to its practice and a further justification to massage the scruples of its practitioners. Those exposed to the depredations of poachers were obliged to engage as much as possible in this newly open political front challenging the privileges of land ownership. In the middle of this poacher/landlord conflict was the RIC – three forces arrayed against each other in a form of Mexican stand-off. Thaddeus’s serious image of the violent result of an encounter between poacher and gamekeeper, however, was not figurative. The incidents of affray and violence were numerous and not always resolved in favour of the law-abiding. One landlord’s 1872 attempt to stamp out poaching had the effect of eliciting threats against him.<sup>681</sup> Poachers shot one Askeaton J.P. and this and the many reports of bailiffs and gamekeepers suffering beatings indicate a huge appetite not to forego the joys of poaching.<sup>682</sup> Poachers too had their setbacks and many were foiled in their endeavours, but escaped, while others were apprehended and faced court proceedings.<sup>683</sup>

Those unlucky enough to face prosecution, a minority, were particularly unfortunate because their chances of evading fines or imprisonment were slim. It was very unusual for a prosecution not to succeed in conviction.<sup>684</sup> It is perhaps this reality that may have tempered police attitudes to poaching; the constabulary had to calculate whether pursuing a prosecution, leading to almost certain conviction would be more desirable than the inevitable public opprobrium that follows over-zealous application of unpopular laws. One criticism of people shooting without licences, and the police’s

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<sup>681</sup> *LC* 15 June 1872.

<sup>682</sup> *LC* 1 Sept 1874; 19 Sept 1876; 29 May 1880; 1 Mar 1883; 27 Jan 1885.

<sup>683</sup> *LC* 28 July 1866; 13 Apr 1869; 6 Sept 1870; 25 Feb 1871; 28, 31 Mar 1874; 27 Apr 1875; 18 Nov; 5, 24 Dec 1876; 28 June 1877; 25 Apr; 13 Aug 1878; 27 Feb; 15 Mar; 22, 24 Apr; 5, 19, 23 Aug; 20, 23, Sept 1879; 12 Feb; 8 Apr 1880; 13 Jan 1881; 19 Sept; 4 Nov 1882; 12 Sept 1885; 18 Jan; 12 Feb 1887. Women poaching eels, *LC* 13 Apr 1880.

<sup>684</sup> The only case I encountered, *LC* 31 Jan 1874; though a conviction in *LC* 28 Oct 1865 collapsed on appeal.

inactivity in stamping it out, described those huntsmen as an ‘infestation’.<sup>685</sup> In a rare case against a poacher that failed to achieve a conviction, an entertaining case of the ‘pot calling the kettle black’, a sportsman, convicted of poaching in 1865, had his appeal upheld when the evidence originally presented against him was deemed deficient because it was obtained from a ‘notorious poacher.’<sup>686</sup> Not all bailiffs and gamekeepers were the upstanding guardians of game they ought to have been. One Listowel bailiff was himself successfully prosecuted for poaching in 1874.<sup>687</sup>

The reason it was difficult to evade a conviction when prosecuted was that the law held a triple lock over the alleged miscreants: if the poaching charge could not be proved, it was still almost impossible to evade a charge of trespass or a charge of not having a correct game certificate. In 1850 a Tuamgraney man was fined for shooting without the permission of a landowner, but was not prosecuted for poaching because he always held a game certificate: his fine was for trespass.<sup>688</sup> Game conservators emphasised the licensing aspect of the problem when trying to garner public support for the suppression of poaching, suggesting that appeals against the act of poaching, *per se*, had little purchase among the general population.<sup>689</sup>

The inefficacy of law enforcement against poaching combined with the sheer popularity and widespread nature of the pastime had a considerable effect on the amount of game available. In exasperation the *Chronicle* pronounced the Game Act a ‘dead letter’ in 1866 following reports of the scarcity of game for their legal predators.<sup>690</sup> In 1873 a gentleman was said to have left the county for good because of

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<sup>685</sup> LC 22 Dec 1874.

<sup>686</sup> LC 28 Oct 1865.

<sup>687</sup> LC 31 Mar 1874.

<sup>688</sup> LC 16, 20 Nov 1850.

<sup>689</sup> LC 13 Jan 1866, 15 Sept, 22 Dec 1874, 25 Mar 1882, 27, 29 Sept 1883.

<sup>690</sup> LC 16 Jan 1866.



the lack of game due to the depredations of poachers.<sup>691</sup> The availability of hares was guarded carefully and Sunday poaching was deemed, in 1874, to be sufficiently serious to impact harrier clubs.<sup>692</sup> Thomas Fosbery, a man synonymous with coursing ‘in a legitimate manner’ in Limerick for twenty–six years was obliged to cancel a Limerick Coursing Club meeting on his estate in Clorane in 1878 because of the complete ‘annihilation’ of hares on his preserves.<sup>693</sup> The frustration of legal hunters at the brazen–ness of lawless hunters also had an undisguised class political tone. A decrier of the practice of ‘poaching with impunity’ at Ballinacurra, just outside Limerick city, noted the contempt for the law of two parties of the ‘corner boy class.’<sup>694</sup> It is somewhat ironic too that the unlicensed, illegal hunt supporting many, among them some of that apparently disreputable class, denied access to the legal hunting minority in the Land War and Plan of Campaign eras of ‘stopping the hunt.’<sup>695</sup>

John Christopher Delmege J.P., landlord, conservative activist and scourge of corner boys and poachers, was a typical target of the 1880s hunt saboteurs. Throughout this period his family’s sporting (shooting) excursions received much local attention.<sup>696</sup> A County Limerick Foxhounds hunt in late 1885 had to be abandoned because the Master would not accede to protesters’ requests to refuse to let one of the Delmege to participate. The protesters objected only to Delmege and were prepared to allow the hunt to continue if he were absent – a considerable concession in those excited times.<sup>697</sup> Delmege was not passive in his reactions to poaching: he became the most assiduous defender of the privileges of land ownership and game and pursued poachers

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<sup>691</sup> LC 27 Nov 1873.

<sup>692</sup> LC 24, 29 Dec 1874.

<sup>693</sup> LC 23 Nov 1878.

<sup>694</sup> LC 29 Sept 1883.

<sup>695</sup> Philpin, C. H. E., (ed.), *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987).

<sup>696</sup> LC 6 Feb 1873; 12 Aug 1879; 17 Aug 1880; 15 Aug 1882.

<sup>697</sup> LC 22 Dec 1885.

single-mindedly.<sup>698</sup> In the most heated months of the early Land War in late 1881 he was selected as a target for a Land League hunt by which he was to be deprived of all his game by a large crowd. He was alerted to the planned attack on his preserves and with the force of police and army behind him thwarted the popular movement to kill off his game. The league hunting party similarly received intelligence of the force ranged against them and they discreetly failed to turn up. The rage people felt towards him before the abortive hunt can be guessed, but is as nothing compared to the frustrated ambitions of the crowd denied its thrill and satisfaction. The Land League hunt phenomenon, in this case unfulfilled, was a powerful form of political and sporting enterprise, and perhaps all the more effective because of the personal impact on an unfavoured landlord.<sup>699</sup>

Between the helplessness of most landlords and the hard-line attitude of Delmege there seemed few alternative approaches to poaching from the landlord class. Efforts at combination to tackle the problem were notable by their absence. It was observed from as far away as Dublin that ‘the state of the river [at Castleconnell] reflects the greatest discredit upon those who have the conservancy of it.’<sup>700</sup> Landlords seem to have decided to weather the storm, individually, as best they could, islands of game being poached one by one. A suggestion to form a group to prevent poaching on the Shannon and Lough Derg was not a success when made in 1886.<sup>701</sup>

One landlord, Massy Dawson from Newport in Tipperary, was a practitioner of the middle ground approach that might be termed ‘killing poaching with kindness.’ In 1877 he gave permission for a coursing match on his lands at which five hundred men

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<sup>698</sup> *LC* 21 July; 25 Aug 1866; 25, 27 Nov 1873; 5 Dec 1876; 25 Apr 1878; 12 Feb 1887.

<sup>699</sup> *LC* 29 Dec 1881.

<sup>700</sup> *ISF*, 30 Apr 1870.

<sup>701</sup> *LC* 23 June 1885.

attended.<sup>702</sup> It is unclear his exact motivation for such largesse, but by adopting such a conciliatory attitude towards the hunting passions of his neighbours he was setting himself at a distance from the stance of many landlords in North Munster. Dawson's approach created more goodwill towards him and his preserves than no amount of legal and policing initiatives could equal and on his passing few Irish landlords of the era received the acclaim of locals he enjoyed.<sup>703</sup> The hope that by engaging with local hunters and facilitating their sport, within reason, it might lead to better game preservation outcomes was a wise course between the Scylla of passivity and the Charybdis of draconian policing.<sup>704</sup> Massy Dawson's approach may also be equated with an attempt to 'launder' the sporting practice of the outlaw hunters.

In the second half of the nineteenth century there was a second category of sports – 'battery' or lawn sports – and of these cricket was the most important. Because cricket shared grounds, personnel and patrons with sports like croquet, lawn tennis and archery these sports ought to be considered as a package. As tennis grew cricket and croquet suffered, suggesting that they were all the preserve of a single, small sporting constituency.

### **Cricket**

Cricket was the first field game to be organised in the region.<sup>705</sup> The two key clubs in Limerick's cricket story are Limerick and Stoneville (a townland between Rathkeale and Newcastle West in West Limerick). The Stoneville club pre-dates 1850; it catered for players from Rathkeale, Newcastle West and other areas of West Limerick and had

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<sup>702</sup> *LC* 27 Nov 1877. Among the five hundred must have been many poachers. Dawson's gamekeeper was embroiled in a dispute with 'many persons' of the crowd and one spectator named Slattery was killed by a gunshot during that dispute.

<sup>703</sup> For a local view on his 'career', Marnane, Denis G., *Tipperary Historical Journal*, 1991, 124-5.

<sup>704</sup> Cork M.P., president of Cork Anglers Club similarly generous towards 'humble piscators' *ISF* 30 Apr 1870.

<sup>705</sup> *LC* 15 May, 5, 19 June 1850, 10 May, 27, 30 Aug, 20 Sept 1851, 8 May 1852, *LC* 15, 27 Apr 1865, 2, 9 May, 8 Aug 1868, 13 May 1869.

a successful four decades after that year.<sup>706</sup> The Limerick club had a less successful 1850s and 1860s than the Stoneville club, experiencing many formations, but it became a standard bearer of the sport and an engine for other sports development soon after its final incarnation in 1871.<sup>707</sup> In contrast to Stoneville's success two of Clare's early clubs found it more propitious to coalesce to ensure survival; the Ennis CC and the Clare County CC amalgamated in 1865, adopting the rules of the county club. The arrears of the county club were paid off. In the first practice match of the new club in the 1866 season the club could only muster one team of four and another of five players, this suggests certain financial and numerical playing strength issues at play in the background.<sup>708</sup>

In the third quarter of the century most cricket clubs had field and numerical strength difficulties and skill deficiencies, but while cricket experienced these problems its wide geographical spread and distribution, relatively high level of organisation, access to patronage and institutional support and its relative popularity marked it out as an important element of the sporting culture and infrastructure of the second half of the nineteenth century.

In 1865 Limerick, Clare and that part of Tipperary contiguous with Limerick possessed sixteen clubs with varying levels of activity, success and longevity. The final third of the century saw a growth in the numbers of villages and towns boasting clubs. Figure Three is a graph describing the number of cricket clubs shown to be in existence at some time between 1865 and 1887. The slope of the graph in Figure Three shows a steady, but small growth in the number of clubs between 1865 and 1872. From 1873 to

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<sup>706</sup> *LC* 18 May 1850. Stoneville is a big house between Newcastle West and Rathkeale in West Limerick. The membership of the club came from this wide area.

<sup>707</sup> What is called the Limerick Club was defeated by a team from the Royal Horse Artillery, *LC* 26 July, 13, 16 Aug 1851, 5, 8 May 1852. What is called the City of Limerick Cricket Club played a game against Newcastle West, *LC* 16, 23, 28 July 1868. Delight at a plan to form a cricket club, *LC* 15, 25 Apr 1871.

<sup>708</sup> *LC* 15 Apr 1865, 31 May 1866.

1877 a tremendous rate of growth in the number of clubs was experienced, before the cricket scene resumed the same slow model of growth from 1878 to 1887.<sup>709</sup> By 1887, sixty-two clubs were noted as practising the game in Limerick and neighbouring districts of surrounding counties *at sometime* in that twenty-three year period.

Care must be taken interpreting in the gross figures. The figure of sixteen clubs in 1865 is the total for clubs that played cricket in the decade and a half before that year.<sup>710</sup> It does not mean that there were sixteen clubs offering opposition to each other nor does it mean those clubs had continuous existences in all that time or that they were fated to still be in existence in the 1880s. The graph describes simply a running total of clubs that can be shown to have had a presence in the Limerick sporting infrastructure of the previous half of the century.

Between 1873 and 1877 twenty-seven clubs, whose existence had been unknown up to that half decade, began to appear in cricket reports.<sup>711</sup> It is reasonable to assume they were formed in that period or only sometime before it. This number is forty four per

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<sup>709</sup> All dates correspond to editions of the *Limerick Chronicle*. Clanwilliam, 12 July 1879; Milford, 31 July 1879; Castletown Conyers, 24 July 1880; West Clare CC, 4 Oct 1881; Doneraile, 5, 9 Sept 1882; Sacred Heart College, 24 May 1883; Limerick Wanderers, 27 May 1884; Ralahine CC, 18 Apr 1885; Limerick Rovers CC, 25 June 1885; Kilnasoolagh CC played a return game against Limerick Rovers at Rosbrien in Limerick on a Sunday implying both RC teams, 17 Sept 1885; Clonagh CC, 27 July 1886; Cork Hardknockers, 12 Aug 1886; LPYMA set up a cricket and lawn tennis club for its members, 18 June 1887.

<sup>710</sup> All dates correspond to editions of the *Limerick Chronicle*. Queen's County Cricket Club, 15 May 1850; Stoneville CC, 18 May 1850; in July 1851 a report of a match between the Newcastle and Stoneville Clubs, 19, 30 July; 2, 6, 9 Aug 1851; LC 9, 13, 16 Aug 1851; Clonmel, 5, 19 June 1850; Adare CC, 10 May 1851; 13 May 1869; Limerick Club, 26 July; 13, 16 Aug 1851; 5, 8 May 1852; 16, 23, 28 July 1868; 15, 25 Apr 1871; Killaloe, 27 Aug 1851; Ballynagarde, 27, 30 Aug 1851; Nenagh CC, 27 Aug; 20 Sept 1851; 8 May 1852; 2, 9 May; 8 Aug 1868; Original Garryowen Cricket Club, 27 Apr 1865; The Ennis CC and the Clare County CC amalgamated in 1865, 15 Apr 1865; 31 May 1866; Kildimo, 27 June 1865; 22, 29 July 1871. Kilkee, 27 June; 31 Aug 1865; Doonass CC, 5 Aug 1865; Ballingarry, 5 Aug 1865; Ballinamona, 10, 21 Oct 1865; 10 July 1866; Charleville, 10, 21 Oct 1865; Castleconnell, 18 Aug 1868; Cahir, 18 Aug 1868; Pallaskenry CC, 6 Oct 1868; 27 Mar 1869; Newmarket on Fergus (Woodpark), 2 July 1870; Castlegarde, 22 July 1871; 16 July 1872; 5 July 1873; Munster Bar, 22 July 1871; Gort, 17 Sept 1872.

<sup>711</sup> All dates correspond to editions of the *Limerick Chronicle*. Gort, 17 Sept 1872; Mallow, 29 Apr 1873; Ennis College, 10 May 1873; see also Barne's College Ennis, 16 May 1874; Abbey (Tipperary), 22, 29 May 1873; Thurles, 29 May; 14 June 1873; Rockhill, 12 July 1873; Home Rule CC (Newcastle West), 24 July 1873; Rock (Cashel), 24 July 1873; Templemore, 24 July 1873; Newport School, 2 Aug 1873; Clarina, 19 Aug 1873; Tipperary, 12 May 1874; Killadysert CC, 26 May 1874; Dundrum CC, 7 July 1874; Limerick Junction, 21 July 1874 – presumably the same as Ballykisteen, 30 July 1874; South Tipperary, 20 Aug 1874; Mount Trenchard, 8 May 1875; Castletroy, 17 July 1875; Castle Ievers, 17 July 1875; Kilrush CC, 24 Aug 1875; Star CC, 13 June 1876; Listowel, 9 Sept 1876; Tulla, 12 Sept 1876; Kilfinane, 19 June 1877; Kilcosgriff, 28 June 1877; Kilcolman CC, 31 July 1877; Shanagolden CC, 31 July 1877; Kilmurry CC, 25 Sept 1877; Cragave CC, 25 Sept 1877.

cent of the entire number of clubs shown to exist in the period and is clear evidence of the growing popularity of the game. The growth of the game tapered off by 1878, indicating that the rise of the sport had plateaued.

Most of the clubs that appear in these decades were community clubs intimately connected to local notables in the gentry or aristocracy.<sup>712</sup> Stoneville CC was important in fostering the game in the west of County Limerick. Later, when the Newcastle West section could sustain a club of its own the Newcastle contingent abandoned Stoneville, leaving a rump club.<sup>713</sup> From the mid 1860s there was a creditable amount of cricketing activity by Stoneville, now called Rathkeale CC and which once played under the title Incogniti in 1886.<sup>714</sup> Given its big house origins and such an esoteric designation this was not a club of working class or even farm labourers, confirming cricket's status as an elite sponsored sport. To the east of Rathkeale was an even more fashionable and socially exclusive club sponsored by the Earl of Dunraven and Mountearl, Adare CC.<sup>715</sup> Dating from 1851, it had an interrupted lifespan, for instance, when it was revived in 1869 it was described as a young club.<sup>716</sup> Further illustrating the elite society origins of the sport in the county was the main mover behind Newcastle West CC, Edward Curling. He was agent to the trustees of the Devon estate, member of the Newcastle Union and of Desmond Masonic Lodge, number 202.<sup>717</sup> The local Church of Ireland bishop patronised a Killaloe cricketing tradition by letting out his demesne for the purpose for several years before 1851.<sup>718</sup> Another Limerick notable, John Croker, laid out a cricketing ground at his home in Ballynagarde in 1851, a

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<sup>712</sup> Progress of cricket due to 'high example and noble patronage', *ISF* 14 May 1870.

<sup>713</sup> One game pitted the two localities against each other with the Rathkeale lads victorious, *LC* 17, 21 Aug 1850. In July 1851 a report exists of a match between the Newcastle and Stoneville Clubs, but the report of the return match labels the Stoneville side as Rathkeale, *LC* 19, 30 July; 2, 6, 9 Aug 1851. Stoneville was interchangeable with Rathkeale at this time, *LC* 9, 13, 16 Aug 1851. Match at Newcastle West, civilians versus military, plus a return, both won by civilians, *LC* 9, 16 Oct 1850.

<sup>714</sup> Rathkeale Incogniti emerged, *LC* 27 July 1886.

<sup>715</sup> *LC* 10 May 1851.

<sup>716</sup> *LC* 15 May 1869.

<sup>717</sup> *LC* 6 Aug, 8 Nov 1851, 21 Jan 1852.

<sup>718</sup> *LC* 27 Aug 1851.

subsequent cricketing tradition is observable after this practical commitment.<sup>719</sup> Baron Monteagle similarly supported the batting game in Mount Trenchard, near Foynes.<sup>720</sup> Many middle class proto-clubs devoted to cricket appeared in the seventh and eighth decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>721</sup> Some of these were holiday clubs, formed by the temporary inhabitants of resort towns like Kilkee: for example, West End CC, George's Head CC, Sir C. Fitzgerald's XI and W.L. Gubbins's XI all played there in August 1879.<sup>722</sup>

Further illustration of the advantaged, establishment, increasingly middle-class and loyalist credentials of the game and its supporters, at least in the early decades of formal organisation was the presence of loyalist iconography, the employment of military bands at the sport's key events and the practice of playing games against military opposition. The patronage of cricket in its early formative and organisational period placed the sponsoring landlords in the position of sporting viceroys.<sup>723</sup> The *tableaux* constructed around a cricket game stressed the hierarchical nature of the gathering with the landlord standing in for the crown. A Sunday school excursion that included cricket at Ballinarry in 1851 and concluded with a recitation of 'God save the Queen' was typical of Sunday school outings.<sup>724</sup> Many school and Sunday school outings also added three cheers for the health of the monarch to the anthem. The Queen's position at the head of the established church placed this duty on the organisers of such events for children, but the confluence of religious and political symbolism behind these practices lent the events a sectarian character in the pre-disestablishment years and a political aspect from the 1870s on. The Limerick County

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<sup>719</sup> LC 27 Aug 1851.

<sup>720</sup> LC 8 May 1875.

<sup>721</sup> Mr. Thwaite's XI, Mr. Considine's XI, Mr. Keays's XI, Mr. Wallace's XI, Mr. Cooper's XI, Mr. W.J. Evans's XI, Mr. Cooper Chadwick's (Ballinard), Mr. Walter Ryan's (Scarteen), F.B. Henn's XI, Rev. Smith's XI, Mr. Harkness's XI, Mr. Deane's team, H. Thompson's XI. LC 15, 24, 26, 31 Aug 1865, 6 Aug 1868, 24 July, 5 Aug 1871, 13 July 1872, 14 Aug 1873, 30 May, 8 June 1876, 7 June 1877.

<sup>722</sup> LC 2, 4 Aug 1870.

<sup>723</sup> ISF, 14 May 1870.

<sup>724</sup> LC 2 Aug 1851.

Cricket Club always included that anthem whenever a band (invariably a military one) was engaged to play in the ground on match days.<sup>725</sup> Sometimes military bands played at the ground even when no game was fixed. This form of entertainment was supported by the LCCC community, but the reservation to the club's private space of this tribute to the Queen – outside the barracks it was one of the few places regimental bands performed – meant that the club's ground could be interpreted by some to be an extension of the barracks. In 1882 there were threats made against the club judged serious enough to have police assigned to guard the clubhouse nightly from its antagonists.<sup>726</sup>

The military's involvement in cricket was considerable, but not critical. Military players did supplement numbers in the squads of local cricket clubs. Of course, many of these players may have been locals in the army, but the majority were from visiting English, Scottish and Welsh regiments. Deeper research is needed into the squad lists of local cricket teams to quantify the absolute contribution of visiting military to Limerick's cricket teams, but anecdotal evidence suggests that three or four players from the local barracks was an average contribution to such sides. This was not always required though; it is also likely that the military were called on to support community teams even when the community team had the numbers, but did not have the quality of player demanded for certain fixtures.

The contribution of the military to cricket by providing sporting opposition to civilian cricket clubs is easier to quantify. In the twenty three years from 1865 to 1887, 325 match reports and confirmed fixtures indicate that ninety two games involved army versus civilian cricket contests. This is twenty eight per cent of the total. Civilian

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<sup>725</sup> LC 28, 30 July 1881, 12 Aug 1882.

<sup>726</sup> LC 20 June 1882.



versus civilian games accounted for the remaining seventy two percent of games (233 in total).

These figures were skewed slightly by the LCCC's arrangements to play a greater number of military sides during the 1880s than that club had played in the previous decade. The LCCC was, in the late 1870s and through the 1880s, a stuttering club; it was reliant on military sides to provide opposition despite the large number of clubs in the county and surrounding counties and the LCCC was also devoting more energy to its lawn tennis branch.<sup>727</sup> The teams against which the LCCC might have instead arranged games went uninvited. As the game was then going through a transition to middle class control many of those teams were not of sufficient standing to justify LCCC agreeing to play them. By propping up the LCCC's 1880s exclusive cricket programme, the military merely confirmed for many the irredeemable loyalist and establishment character of the city's cricket club.<sup>728</sup> The entire 1883 season of the LCCC depended on military opposition, with only one non-military side reported offering opposition to the club, and that was the equally establishment Cork County CC.<sup>729</sup> It is curious why the LCCC failed to offer leadership to more cricketing enthusiasts and did not make greater strides to realise the latent demand for organised sports, particularly in the 1870s and 1880s when organised sport blossomed. A measure of its failure was the fact that the LPYMA set up its own cricket and lawn tennis club in 1887.<sup>730</sup> This association was part of the natural constituency of the LCCC and by not accommodating those young Protestant men and women in its sporting enterprises it cut off a future stream of talent, support and finance. The LCCC was a club first and for cricket second.

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<sup>727</sup> *LC* 22 Sept 1883, 11 July 1885.

<sup>728</sup> *LC* 1 July, 26, 28 Aug 1880, 5, 7 May, 2, 25 Aug, 1, 8, 13 Sept 1881, 11, 13, 16 May, 22 June, 4 July, 10, 12, 19 Aug 1882.

<sup>729</sup> *LC* 29 Mar, 7, 14 Apr, 17, 19, 24 May, 2, 7, 9, 28 June, 5, 19 July, 18 Aug, 13, 22 Sept 1883.

<sup>730</sup> *LC* 18, 23, 28 June 1887.

Despite the LCCC's attempt to retain an exclusive cachet for the sport, many cricket clubs in the 1870s and 1880s do not correspond to the earlier 1850s and 1860s notions of the cricket club described above.<sup>731</sup> Cricket infiltrated its way into the sporting infrastructure and succeeded in expanding its class appeal – the prime example of this is the Nenagh CC.<sup>732</sup> This club, though a typical establishment club changed its social focus and direction over the years to establish itself as a more popular club and as the premier sports club of middle class North Tipperary (it even possessed its own band).<sup>733</sup> A telling review of the state of Irish cricket in 1870 in the *Irish Sportsman and Farmer* corroborates this theory that cricket was devolving down the Irish social scale.

‘The game has ceased to be the exclusive prerogative of the higher classes, and though it is hardly likely that it will ever spread throughout the villages and hamlets, or achieve the popularity with the Irish peasant of hurling or football; in the towns, and among the artisan classes, it still promises further to extend itself. ... And when *the* sex manifests so much interest in a masculine game, it is pretty certain the men will take to it with increased ardour.’<sup>734</sup>

The progress of cricket in the 1870s faltered towards the end of that decade and, as the example of the LCCC shows, this was the decade of the social broadening of the game. Cricket seemed to suffer something of what was termed at the turn of the millennium, the ‘Burberry effect’, whereby apparel that was once an indispensable part of an English home–counties lifestyle became contaminated when that marker of class and social standing was appropriated by the lower orders. The concern of the Limerick County Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club that its character not to be ‘vulgarised’ certainly indicates the real possibility of an earlier, local expression of the Burberry effect.<sup>735</sup>

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<sup>731</sup> LC 14 July 1847.

<sup>732</sup> NG 14 Oct 1876.

<sup>733</sup> LC 20 Sept 1851.

<sup>734</sup> ISF, 28 May 1870.

<sup>735</sup> LC 31 July 1883.

One indicator of the increased middle-class character of the game was the seriousness of the clubs' approach to results. The elite clubs seemed less bound up with the outcome of games as winning and losing sides were equally rewarded by the social whirl surrounding games. Middle-class clubs, on the other hand, were more devoted to performance and less concerned with the social ballyhoo. A highly contentious practice among many clubs in this period was the use of the term *an XI* in place of *the XI* of a cricket club.<sup>736</sup> Just as clubs that had limited skills among their player pools resorted to drafting useful players from regiments in the local barracks, the mere change of designation of a team could impact on how the performance of the club side was viewed. For example, a club facing certain defeat and lacking soldier backing could describe its team as *an XI* of the club. If the side won it would suggest to all that its second string side was able to win a game, but if they lost the defeat would sting less because the club's entire honour had not been staked. This practice was resorted to on many occasions. The changed designation practice was particularly useful if the opposing club was not seen to have an equal social standing with the first club, as if the idea of playing that club was *infra dig*. This was certainly the case when Clarina, a new club and not a power, had the temerity to beat *an XI* of Adare in 1873.<sup>737</sup>

The Adare team represented an economically strong, secure and model parish against its less powerful and influential neighbour; though reports of the game are silent on the wider meaning of the result, the negative outcome for the more powerful protagonist fitted a David versus Goliath narrative that is a staple of sports commentary and reportage, then and now. Sport's ability to exploit well known dramatic templates is just one of its arsenal of tricks allowing it to compete against and 'slay' rival cultural projects. A first team defeated by a second or third team was, in this era, akin to

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<sup>736</sup> An XI of LCCC versus Abbey, LC 29 May 1873.

<sup>737</sup> LC 19 Aug 1873.

Sancho Panza or a squire defeating a mounted knight in a jousting contest – an outcome not to be permitted by the more socially significant contestant. The many squabbles over cricket team designation (and later in rugby union) illustrate a hyper-sensitivity to defeat by social inferiors.

The report of one 1873 LCCC game against Newcastle West described the Limerick side as *an XI*, causing disgruntlement to Newcastle West members and supporters.<sup>738</sup>

The LCCC seem to have had difficulty putting out its best side that summer; the representative side to play Thurles was also labelled *an XI*, as was the team to play the Rifle regiment then in town.<sup>739</sup> This distinction was obviously important to the gentlemen of the club because the second string of the club truly was a second degree sporting power. This was seen in the matching of the first eight or eleven against the second fifteen or twenty of the club in a practice game later that month, June 1873.<sup>740</sup>

Indicating the paucity of talent among the second string, and perhaps a little class distinction, the club professional was also deputed to play with the lesser players.

## Croquet

Croquet was a minority sport associated, like archery and tennis after it, with garden parties and the big house.<sup>741</sup> Some 1872 suggestions for the proper purpose of the People's Park in Limerick, planned through the early 1870s, placed cricket, croquet and archery together – tennis was two years from invention and patenting yet.<sup>742</sup>

Though this suggestion was made it was not acted upon and the sport remained behind the walls of the gentry's estates. One Plassey House croquet event in 1868 was a

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<sup>738</sup> *LC* 3, 14 June 1873.

<sup>739</sup> *LC* 14, 17 June 1873.

<sup>740</sup> *LC* 17, 21 June 1873.

<sup>741</sup> Thomas M. Bourke of 120, George Street, Limerick knew his market and advertised cricket, archery, fishing, croquet and other games equipment to the elite, *LC* 11 May 1865. Countrywide croquet was often grouped with archery in sports clubs; Co. Longford Archery and Croquet Club, Rock (Cashel) Archery and Croquet Club, *ISF* 28 May, 30 July 1870.

<sup>742</sup> *LC* 27, 29 June 1872.

morning garden party given by Mrs. R. Russell for the nobility and gentry of the county and officers of the garrison. A splendid tent was erected in front of ‘the fine croquet ground.’<sup>743</sup> The County Clare resort village of Miltown Malbay held a croquet match in the same year and men and women both competed.<sup>744</sup> The curiously and indecipherably titled OKC Croquet and Tennis Club, which is mentioned in 1876, is the only mention of a proto-club or a formally organised club for croquet in the entire period.<sup>745</sup> This club, about which we know frustratingly little, nevertheless offers some interesting speculations. Two possibilities exist about the history and lineage of this club. First, an earlier croquet club may have grafted tennis onto its repertoire when tennis was patented in 1874, or second, the club emerged after 1874 following the patenting of lawn tennis and may have incorporated croquet for some or all of its members. It is almost an invariable rule that one club or association begat another in the middle of the nineteenth century and that the likelihood of a club being formed, *sui generis*, for two separate sporting purposes in this period is extremely low. In fact, this is the only example of a club formation with two sporting codes in its title in the entire period of this study. In all probability, therefore, a croquet club existed, to which the club added lawn tennis, and we can be certain that this addition was the death-knell for the earlier croquet tradition in that district. After tennis’s arrival croquet remained in the solitary gardens of the gentry and a rare report of croquet at a Sunday school excursion in 1882 was the last reference to it in that decade.<sup>746</sup>

An 1869 croquet outfitters and equipment suppliers’ advertisement for a sale of equipment for this ‘popular and amusing outdoor game’ sought to clear the stock by reducing the price from 40s to 22s 6d, an understandable reduction for an out-of-season product. To ensure ‘speedy clearance’, however, extra equipment and a rules

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<sup>743</sup> LC 9 July 1868.

<sup>744</sup> LC 3 Sept 1868.

<sup>745</sup> LC 19 Aug 1876.

<sup>746</sup> LC 10 June 1882.

book were also offered as inducements.<sup>747</sup> 1875 was an ominous year for croquet as lawn tennis had begun its irresistible march along the gentry's gardens.<sup>748</sup> The All Ireland Croquet Champion Club held its second annual meeting in 1875 at Lansdowne Road in Dublin.<sup>749</sup> By failing to establish a national beach-head for the sport of croquet, the promoters of this initiative ceded the ground, literally, to lawn tennis; despite croquet's near three decades start on lawn tennis its organisational inertia marked it out as the nineteenth century's dodo sport.

Cricket, croquet, archery and lawn tennis were each in their formative stages hugely associated with the 'big house' in Ireland. With the exception of cricket all exhibited near equal male/female participation figures, emphasised decorum and values in the rhetoric of the games, and these sports experienced varying fates. The different evolutions of each related to levels of organisation, gender balance, the vigour of the sport and the sports ability to garner new audiences and participants. Any complaints about the sedate nature of croquet do not account for chess's superior claim to that crown, and yet chess became formally organised and grew in a way croquet did not. One 1875 analysis of the mania for lawn tennis concluded that tennis's cheapness gave it an edge over other sports, ignoring the fact that the racket (and bat and mallet) game was played by a socio-economic cohort for whom cost was not the deciding factor in participation.<sup>750</sup>

Some discussion of archery provided a hint of the narrow confines of this cohort of sportspeople and suggested a pedestrian social dynamic in the garden sports world. In a letter supporting the introduction of the Munster Archers Club in 1865, 'Strongbow' (archery letter writers lacked humility and imagination in their choice of pseudonym)

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<sup>747</sup> *LC* 9 Oct 1869.

<sup>748</sup> *IT* 18 May, 3 June 1875. Wexford Archers annual ball, *IT* 10 Dec 1875.

<sup>749</sup> *LC* 17 Aug 1875.

<sup>750</sup> *LC* 29 July 1875

said the Castleconnell Archery Society meetings were exclusive, limited, 'heavy' and repetitive affairs. He also pointed out the lack of handicapping that left the same shots to win again and again, suffocating the urge among the less talented to practice. Strongbow's hope was that the amalgamation of the archery clubs would lead to more exciting, more widely based, more sociable and more competitive days out.<sup>751</sup> His hopes may have been realised, if only temporarily, but the ultimate failure of the sport to progress may be down to two factors. First, that in its amalgamated form archery was not as attractive to people as it was in its less formal, smaller, more intimate atmosphere. A second possibility exists that the relatively narrow county scene could muster a cricket team (male) and tennis club (male and female participants), but was unable to sponsor a croquet and archery club in addition to these exciting, player intensive and popular pursuits. An explanation that cricket and lawn tennis crowded out the less vigorous, more feminised, exclusive, domestic and decorous sports with which it competed for adherents seems the most likely explanation for archery's and croquet's inability to take off. Cricket and tennis worked better outside the confines of the big house straitjacket, but archery and croquet could continue quite well within the walls of this 'golden ghetto', so when big house declined so did the sports that relied solely on its protection and embrace. The decline of this ghetto has been charted elegantly by Dooley, among others, who has noted the near century long decline in status and means of this once powerful group in society. By the 1930s, Dooley concluded that 'Lavish dinners, balls and hunting parties were a thing of the past.'<sup>752</sup> More importantly, the ghetto actually became even more 'psychologically' 'insular' than ever before under the pressure of the Troubles in the teens and twenties of the twentieth century, representing the final destruction of one of the key agencies of the

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<sup>751</sup> LC 17 June 1865.

<sup>752</sup> Dooley, Terence, *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland*, (Wolfhound, Dublin, 2001), 276.

organisation and development of sport in Limerick and Ireland from the eighteenth century onwards.<sup>753</sup>

The association of croquet and archery with feminine sport in an era of hypermasculinised sports development must also have had a negative impact on male participation in the sport – surely one of the attractions for the women who enjoyed the sport. If those men deserted the archery game for cricket, one crutch on which the hoops game rested would have been removed and its fall would have been natural. It is possible many women gave up active participation in ‘their’ sports to become passive participants i.e. spectators in the cricket scene. The frequency with which the attendance of women at cricket matches was noted does grow through the 1870s.<sup>754</sup>

The report of a cricket match in 1875 between HMS Defence CC and Newcastle West CC where the arrival of many ladies at lunchtime lent a ‘scene of charm impossible to surpass.’<sup>755</sup> Equally notable was the presence of the rank and ‘beauty’ of Tipperary at the Abbey School athletic sports in 1881.<sup>756</sup>

Croquet was supplanted in the ‘country houses’ by the lawn tennis mania of the late 1870s. Observers quickly saw the writing on the wall for croquet – only months after its introduction to Limerick, but, like Belshazzar, they similarly failed to act.<sup>757</sup> The formation of the tennis section in the Limerick County Cricket Club opened up the game to ‘many townfolk who don’t care for cricket or who don’t have gardens to hold it.’ By escaping the confines of the big house organised tennis expanded its appeal to the gardenless many. This demonstrates the evolutionary principle in which sports

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<sup>753</sup> *ibid*, 275.

<sup>754</sup> *ISF*, 28 May 1870.

<sup>755</sup> *LC* 15 May 1875.

<sup>756</sup> *LC* 14 June 1881. Also *LC* 19 Oct 1869, 13 Aug 1870.

<sup>757</sup> *LC* 29 July 1875.



were involved in a ceaseless, churning, competitive contest for human resources and audiences.

Croquet and archery were squeezed by the twin appeals of cricket and lawn tennis, whose headquarters at the County Cricket grounds on the Ennis Road in Limerick City rapidly became a social and cultural whirlpool in the 1870s and 1880s. The popularity of the Limerick Skating Rink, on Military Road (now O'Connell Avenue) which also opened in 1876, must also have had the effect of further distracting the bow and mallet wielders from their pursuits.<sup>758</sup> The Limerick Rink, though a commercial, public venue, nevertheless, became a site for the exclusionary principles of the croquet and archery variety. In 1879 a club was formed, expensive and exclusive, that had the capacity to book out the rink solely for its members, getting rid of the need for this club's members to risk rubbing shoulders with the less genteel customers of that establishment. The social and cultural hegemony of the big house on the sporting and cultural life of the county was thus broken, even in those sports that it sponsored, by the mid-1870s. These sports' secession from the gentry's patronage and control by those sports is further evidence of the privatisation of sport. In effect, middle-class agencies centralised and rationalised the practice of sports, denying the big house patrons their ability to govern and administer the sports into the future.

Croquet was one of a set of sports, including steeplechasing and showjumping, that emerged in the form of a modern organised sport in Ireland and can claim, in effect, to be Irish in the same manner in which cricket is English – yet these sports' claims upon nationalist imaginations were not pursued and the discourses about patriotism, Ireland and sport in the decades before 1884 proceeded without acknowledging the debt to the originators of these sports. Nationalists were not the only ones with ambivalent

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<sup>758</sup> LC 13, 20, May, 1, 3, 15, 17, 20, June 1876.

attitudes to the cultural and political significance of sports that developed in Ireland or with an extensive Irish input. Loyalist, Tory and later Conservative and Unionist Ireland had a difficulty celebrating the Irishness of these Irish sports and at the same time maintaining its political stance.

### **Lawn Tennis**

Lawn tennis was introduced to the Limerick County Cricket Club's programme of activities, one year after its invention, in April 1875.<sup>759</sup> Within three months it began to overshadow the other main garden sport, croquet.<sup>760</sup> Inside three years tennis had completely supplanted croquet and reached such a critical mass that the local club's annual tournament appropriated the title 'grand' – the only Limerick sports event that could justifiably defend this designation.<sup>761</sup> Tennis was such a rage in late 1870s Limerick that cricketers and footballers outside the region attributed Limerick's, then, poor record in those sports to mania for the racket game.<sup>762</sup> Outsider views of the neglect of cricket by the county club in favour of tennis were corroborated by the despondent report of a crushing defeat of the cricketers on the last day of the 1883 season.<sup>763</sup> The gloomy prediction in that report that there would be a cricket club with no cricket seemed prescient; by 1885 the grounds of the club had sixteen tennis courts and a cricketing culture that to many seemed dead.<sup>764</sup> Given this timing, the conclusion that Limerick cricket was 'murdered' on the tennis court by a racket wielding, white clad aristocrat and not a sturdy son of the soil with a *camán* in hand is tempting, but

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<sup>759</sup> LC 20 Apr 1875.

<sup>760</sup> LC 29 July 1875.

<sup>761</sup> LC 29 June, 26 Sept 1878.

<sup>762</sup> Garnham, Neal, *The origins and development of football in Ireland; being a reprint of R.M. Peter's Irish Football Annual of 1880, (introduction by Garnham)*, (Ulster Historical Foundation, Belfast, 1999), 65. Hone, William Patrick, *Cricket in Ireland*, (Kerryman Press, Tralee, 1955), 85-6.

<sup>763</sup> LC 22 Sept 1883.

<sup>764</sup> LC 11, 18 July 1885.

the conclusion cannot be gainsaid; tennis undermined cricket sufficiently for the GAA to apply the *coup de grâce*.

Throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century tennis was under the aegis of the Limerick County Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club.<sup>765</sup> The fact that the earlier cricket club (formed in 1871) became a tennis club with a cricket team attached demonstrates a tremendous flux in the sporting sensibilities of Limerick's middle class in the 1880s. The cricket club was, in a sense, subsumed or cannibalised by its offspring – a case of the farrow eating the sow. It was also an indicator that the tendency of one club to generate or spawn other club offspring was not simply a positive evolutionary process whereby two single clubs emerged from one parent, but a parasitic relationship often existed to the detriment of the host club and the gain of the newer body.

Following Limerick city's example more towns including Listowel, Adare, Kilkee, and Killaloe began to host tournaments.<sup>766</sup> Kilkee was the town outside Limerick most concerned to possess tennis facilities because it would make that seaside resort more attractive to visitors and boost business.<sup>767</sup> Lawn tennis parties flourished through the 1880s; in one example a tennis 'party' provided the overture to a grand social occasion at Castleconnell in July 1883. It was followed by a ball on an 'extensive scale.'<sup>768</sup> It must be noted that much tennis activity took place in private gardens with equipment sourced from one of the many retailers in Limerick then advertising tennis paraphernalia.<sup>769</sup>

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<sup>765</sup> LC 20 Apr 1875, 3 May 1887.

<sup>766</sup> LC 3, 8 Sept 1881, 29 Aug, 5, 7 Sept 1882, 23, 26 Aug 1884, 18 June 1885, 2 Sept 1886, 9 Aug 1890.

<sup>767</sup> LC 25 Aug 1885.

<sup>768</sup> LC 17 Sept 1878.

<sup>769</sup> LC 27 July 1886.

Tennis was patronised by the elite of society as evidenced by the report of the after match ball at the Athenaeum in 1886.<sup>770</sup> The surveillance placed on the social standing of potential tennis club members, however, could not be more explicitly stated than in an 1883 editorial in the *Limerick Chronicle* recommending that the sport ‘must not be vulgarised.’<sup>771</sup> Despite this restriction on access to the sport, tennis had the merit of being open to both sexes and this novelty in the sporting infrastructure of the period led to a thriving social scene around the game. For one participant lawn tennis was ‘now most fashionable’, enjoyed by ‘the grave and the gay, the young and the old.’<sup>772</sup>

The game had opportunities to exploit the potential of other playing surfaces, for example, the skating rink premises, to expand the season even into winter months.<sup>773</sup> Yet, such avenues were not explored and the game fought to keep its exclusive and summer party character. This character was also maintained by a rather strict ticketing policy, at least in comparison with other sports, at the annual Limerick Lawn Tennis Tournament.<sup>774</sup> While this fitted the social demands of the game, a chance to expand the reach and size of the tennis community was temporarily lost. One limited exception to this rule was a tennis contest on the frozen river Feale at Listowel in 1881 that provided ‘general amusement’ to a large crowd.<sup>775</sup> By the late 1880s some of this exclusivity began to falter and when a tennis and cricket club attached to the Limerick Protestant Young Men’s Association was formed in 1887 it led to a growth in LPYMA membership of 170 people. This indicates a considerable level of pent up demand for the sport and a widening of its appeal in the Protestant community of Limerick.<sup>776</sup>

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<sup>770</sup> LC 24 July 1886.

<sup>771</sup> LC 31 July 1883.

<sup>772</sup> LC 21 May 1878

<sup>773</sup> LC 18 Sept 1877.

<sup>774</sup> LC 18 July 1885.

<sup>775</sup> LC 25 Jan 1881

<sup>776</sup> LC 18 June 1887.

Lawn tennis, despite such class and religious associations, avoided many of the worst attentions of agitators during the Land War and Plan of Campaign. This was partly a result of its discretion and because it had the character and appeal of a social oasis – its very exclusivity and reservation to private spaces kept the sport below the sensitive political radar of the times. The Tipperary club's circumspection was not enough, however, for it to escape the ire of the town's National League. In 1886 the League began a campaign against the club, then seven years in existence, with the aim of getting it to move to a premises further from the town. Accusations of sectarianism were levelled against the club, a charge its promoters vigorously denied.<sup>777</sup>

### **Archery**

Archery is one of the most fascinating sports in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. It emerged slowly and modestly from the gardens of the big houses of the region in the early 1860s, became consolidated into a network of archery societies, and just when it should have taken off, died a mysterious death. Though the sport achieved a relatively high level of organisation it barely stumbled into the 1870s and a report of archery of an informal nature at a garden party in 1871 is the last evidence for its serious practice.<sup>778</sup>

The Munster Archers, an umbrella society for a number of smaller groups in the Limerick area, was formed under the leadership of the Castleconnell 'society' in 1865. The South Tipperary Bowmen Archery Club was formed from Knocklofty house, home of the Earl of Donoughmore in 1861. A club in Doneraile, County Cork dates to an intermediate year, 1863.<sup>779</sup> The enthusiasm for the sport evident in this wave of

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<sup>777</sup> LC 1 July 1886.

<sup>778</sup> LC 1 July 1871.

<sup>779</sup> LC 16 Sept 1862, 4 May, 8 July 1865.

organisation in the 1860s was not in evidence a decade later and suggests a toy eagerly picked up, but just as easily discarded once its novelty wore off.

The outstanding feature of the activity was that it was a majority female participation sport; in Kilkenny in 1860, for instance, a competition attracted ten men, but twenty-five women.<sup>780</sup> The Munster Archers grand tournament of 1867 repeated this pattern with eighteen male and twenty-eight female participants.<sup>781</sup>

Limerick's archery story begins with an archery demonstration for the Lord Lieutenant in the Hermitage, Castleconnell in 1862. It graduated to the successes of four highly competitive seasons, 1865 – 1868, under the Munster Archers banner, until the game entered a steep decline and returned to its former garden sport status in 1871.<sup>782</sup> This brief efflorescence and swift retrenchment cannot be satisfactorily explained by the extant sources, but intriguing speculations are possible. The fact that it was a majority female affair may have been significant. Though archery initially included men and women in roughly equal numbers this gave way to the predominance of women in its practice. Once this 'tipping point' in its gender balance was reached it is likely that the sport became *infra dig* for many male archers and precipitated an exodus from the sport. Without a majority male presence archery was isolated among sports and, in some senses, a freak among the sports infrastructure of the 1860s and 1870s.

It is possible archery lost out to croquet, but this seems unlikely as the croquet scene remained under-developed and under-reported; had the archers switched allegiance to the mallet game they would surely have brought their organisational and public relations traditions with them, however, no such transition is observable in sports

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<sup>780</sup> LC 15 Sept 1860.

<sup>781</sup> LC 5 Sept 1867.

<sup>782</sup> LC 7 Aug 1862, 8 July, 3 Aug 1865, 10 May, 5, 19, 21 July 1866, 5 Sept 1867, 2 May, 5 Sept 1868.

reports of the time. The craze for lawn tennis could not have killed off the game in Limerick because archery was moribund before tennis was even invented. The likelihood is that the same women and the same class of woman that enjoyed archery were brought to the racket game in the mid to late 1870s. The mystery of the decline in archery is the most tantalising story in late nineteenth century Limerick sport.

The New–Model sports that were principally organised in the 1870s under the control of the middle–class, out from under the gentry’s shadow, included athletics, cycling, rugby union football, baseball and association football – though the latter did not appear until the 1890s its development was of a piece with the former sports.

### **Athletics**

Simple athletics challenges fostered an appetite for competitive athletics contests. An eighty–three year–old former military man from Roscommon issued a challenge to any military man to walk one hundred miles for £100 in 1851. The prize was as significant as his requirement that his opponent must have the same rank as he did – no doubt to obviate a loss to a plebeian grunt.<sup>783</sup> That seemed to be a popular amount for a wager that year because two military men, wagering £100 each, walked a much shorter distance, from Cork to Ballincollig, in full gear and to the cheers of many spectators.<sup>784</sup> These simple man-to-man contests were a prominent part of the athletics culture and involved more than just military figures such as two bakers who contested a £15 purse in a foot race in Limerick in 1871.<sup>785</sup> Not all prizes were monetary, however, C.B. Croker of Ballinagarde challenged another gentleman, duel–like, to contest for a silver cup in 1877.<sup>786</sup> Some contests relied on a single individual like the bank worker that walked four and a half miles in less than an hour for an undisclosed bet just one year

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<sup>783</sup> *LC* 30 Apr 1851.

<sup>784</sup> *LC* 16 Aug 1851.

<sup>785</sup> *LC* 30 Nov 1871, 8 Nov 1873

<sup>786</sup> *LC* 4 Oct 1877, 19 Sept 1878.

earlier.<sup>787</sup> Not all challenges involved stakes or wagers, though. Three young men walked from Limerick to Ennis and returned by coach, presumably as a personal challenge or for the fun of it as no wagers were recorded.<sup>788</sup>

Commercial endurance walking events were promoted and proved popular, especially in the late 1870s.<sup>789</sup> Smythe, an Irish-American postman who set out to complete a two hundred mile walk within fifty–two hours at the Limerick Skating Rink in 1877 narrowly failed in his task, but the £20 subscribed by the general public in the event of success was presented to him in any case.<sup>790</sup> His example led to a rash of similar challenges; those between two local amateurs, Mr. Maynard and Mr. Browning, who arranged a much anticipated 10-mile walking race, and one concerning another gentleman who planned a thirty mile walk within eight hours, were just two of many in this high season of the walking game in Limerick.<sup>791</sup> Browning and Phillips, another contestant in walking matches at this time, were members of the local Somerville (rugby) F.C. so the intimate connection between football and athletics in the late 1870s is clearly discernible.<sup>792</sup> Browning also won an Irish championship medal in athletics in 1881 proving that the renaissance men still held their own across a range of sports. The requirement to specialise, to which athletes today are bound, had not begun to press home.<sup>793</sup>

Sunday school outings catered for and helped to develop a taste for athletics in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>794</sup> One outing, offering dinner and rural games

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<sup>787</sup> *LC* 1 Apr 1876.

<sup>788</sup> *LC* 16 Nov 1886.

<sup>789</sup> *LC* 13 Jan, 10 Apr 1877, 28 May, 12 Oct 1878, 4 Feb, 15, 17 Apr 1879, 9 Oct 1880.

<sup>790</sup> *LC* 29 Sept, 4, 6, 9, 23, 25, 27, 30 Oct 1877.

<sup>791</sup> *LC* 20, 25, 30 Oct, 1, 3, 6, 10, 13, 15, 17 Nov 1877.

<sup>792</sup> *LC* 8, 15 Nov, 6 Dec 1877.

<sup>793</sup> *LC* 2 Aug 1881.

<sup>794</sup> *LC* 10, 22 June 1882, 23 Aug 1883, 31 July 1884.



for the children of Rathkeale and Kilsconnell in 1865 was not untypical.<sup>795</sup> Many of these were relatively small, intimate affairs, but one Wesleyan Sunday school outing in 1873, catering for more than three hundred children, showed the potential of this form of sports administration.<sup>796</sup> Railway and steamboat outings became increasingly popular in the third quarter of the century offering new leisure possibilities. One of the most delicious accounts of athletic sports in this period was notable for its ambiguous, but telling description of the audience. A group of excursionists to the town of Killaloe in 1886 ‘got up’ some athletics events for ‘the benefit of the natives.’<sup>797</sup>

Military sports days were well-publicised affairs at which respectable elements of society were welcome to attend.<sup>798</sup> Such events were a feature of the period. Though athletics were an established means of military recreation and promotion the military rarely employed athletics as a means of celebrating Queen Victoria’s birthday, however, in 1878 this trend was bucked.<sup>799</sup> The army’s attempts to celebrate the sovereign’s birthday in the second half of the nineteenth century were low key, serious and reserved. It appears a sports event could not provide the gravitas such an event demanded, particularly in the monarch’s more acute early widowhood – her grief clearly militated against a pairing of monarchical celebration and military promotion in the crucial third quarter of the nineteenth century. Many suggestions that the army could be popularised by holding military tournaments in Ireland were made, but they were more aspirational than was realised at the time.<sup>800</sup> The fact that the purpose of such calls was to popularise the army by using athletics also indicates the depths to which the military had descended in Limerick. This emphasis placed the army cart

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<sup>795</sup> *LC* 15 Aug 1865.

<sup>796</sup> *LC* 3 July 1873.

<sup>797</sup> *LC* 10 Aug 1886.

<sup>798</sup> *LC* 17 June 1865, 14, 17 Aug 1869, 21 May 1870, 24 June, 21 Sept 1871, 22, 24 Aug 1872, 29 Apr, 3 May, 21 June, 6 Sept 1873, 20 June, 20 Aug, 8 Sept 1874, 29 May 1875, 27, 29 June 1876, 26, 28, 30 June 1877, 8 Aug 1878, 25 Sept 1880, 12 Aug 1882, 13 Sept 1884, 25 June, 14, 18, 21, 23 July 1885, 3 Aug, 16 Sept 1886, 24, 26 May 1887.

<sup>799</sup> *LC* 25 May 1878.

<sup>800</sup> *LC* 21 July 1885.

before the athletics horse. Had the sports entrepreneurs been concerned to popularise sports by using the army it is possible a different cultural and political outcome may have been achieved.

Athletics-heavy school sports days introduced huge numbers of boys to organised, rule-based sports.<sup>801</sup> The practices of organising games between current and past members of the same school and of inter-school competitions created a wider *esprit de corps* in the school and its sponsoring community, in addition to expanding the pool of available sports talent.

Athletics became supplementary diversions during regattas. Boat races provided long, inactive and sedate experiences to spectators and these interludes were ripe for the provision of short, simple exciting running, throwing and jumping contests. The sheer number and geographical distribution of regattas that began to include athletics during the third quarter of the nineteenth century illustrates the complementarity of these sports.<sup>802</sup> Regattas were not the only events to add athletics to their repertoires. Some horse race meetings exploited athletics and athletics even ‘piggy-backed’ onto Kilkee’s Tennis Week in 1882.<sup>803</sup> In Castleconnell in 1885 the regatta portion of a regatta-plus-athletics spectacular was abandoned, but the athletics contests remained. The reason offered for cancelling the regatta was it was too late in the season.<sup>804</sup> It is possible that crews were not prepared to commit to the late date of the races, but it is more likely that the river conditions were not conducive to an efficient running of the races.

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<sup>801</sup> *LC* 12 Sept 1868, 26 June, 6 July 1869, 27 June 1871, 8 June, 24 Aug 1872, 26 June, 17 July, 11, 13 Sept 1873, 27 Aug, 12 Sept 1874, 11 May 1875, 6, 8 Sept 1877, 28 Aug 1879, 14 June 1881, 1 June 1882, 18 Aug 1885.

<sup>802</sup> Castleconnell, *LC* 23 May 1874. Doonbeg, *LC* 3 Aug 1875. Killaloe, *LC* 28 Aug 1875. Mountshannon Bay, *LC* 31 Aug 1875. Bunratty *LC* 4 & 9 Oct 1877. Clarecastle, *LC* 14 Aug 1879. Kilrush, *LC* 10 Sept 1881. Foynes, *LC* 7 June 1884. Glin, *LC* 22 July 1884. Carrigaholt, *LC* 5 Aug & 4 Sept 1886. Clonmel, *LC* 19 Aug 1886.

<sup>803</sup> *LC* 5 Sept 1882.

<sup>804</sup> *LC* 5 Sept 1885.

There were several benefits of this dual form of organisation: the capturing of larger audiences than would be expected for separate events; economies of scale reduced costs on the organisers; more spectacle could be guaranteed which, in turn, drew more custom, so that more money would accrue to local traders who would then be more certain to subscribe to organising costs. This last point was of particular importance; the failure to hold a regatta again in Castleconnell in 1886 was put down, simply, to the ‘apathy’ of local shopkeepers.<sup>805</sup> The annual sports at Glin, County Limerick almost invariably included a regatta and athletics, the villagers appreciating the benefits of killing two sporting birds with one organisational stone.<sup>806</sup>

Community based athletics meetings bloomed like a thousand flowers in the 1870s and early 1880s.<sup>807</sup> They were easily run, popular, relatively cheap – except for prizes – and, given that most were held in the autumn, they slotted neatly into the rhythms of rural economies. Finally, they provided positive harvest festival opportunities to which the middle classes could subscribe. In contrast to under-fire patron/pattern days, they were beacons of bourgeois respectability and conviviality and so received an amount of clerical approbation in inverse proportion to the contumely heaped on the pattern followers. These athletics meetings were of the community and by the community: a small number of specialist agencies and some clubs emerged tentatively from this

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<sup>805</sup> *LC* 9 Sept 1886.

<sup>806</sup> *LC* 2 Oct 1883, 22 July 1884, 20 July 1886.

<sup>807</sup> All dates correspond to editions of *LC*. Newport, 29 July 1875. Fedamore, 30 Oct 1875. Newmarket on Fergus, 13 & 27 Dec 1877 & 17 Jan 1878; 4 & 27 July 1878; 28 June 1879; 18 Oct 1884, GAA sports plan, 7 & 17 Nov 1885. Thurles, 16 July 1878; 28 June 1879. Hospital, 27 Aug, 19 Sept 1878, 26 Sept 1885 – GAA rules. Kilmihill, 10 Sept 1878. Kildysart, 19 Sept 1878, 14 Oct 1884; 27 July 1886 – GAA rules. Boherbuoy (Limerick City), 15 Oct 1878. Patrickswell, 15 Oct 1878. Bruff, 7 Nov 1878, 20 Feb 1879; 11 Aug 1885 – GAA rules. Kilkishen, 8 Mar 1879. Athlaca, 10 Apr 1879. Castletown Conyers, 15 Aug 1882. Broadford, 7 Sept 1882, 6 Sept 1883, 26 Aug & 11 & 13 Sept 1884, 24 Aug 1886. Kilfinane, 6 & 29 Sept 1883 – the report notes that it was revived after a couple of years. Also 5 Aug 1884, 3 Oct 1885 9 – incl glass ball shooting contest. Glin, 2 Oct 1883; 22 July 1884; 20 July 1886. Sixmilebridge 18 Oct 1883, 25 Sept 1884. Castleconnell, 11 & 18 Mar 1884, 26 Sept, 10, 15 & 20 Oct 1885 – includes piping and jig and reel dancing events. Parteen, 5 & 7 Aug 1884, 9 & 16 June 1885. Askeaton, 19 Aug 1884. Tipperary, 6 Sept 1884; 7 & 17 Aug 1886. Rathkeale, 30 Oct 1884. Emly, 8 & 13 Nov 1884. Kilrush, 29 June & 8 July 1886. Carrigaholt, 5 Aug & 4 Sept 1886. Nenagh, 7 Aug 1886. Clonmel, 7 & 19 Aug 1886. Newcastle West, 7 Aug & 9 Sept 1886 – GAA rules. Ballylanders, 14 Aug 1886 – notes it is 4 years since they were last held. O’Brien’s Bridge, 9 Nov 1886 – GAA rules. Aherlow, 11 Nov 1886 – GAA rules. Dromcollogher, 3 May 1887. Lahinch, 12 July 1887.

tradition. Athletics events appeared deceptively easy to arrange so local committees, not specialist athletics clubs, arranged the great majority of athletics contests in this period.

The first non–proto, non–school and non–military club dedicated to athletics only was a group called the Limerick Hare and Hounds. These young men organised in 1876 to run middle and long distances and they commenced their runs from the Limerick County Cricket Club pavilion.<sup>808</sup> The form the runs took was simple: a lone runner went ahead of the ‘pack’ dropping a paper trail his pursuers could follow. It was just as the name implied, a pedestrian version of hunting with hounds. Other such groups followed this form of athletics for a while including Leamy School Football Club – for whom it must have been a valuable training technique.<sup>809</sup> Another Hare and Hounds Club emerged in late 1884.<sup>810</sup> A hope was expressed in the *Limerick Chronicle* that this would provide a break from football, but it was in vain. The close links between football and running were underscored by an instruction that Limerick FC players in line for the next game ‘should attend’ the next run of the club.<sup>811</sup> By the following year the club (which sometimes operated under the title of Limerick Harriers) commenced its runs at four pm on weekday afternoons from the LCC club pavilion. The necessity to secure a release from work by three pm is clear and the likelihood of these events being anything other than a comfortable middle class affair is remote.<sup>812</sup> The election of this club to membership of the Irish Amateur Athletic Association late in 1885 merely confirmed it as such.<sup>813</sup>

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<sup>808</sup> *LC* 15, 27 Jan, 30 Mar 1876.

<sup>809</sup> *LC* 23 Dec 1876.

<sup>810</sup> *LC* 27 Sept, 2, 7, 14, 21, 23 Oct, 11, 20 Nov, 4 Dec 1884, 27 Jan 1885.

<sup>811</sup> *LC* 11 Nov 1884.

<sup>812</sup> *LC* 3 Nov 1885.

<sup>813</sup> *LC* 10 Dec 1885.

The key period for the crystallisation of the disparate athletics traditions into a more recognisably modern form was from 1872 to 1878. In August 1872 Limerick's cricket and rowing club members were able to exploit the fact that the former club, instituted a year before, now possessed an excellent ground in which to hold a well organised series of athletics contests.<sup>814</sup> Because the County Cricket Club hosted them the sports were known as the Limerick County Cricket Club sports, but they could not have succeeded without the involvement of the Limerick Boat Club, Shannon Rowing Club and Limerick Football Club memberships – to whose members the events were confined.<sup>815</sup> The last event run by this coalition of clubs was in 1877.<sup>816</sup> Taking up the mantle of athletics in 1878, the Limerick Amateur Athletic Club became the first modern dedicated athletics club in the region.<sup>817</sup> Thereafter this club gave the lead in athletics and bicycling until confronted by the new, confident Gaelic Athletic Association in 1885.

The trends that saw a coalition of cricket, rowing and football clubs produce a club dedicated to a different sport, athletics, was not a static one and the late 1870s rage for bicycling, described by Brian Griffin, initially found a home in the (barely) older athletics infrastructure.<sup>818</sup> The Limerick AAC always included bicycling in its programme for its annual sports, but it only adopted the title Limerick Amateur Athletic and Bicycle Club in 1880, indicating a growth in that element of the club's output and appeal.<sup>819</sup> Crucially, the LAABC kept the original exclusivity of the early days of organised athletics when the events were restricted to members of the

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<sup>814</sup> *LC* 1, 3, 17, 27 & 31 Aug, 5, 19 Sept 1872.

<sup>815</sup> *LC* 19, 26 Aug, 2, 14 Sept 1876. Like its Limerick counterpart the Clare Cricket Club organised an annual athletics meeting. *LC* 1, 20 June 1878.

<sup>816</sup> *LC* 8 May, 14, 16, 21, 23 June 1877.

<sup>817</sup> *LC* 11 Apr, 18 May, 8, 11, 18, 29 June, 4 July 1878.

<sup>818</sup> Griffin, Brian.

<sup>819</sup> *LC* 12, 15, 17 June 1880.

recognised ‘gentlemen’s clubs’ of the city and county. Prospective members were still required to put their name forward to be balloted on.<sup>820</sup>

A relatively small number of athletics clubs emerged in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Among these were clubs in Limerick, Miltown, Kilmallock, Tradaree (Newmarket on Fergus), Clare, Emly and Tralee.<sup>821</sup> These official clubs, to distinguish them from their provisional, less bureaucratised athletics committees bringing amateur athletics to the region, were supplemented by some institutional athletics clubs such as the Limerick Drapers’ and Athletic Club and the Leamy School Athletic Club.<sup>822</sup> Without the more committed focus a single purpose club could bring to organising its events many community events lacked spectacle and oftentimes lacked vigour. The Castleconnell sports of October 1885 lacked big fields in most competitions. Most events pitted three athletes against each other and some only two. This may be accounted for by the lateness in the year of the meeting and it is equally possible that fading light necessitated the abandonment of the football match held afterwards. This game, between Castleconnell FC and a XV of Limerick was abandoned before any score to complete a rather desultory day of *athleticus interruptus*.<sup>823</sup> The mechanism of the club was the most efficient guarantor of an exciting, well-delivered programme of athletics.

Spurred by the advent of the GAA fifty representatives of the established county clubs from around Ireland met in Dublin in February 1885 to form another body to govern athletics in Ireland.<sup>824</sup> The new body, the Irish Amateur Athletic Association, offered a rival model of organisation and a support mechanism for those clubs. Under the

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<sup>820</sup> LC 26 Apr 1884.

<sup>821</sup> LC 11 Apr, 21 Sept, 15 Oct, 14 Nov 1878, 26 Apr, 25 Oct 1879, 13 Nov, 16 Dec 1884.

<sup>822</sup> Limerick Draper’s and Athletic Club meet and change name to Limerick Commercial Athletic Club, LC 11 Sept 1886. A month later its true purpose was indicated by its description as the Commercial Gaelic Athletic Club, LC 23 Oct 1886, 1 Feb 1887. Leamy School Amateur Athletic Club second annual sports meeting held in 1878. LC 8, 15 Aug 1878, 4 Sept 1880.

<sup>823</sup> LC 10, 15, 20 Oct 1885.

<sup>824</sup> LC 24 Feb 1885.

umbrella of the IAAA the clubs were part of a shared sporting culture and were joined in a common purpose. The IAAA facilitated the organisation of a meeting to find the Irish champion in the various athletic disciplines. Up to that point the identity of the best athlete was a matter of contention with many openings for the victors in regional events to claim a title.<sup>825</sup> The result was, however, to pit the IAAA and the GAA in ‘opposite camps’ – an unfortunate, if prescient, military allusion in the reporting by the *Limerick Chronicle*.

There was some consideration of the problem of the existence of two athletics governing bodies in Ireland, the IAAA and the GAA, at least among IAAA people, in late 1885.<sup>826</sup> The IAAA later amended its so-called ‘boycotting rule’ preventing GAA members from competing at its events. C.H. Gubbins, an Irish Protestant Home Rule Association member and honorary secretary to the LAABC, seconded the motion proposing this rule change.<sup>827</sup> Gubbins’s conciliatory stance towards the GAA seemed to prove successful because the LAABC sports that year were the biggest ever, attracting eighty-five entries. Speaking after that event A.W. Shaw (another IPHRA member and future president of the LAABC) called attention to very the very ‘class distinctions’ he deplored by saying he did not like to see them. Gubbins’s exertions towards a neutral political atmosphere for athletics in the city, noted in his speech at the same dinner, were sincere, but he hoped for rapprochement between the two athletic ‘traditions’ was more distant than he or Shaw imagined.<sup>828</sup> The inclusion in LAABC events of military bands, recitals of ‘God Save the Queen’, post-athletic banquet toasts to the queen and other real and symbolic obstacles remained to keep the

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<sup>825</sup> LC 21 Apr 1887.

<sup>826</sup> LC 7, 11, 26 Nov, 10 Dec 1885.

<sup>827</sup> LC 27, 30 Mar 1886.

<sup>828</sup> LC 8, 17 Apr, 1 May, 5, 8, 10, 12 17, 26 June 1886.

new associations in a tense relationship.<sup>829</sup> One consequence of the GAA's presence upon the LAABC seems to have been a more open, inclusive membership policy by the latter; twenty new athletes were admitted in April 1886, a key period in the competition between associations for adherents.<sup>830</sup> A more interesting consequence was its decision, unexplained, 'not to solicit the usual small subscriptions from the public' to finance the annual sports. The club instead panned for cash more extensively among businesses, securing £10 from the Harbour Board, for instance.<sup>831</sup> The competition for funds in the general public by two rival athletics codes must have impacted upon the LAABC's ability to source funding from its usual sources. To the need for new sources of funding was now added a requirement for the LAABC to cut costs and achieve efficiencies with its existing funding. This requirement appears to have been difficult to achieve because the club's practice of lavish testimonials to important members continued, including the presentation of a 'large silver punch bowl' to Gubbins in appreciation of his services to the club.<sup>832</sup> The more ascetic Gaelic sports movement did not usually display such extravagance, relying on that tradition's peasant purse management cunning.<sup>833</sup> The gap between the two movements could hardly be more apparent than when, following his organisational efforts of the year, Gubbins embarked on a continental bicycle tour with a colleague, a luxury to which most GAA entrepreneurs could only aspire.<sup>834</sup>

The County Kerry Athletic and Cricket Club sports for 1886 had similarly hopeful indicators of a compromise between the two athletics tendencies and ran under both

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<sup>829</sup> The notice advertising a band contest at a GAA sports event as a matter 'of course' indicated the bands would all be non-military, *LC* 26 Aug 1886.

<sup>830</sup> *LC* 17 Apr 1886.

<sup>831</sup> *LC* 8 June 1886.

<sup>832</sup> *LC* 26 June 1886.

<sup>833</sup> Naturally, the exception that proves this rule was the presentation of a gold hurley and a pearl ball to a GAA official, *LC* 1 Jan 1887.

<sup>834</sup> *LC* 9 & 28 Sept, 12, 16 Oct 1886.



the IAAA and GAA rules.<sup>835</sup> The club's efforts also faced the kinds of obstacles encountered in Limerick. Just the year before the Tralee National League had expelled its President for not working on the boycott of non-GAA sports.<sup>836</sup> There was severe competition between the rival national bodies to run competitions at local and national level: the sports administration race was as keenly contested as that of the actual sports themselves.

The relative appeals of the LAABC and the local GAA organisation may be gauged by the fact that in the year of its greatest appeal the LAABC catered for eighty-five athletes on one day, but the GAA, two months later announced a plan for sports meetings on three successive Sundays that Autumn.<sup>837</sup> The GAA had outperformed the output of the LAABC despite the LAABC's six-year start on it. The distance between the two athletics bodies was not fixed, however: the GAA thanked the LAABC for the use of its stand in the Market's Field, a pointer to cooperation, while questions directed at the Mayor at a market trustee meeting for granting permission to the GAA to use the field pointed to suspicion of the Gaelic sports movement.<sup>838</sup>

The welding of sports and politics, so obvious in the 1880s, was not only the result of GAA activity; many important episodes predate the formation of the GAA while many more had no proximate GAA involvement. The Rathkeale branch of the National League utilised sports to demonstrate the popularity of its aims and objectives in October 1884. By holding the sports in a 'boycotted field' they were symbolically, if not legally, reclaiming it from its landlord.<sup>839</sup> In 1886 the organisers of the popular Listowel race meeting, having made themselves obnoxious to the National League,

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<sup>835</sup> *LC* 14 Aug 1886.

<sup>836</sup> *LC* 23 June 1885

<sup>837</sup> *LC* 21, 24, 26 Aug, 9, 14, 18, 21, 28 Sept, 2, 5, 7, 14 Oct 1886.

<sup>838</sup> *LC* 14 Oct 1886.

<sup>839</sup> *LC* 30 Oct 1884.

received poor public backing, in terms of attendance figures, due to a campaign by the League to disrupt their plans. The success of the League was in no small way down to an athletics meeting held in opposition to the races.<sup>840</sup> Such a confrontational approach in sports organisation was matched by real and violent clashes on the day between rival groups that even a large force of police was unable to prevent. On another occasion a noted local athlete named O'Grady was among six men charged with assault while trying to prevent an eviction in 1887.<sup>841</sup>

The attempt by a new breed of sport entrepreneur to insert himself between the most prominent type of sports patron, the landlord, and the sporting public was not a new phenomenon. In April 1866 a Fenian poster, with socialist undertones, appeared in several Cork churches encouraging people to stay away from an upcoming race meeting. Each corner of the placards had effigies of pikes crossed. The text was as follows;

‘Irishmen, - You are earnestly Requested not to go to the Races, or to go Maying. It is too soon to Forget Those that Sacrificed their Liberty for you in their endeavour to Right the Wrong. It is those fat-gutted fellows that’s getting up the Races for your Oppression. Remember the Banished – John Lynch, Bryan Dillon, O’Donovan &c – God Save the Green!’<sup>842</sup>

The practice in the contentious 1880s of hosting athletics events to rival regattas and horse races patronised by the gentry could also be turned against athletics – if the political exigencies of the day allowed. The arrangements for Glin’s annual regatta and athletics in 1886 were thrown into chaos when the National League, following a dispute about the presence of the Knight of Glin at the proceedings, elected to hold a series of horse races to draw the crowds in its direction. The decision to offer races was wise because even political neutrals were not required to sacrifice too much for their

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<sup>840</sup> *LC* 5, 7 Oct 1886.

<sup>841</sup> *LC* 17 Feb 1887.

<sup>842</sup> *LC* 17 Apr 1866.

political principles.<sup>843</sup> By offering a *quid pro quo* to the sporting public the National League hit on a successful tactic to oppose landlord and loyalist control of athletics – albeit with the more significant aim of cutting off their legal powers over land.

Athletics' public profile grew steadily in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and its presence in the media and its power as a public relations tool became naturalised. The media responded to the popularity of the sport and benefited from close associations with events and personalities. Locally, the *Chronicle* observed and scrutinised athletics practice in Workingmen's Clubs in England, developments in America, even the LPYMA confirmed athletics' arrival as a permanent social and cultural fixture by questioning in a debate whether athletics did more harm than good.<sup>844</sup> An early case of the use of celebrity endorsement by a sportsman was the pro-temperance stance of a professional athlete celebrated in a public lecture in Rathkeale in 1886.<sup>845</sup> Press involvement in the sport of athletics extended to direct sponsorship, as with the Dublin magazine *Sport's* sponsorship of an Irish athletics tour of Canada in 1885.<sup>846</sup> A representative Irish team to compete in the English athletics championships in 1886, organised, again through the magazine *Sport*, performed well.<sup>847</sup> *Sport's* initiatives were not uncommon in the early decades of sports organisation and development. The blue riband events of two of the world's most famous sports, cycling and baseball, were deliberately constructed to raise the profile of their initial sponsors, the magazine *l'Equipe* and *The World* newspaper, respectively.

## Cycling

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<sup>843</sup> LC 20 July, 17 Aug 1886.

<sup>844</sup> LC 23 May 1874, 18, 30 Jan 1879.

<sup>845</sup> LC 15 May 1886.

<sup>846</sup> LC 23 July, 1, 22 Aug, 12 Sept 1885.

<sup>847</sup> LC 26 June, 6 July 1886.

Before the bicycle's sporting potential was fully realised it was celebrated as a conveyance for leisure with many prominent reports of men taking excursions and holidays using this new mode of transport.<sup>848</sup> Developments in bicycling for sport in England were later reported in Limerick – like accounts of a fifty-mile run in three hours and forty minutes or the doings of London bicycle clubs.<sup>849</sup>

Many non-sporting uses of bicycles were debated in the late 1870s and early 1880s. A story about a bike-borne policeman who caught a thief in England after a twenty five mile chase raised the tantalising possibilities of a 'force of cyclist police in country districts.'<sup>850</sup> One cleric recommended a tricycle for his parish rounds.<sup>851</sup> The popularity of bicycling received the ultimate accolade any leisure pursuit could receive when suggestions were made to put a tax on bicycles and even that a bike battalion would benefit the army.<sup>852</sup>

Only once, before 1874, is the bicycle reported as being used for sport in Limerick; that event was part of a military sports day on King's Island in August 1869. Those velocipede races, confined to officers, for stakes of £3, had a ludicrous character and were simply amusements for a betting purpose, other events included the greasy pole, for instance, but the cycle races were undoubted athletic contests. Close to three thousand people witnessed them, a huge crowd for those times.<sup>853</sup>

Bicycling for sport in Limerick really began with the formation of the Limerick Bike Club during the last week of 1874 by 'gentlemen' from local Masonic circles.<sup>854</sup> Races

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<sup>848</sup> London Bike Club's tour of the Pyrenees, *LC* 13 Nov 1879. U.S. cyclists tour of Ireland, England and western Europe, *LC* 22 Apr 1884. Limerick duo continental bike tour, *LC* 9 & 28 Sept; 12 & 16 Oct 1886.

<sup>849</sup> *LC* 21 July 1870, 7 June, 9 Oct 1873, 5 May, 20 Aug, 6 Oct, 26 Nov 1874.

<sup>850</sup> *LC* 14 Aug 1884.

<sup>851</sup> *LC* 11 Nov 1880.

<sup>852</sup> *LC* 10 Apr 1879

<sup>853</sup> *LC* 17 Aug 1869.

<sup>854</sup> *LC* 29 Dec 1874.

began at times inconvenient to the majority of the working population and commenced at prominent public spaces in the comfortably middle class Newtown Pery area of the city.<sup>855</sup> Early club fixtures were marked by a variety of starting points to exploit different courses out of the city, as well as a range of course lengths and varying start times (anything from 10 am to 8.30 pm) these times corresponding to the length of time required to complete a run.

Other clubs soon followed. The Garryowen Bike Club (1877) met at places such as Park Bridge and the Dock Road, usually at 6 pm, but sometimes with 11 am (Tuesday) starts.<sup>856</sup> The Kincora Cycling Club was able to hold its fourth AGM in 1890 at the club HQ in William Street.<sup>857</sup> A Kincora CC fifteen mile handicap race on a Sunday in May 1890 indicates the membership was Roman Catholic.<sup>858</sup> Less fixed or visible was a ‘committee of local cyclists’ that organised a series of races for juveniles and novices at Rosbrien in September 1890.<sup>859</sup> The Limerick Amateur Athletic Club incorporated a bicycle section within the club in 1880 to become the Limerick Amateur Athletic and Bicycle Club, it was sometimes simply know as the City Bicycle Club.<sup>860</sup>

The bike section of LAABC departed from the city–centre point at Tait’s Clock at Baker Place, just as the LBC did.<sup>861</sup> This suggests the original Limerick Bike Club was subsumed into the LAAC in 1880 to become the LAABC. The runs of the LAABC in 1886 were held weekly on Friday evenings.<sup>862</sup> This was a significant change from the

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<sup>855</sup> Races began at H.Q. – the Athenaeum, Baker Place, Catherine Street, Lower Hartstonge Street, Wellesley Bridge Toll House and the Military Road. Times veered between 3.30, 3.45, 7.00, 7.15, 7.30 and 8.30 pm on weekdays and Saturdays. Early starts were required – 10 am for one trip to Lisdoonvarna (Monday) and 10.30 a.m. for a trip to Killaloe (also held on a Monday). *LC* 15, 22, 29 Apr, 6, 25, 30 May, 3, 17, 24 June, 7 Oct 1876, 29 Mar 1877, 20 Apr 1878.

<sup>856</sup> *LC* 22 May 1877, 19 Mar 1878.

<sup>857</sup> *LC* 25 Mar, 3, 5, 8 Apr 1890.

<sup>858</sup> *LC* 24, 27 May 1890.

<sup>859</sup> *LC* 18 Sept 1890.

<sup>860</sup> *LC* 20 Apr 1880, 7 Mar 1885.

<sup>861</sup> *LC* 22 May 1885.

<sup>862</sup> *LC* 25 May 1886.

early days of the LBC and it suggests later cyclists had fewer opportunities to cut work as the early cycling pioneers must have been required to do. The more cycling developed and expanded its appeal the more it was required to adapt to the time needs of a new, less affluent, but still comfortable middle class. Confirming its early class connections two bike races – a ‘popular amusement’ were held at the Limerick Cricket Club athletic sports in 1876.<sup>863</sup>

The bicycle brought once distant districts closer to those fortunate to possess it and extra-local competition between the new “Knights of the Road” became a prominent part of the sporting scene.<sup>864</sup> Two Limerick amateurs did well at the 1887 Irish Cyclists Association meeting in Dublin.<sup>865</sup> Limerick competitors at other big meetings in Cork and Dublin that year recorded more good performances.<sup>866</sup> Early competitions between individuals were held like one 1876 race from Ennis to Limerick between a Mr. Browne and a Mr. Griffith – these personal challenges drew admiration and helped popularise the pastime.<sup>867</sup> Browne’s part in this popularisation process was considerable, in June 1876 he cycled to Roscrea and overnighting there before cycling to Dublin for the Civil Service Athletic Sports; he returned in one day using an Excelsior bike and this journey was described as the ‘most novel yet done in Ireland.’<sup>868</sup> Though bicycling facilitated sporting contacts with distant centres the main focus was on the local scene, the new sport slotted neatly into Limerick’s sporting infrastructure. A LAABC fifteen mile handicap race over the Blackwater course drew

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<sup>863</sup> *LC* 19 Aug 1876.

<sup>864</sup> Griffin, Brian, ‘The Romance of the Wheel: Cycling, Fiction and late Nineteenth-Century Ireland’, *Sport in History*, (2009).

<sup>865</sup> *LC* 12 Apr 1887.

<sup>866</sup> *LC* 23, 30 June 1887.

<sup>867</sup> *LC* 26 Oct 1876.

<sup>868</sup> *LC* 3, 13 June 1876.

fourteen riders in 1890.<sup>869</sup> Bike races were quickly incorporated into regatta, athletics and even drag hunt plans.<sup>870</sup>

Bicycling delivered a spectacle of power and speed and allowed for a whole new order of physical challenge for athletes and delight for spectators.<sup>871</sup> The speed that could be achieved and the huge distances riders could cover set new landmarks in athletic endeavour many sought to emulate. A Frenchman's 650-mile ride in 1876 and a tricyclist's odyssey from Land's End to John O'Groats in 1884 were two international examples of the great distances and speed possible with the latest bike technology.<sup>872</sup> Two Limerick students cycled from Limerick to Dublin in 1885 completing ninety eight miles in seventeen hours (with four hours and twenty minutes for meals and rests), but by July 1890, the Irish Road Club was able to present a bronze medal to a Mr. Gubbins for having covered one hundred miles in less than twelve hours.<sup>873</sup> This advance in speed may be attributed to better training, certainly, but the improved technology of bicycling was a more telling development.<sup>874</sup>

Developments in the material culture and technological innovations in the cycling world came at a rapid pace in the 1870s and 1880s. The safety, efficiency, design and cost of bicycles increasingly favoured the needs of the consumer and led to a boom in bicycle retailing.<sup>875</sup> Catered for by the Limerick Bike depot on Harvey's Quay, among other shops, the latest cyclometers for registering distance and the first of the Humber Safety pneumatic bicycles were offered to local cyclists almost as quickly as in

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<sup>869</sup> *LC* 6, 8 May 1890.

<sup>870</sup> *LC* 18 Aug, 27 Dec 1877, 20 Feb, 1 Mar, 28 June 1879.

<sup>871</sup> A cyclist and tricyclist set out for Dublin and Bray and back to see if they can set a 12 hours cycling record, *LC* 12 June 1890.

<sup>872</sup> *IT* 25 Sept 1876, 1 Sept 1884.

<sup>873</sup> *LC* 7 July 1885, 29 July 1890.

<sup>874</sup> Griffin, Brian, 'Cycling and gender in Victorian Ireland', paper given at Annual Conference of Society for the Study of Nineteenth Century Ireland, University of Southampton, April 2001.

<sup>875</sup> Bike and trike exhibition at the Royal Albert Hall in 1883, *LC* 1 Feb 1883.

metropolitan centres.<sup>876</sup> Spying the sales opportunities, one of the city's two largest department store, Cannock's, soon added a cycling trade to its business.<sup>877</sup> One local shopkeeper thought it worthwhile to send a mechanic to a pneumatic factory to learn the skills required to repair and maintain these newest cycling machines.<sup>878</sup> With such an increase in bicycle usage came a new form of objectionable street activity.

The earliest complaints about bicyclists on footpaths do not appear until as late as 1890 and this fact is not unconnected to the increasing availability of bikes indicated by Cannock's move into the trade.<sup>879</sup> The new menace of people cycling in the People's Park also received the attention of Limerick Corporation, though the police appear to have remained passive on the issue.<sup>880</sup> The largely middle class nature of the pursuit meant that bourgeois transgressions of the tenets of public safety were more likely to be ignored, or treated more sensitively than those of street kids practicing, hoops, kites and football.<sup>881</sup> The practice of cycling on footpaths and park roads was a menace, but for many cyclists the state of the roads made smoother pathways safer and more attractive in terms of speeds achieved (and safety?).<sup>882</sup>

Complementing the new technologies of cycling new media emerged to cater for the increasingly numerous knights of the road. These media included *The Wheelman*, incorporated with the *Irish Athletic and Cycling News*, and offering football, athletics, theatrical and musical notes, It was welcomed in 1890 in Limerick, where 'cycling is so great a pastime.'<sup>883</sup>

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<sup>876</sup> LC 6 Mar 1879, 31 Mar 1887, 10 Apr 1890.

<sup>877</sup> LC 3 May 1890.

<sup>878</sup> LC 24 May 1890.

<sup>879</sup> LC 6 May 1890.

<sup>880</sup> LC 13 May 1890.

<sup>881</sup> LC 15 June 1872, 22 Aug 1874, 13 Mar 1879.

<sup>882</sup> LC 27 May 1890.

<sup>883</sup> LC 14 Oct 1890.



Cyclists formed a biking brotherhood with a considerable extra-local reach. When a Dublin cycling party passed through the south of Ireland in 1886 many Limerick cyclists met them in Killarney to accompany them to Limerick on their return to the capital. In addition, it was planned to hold a ‘monster meeting’ of local cyclists as they reached Limerick.<sup>884</sup> Another Dublin quartet of cyclists repeated a similar journey in 1890, but the welcome was more muted, as if the novelty of the cycling movement had begun to fade.<sup>885</sup> In 1887 the Cork Gaelic Cycle Club invited the Gaelic Bicycle Club of Limerick to that city and the Limerick lads returned the gesture with twenty Cork cyclists enjoying a cycle and dinner before returning home.<sup>886</sup> A *Limerick Chronicle* editorial noted the ‘quiet temperament’ of bicyclists and their practice of meeting in ‘whole battalions’, adding that the bike [in 1890] was ‘becoming almost a necessity.’<sup>887</sup> This designation is at odds with the image of pavement hogging cyclists, but the distinction that mattered most was that between those cyclists who joined a club and were subject to its rules and disciplines and those who remained non-club, undisciplined solo wheelmen.

Early in the cycling boom the cost, the work-inimical times of club meetings, the expensive tours and the bourgeois meeting places of the cyclists implied that cycling was a middle class pursuit. This fits a profile of ‘Cosmopolite’ a correspondent to the local press on the pursuit.<sup>888</sup> The bicycling class, at least in England, seemed to embody a more liberal conception of society – at the 1884 London Bike Club dinner the gentlemen sat beside their wives – a big departure from the ‘stag’ nature of other sports club dinners.<sup>889</sup> Though little evidence appears in this period of women’s involvement in bicycling, the subsequent value of the bicycle in liberalising the lives of

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<sup>884</sup> *LC* 10, 12, 17 Aug 1886.

<sup>885</sup> *LC* 12 Aug 1890.

<sup>886</sup> *LC* 12 July 1887.

<sup>887</sup> *LC* 6 May 1890.

<sup>888</sup> *LC* 12 Aug 1882.

<sup>889</sup> *LC* 19 Jan 1884.

women cannot be gainsaid. Technological innovation assisted women's entry into the bicycling community. The development of the tricycle for men afraid of the possible danger of a bicycle was the 'in' to the activity for many women. Once women had served an apprenticeship on the tricycle they established the principle that the technology was theirs too and the transition to bicycling seemed unremarkable.<sup>890</sup>

### **Football (Rugby Union)**

Football according to rugby union rules was first recorded in the region in November 1874 when Rathkeale FC played Mr. Massy's X.<sup>891</sup> By coincidence the first record of football in the press in this period was also at Rathkeale, during a school outing in September 1861; it is likely that the local tradition for football, in whatever form, remained more alive in that district than others in the region.<sup>892</sup> The next two recorded formal games of that club, in January 1875, were against Mr. Harkness's team and a combined military/constabulary side and this pattern neatly shows the importance of native, local and civilian agents to the development and growth of the union game in Limerick.<sup>893</sup> That the combined military and constabulary of the area could only muster one team compared with the three civilian squads at the very birth of the organised union game renders any claims for the unique importance of British army origins of rugby in Limerick very dubious. In fact, until the report of a contest between the Tipperary Garrison and Cork FC five years later there was a negligible input of the military or police into the development of rugby.<sup>894</sup> Like Mr. Massy and Mr. Harkness, however, there are mentions in rugby dispatches of Mr. Browning, Mr. Goggins and Mr. Keon as gathering rugby sides around them.<sup>895</sup> Other sides came from schools; the

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<sup>890</sup> *LC* 4 Mar 1879, 30 Sept, 7, 19 Oct, 11 Nov 1880.

<sup>891</sup> *LC* 28 Nov 1874.

<sup>892</sup> *LC* 25 Sept 1861. Clonmel football match of undefined code, though 10 a side, *LC* 6 Feb 1866. Also *LC* 6, 27 Sept 1873.

<sup>893</sup> *LC* 5, 14, 19 Jan 1875.

<sup>894</sup> *LC* 13 Nov 1880.

<sup>895</sup> *LC* 31 Jan, 23 Feb, 10 Dec 1878.

Leamy, Cathedral and Crescent schools were important institutional agencies for the development of the game locally, as was another community club Somerville (sic).<sup>896</sup>

Limerick boys and men at schools and at university in towns around Ireland and Great Britain, and who absorbed the game there, provided the nucleus of occasional teams and often arranged contests against Limerick teams when home on vacation.<sup>897</sup> The links they made at school and university also proved useful in securing visits from Dublin and Cork sides to play Limerick FC in the early years when that club, inaugurated in late 1875, was trying to establish itself.<sup>898</sup> The influence of educational institutions upon the diffusion of the rugby union form of football certainly trumped any military efforts.

In the first decade of formal organisation rugby union grew slowly, but consolidated its gains as a cautious banker minds his own funds.<sup>899</sup> Personality driven teams came and went, but Limerick FC and middle class school football clubs remained the backbone of the game in the region.<sup>900</sup> Occasionally, groups within the LFC could field a team against the remainder such as when the banking personnel in the club roped in some garrison players to play the rest of the LFC in a series of games in late 1881.<sup>901</sup> That series of games elicited some praise for the garrison's role in helping to make the club a success, but such praise was overdone, not surprisingly given the loyalist pretensions of the *Chronicle* in a time of political discord and outright hostility towards the military. The Bankers were the most notable vocational sub-set of the LFC's playing personnel and this fact plainly identifies the LFC as a middle class institution.<sup>902</sup>

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<sup>896</sup> LC 23 Dec 1876, 6, 10, 17, 8 Nov, 6 Dec 1877.

<sup>897</sup> LC 18, 23, 27 Dec 1884.

<sup>898</sup> LC 14 Oct, 13 Nov 1875, 25 Jan, 29 Feb, 7, 30 Mar, 5 Dec 1876, 2 Jan 1877, 1 Jan 1880.

<sup>899</sup> LC 16 Oct 1883, 23, 27 Sept, 18, 28 Oct 1884, 26 Sept 1885.

<sup>900</sup> LC 10 Dec 1878, 23 Sept 1880, 21 Jan, 11 Mar 1884.

<sup>901</sup> LC 3, 5, 10 Nov 1881.

<sup>902</sup> LC 20, 27 May, 30 Sept 1882, 16, 20, 23, 27 Oct 1883.

Political and religious tensions impinged on the organisation of rugby union in the decade after 1874. A second football club, Limerick Rovers, emerged in September 1880, but was short-lived and failed; the LFC by then had plateaued after advancing for five years.<sup>903</sup> The next city club, this time one that survived, Garryowen FC, was formed in September 1884; it benefited from the efforts of local businessman and cultural entrepreneur W.L. Stokes in promoting the game to a wider sporting constituency between 1880 and 1884, and thereafter.<sup>904</sup> In that four year period Limerick FC fielded a first and second team more often than before, secured more games against many Tipperary clubs, and enjoyed regular games against Catholic Literary Institute sides and other ephemeral local teams. Finally, the club placed itself at the heart of a thriving rugby tradition, this leadership of Limerick FC inspiring what was termed a ‘spirit of emulation’.<sup>905</sup> Stokes was the main mover behind Limerick FC, but was also first president of the new Garryowen FC.<sup>906</sup> Just as the LBC and the SRC were institutions of the loyalist and home rule sections, respectively, of Limerick society, the LFC and Garryowen FC now assumed the same political and religious polarity. It does appear likely that the earlier attempt to establish the Limerick Rovers FC was an early, abortive attempt by both tendencies in the Limerick FC to separate and attempt independent existences; that it was not a success was down to the inability of each section to survive without the other. This only became possible after the further growth in the game, managed and propelled by Stokes’s indefatigable efforts.<sup>907</sup> A form of creative tension in the rugby tradition around LFC was a positive force in Limerick rugby: even after the formation of Garryowen, the LFC did not appear to suffer, in fact it thrived, and when an LFC practice match involving two seventeen a–

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<sup>903</sup> *LC* 23 Sept 1880, 24, 29 Sept, 1 Oct 1881.

<sup>904</sup> *LC* 23 Sept 1884, 30 Jan, 25 Feb 1886.

<sup>905</sup> *LC* 9 Mar, 2, 9, 23 Sept, 11 Nov 1882, 2, 4, 6, 16, Oct, 1, 17, 24, 27 Nov, 29 Dec 1883, 3, 5 Jan, 11, 13 Mar, 18 Oct 1884.

<sup>906</sup> *LC* 20, 23 Oct 1883, 23 Sept 1884.

<sup>907</sup> Quite simply, in Stokes absence, LFC practice did not take place, *LC* 14 Feb 1884.

side teams was held in October 1884 the rarity of such a large number of players was noted.<sup>908</sup> Though he was a serious contributor to Church of Ireland bodies and Protestant societies in the city throughout his life, Stokes, demonstrating a ‘catholic’ view of the place of sport in society, achieved something for rugby union that his fellow administrators of cricket absolutely failed to effect, to draw a more diverse strand of society into the game. He could do this because he straddled, diplomatically and skilfully, most of the key fault–lines in Limerick, though denominationally a Protestant, he was politically a Home Ruler and as a butter – merchant he dealt with farmer suppliers and fellow businessmen.

The pattern of rugby development matches the evolutionary patterns of other sports such as rowing, cricket and athletics, with a formal parent club or tradition begetting new clubs. Limerick FC tended and gave leadership to local rugby, including Garryowen FC, but when the latter club emerged it then wrested control of the local rugby tradition from the LFC, notably in the much larger home rule and Roman Catholic sections of Limerick. The example and leadership of Garryowen led to an even greater burst of growth in the popularity and reach of the game locally and this was boosted immensely by the inauguration of the Munster Cup in 1886. In Spring 1887, for instance, eleven clubs were involved in rugby over several Sundays to raise funds for Barrington’s Hospital.<sup>909</sup>

### **Baseball**

It is instructive that America’s pastime, baseball, was played in Limerick even before soccer. The game was played in 1885 in Mungret College, introduced by a priest recently returned from the United States with a ‘complete set of baseball requisites.’

Baseball declined and disappeared, but was revived in that school in 1901 as a summer

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<sup>908</sup> LC 28 Oct 1884.

<sup>909</sup> LC 8 Feb 1887.

game and ebbed between flourishing and mere survival as a pastime.<sup>910</sup> The gap between the late 1880s and 1901 coincides with the absence from the college of the priest who imported the game, Rev. William Ronan. This reliance on the agency of lone individuals to spur on a club, game or pastime perfectly illustrates the necessary role of the Atlases of sport in the late nineteenth century.

### **Football (Association)**

Association football did not appear in Limerick until after the period focussed on in this study. Even then its progress was painfully slow in comparison to that of rugby union football. One of Limerick soccer's early nurseries, Mungret College – where the 'dribbling' code was the most popular game from the early 1890s, only played its first 'outmatch' in 1904.<sup>911</sup> Mungret's difficulty in securing outside opposition for its team until this late stage suggests a lack of interest in the association variety of the game, not surprising given Rugby Union and Gaelic Football's earlier starts in the region. That 1904 contest was a three goal to two victory against Crescent College and these two institutional clubs, three proto-clubs, Mr. Lalor's, Mr French's and Mr. Spillane's teams, were augmented by the Limerick Association Football (L AFC) team in the twentieth century's first decade. In December 1908 and February 1909 Mungret College secured two facile victories over Limerick AFC that point to the city team's recent introduction to the game.<sup>912</sup> This period was a propitious one for soccer in Limerick because another 'newly formed Limerick club', "the Celts", emerged in 1911 to play against, and suffer defeat by the Mungret boys.<sup>913</sup>

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<sup>910</sup> *Mungret College Annual*, 11, June 1907, 99; 3:2 July 1908, 190-3.

<sup>911</sup> *Mungret College Annual*, 1905, 62-4.

<sup>912</sup> *Mungret College Annual* 10, 1907, 76-7; 11, June 1907, 112; 3:2 July 1908, 184-6; 3:3 July 1909, 269-70.

Mr. Spillane's team was a group of past students of Jesuit colleges, *Mungret College Annual* 11, June 1907, 99.

<sup>913</sup> *Mungret College Annual*, 3:5 July 1911, 414.

Intriguingly, however, the jubilee edition of the Mungret college annual notes that ‘gravel football, according to the Clongowes Wood rules’ was played in Mungret in 1884 and for a couple of years thereafter.<sup>914</sup> Clongowes Wood was a Jesuit college with well-established links to England’s famous Catholic school, Stonyhurst College.<sup>915</sup> Stonyhurst’s football rules were quite distinctive from rugby union. The vagueness of this description of a type of football does not rule out the possibility that a form of the dribbling game was played as early as 1884 in Limerick. Earlier references to football played by Royal Artillery personnel at their sports in September 1873 in Limerick and football at a fête in Rathkeale later that month are indeterminate as to the code of game played. Whether these games were of a handling or kicking variety is not known, so some consideration must be given to the possibility that the kicking game (soccer) and/or the handling game (rugby) were played as early as 1873 in Limerick.<sup>916</sup>

### **Hurling and Gaelic football**

Evidence for the practice of hurling and *caid*, though sparse, is telling. One letter on the plans for the new People’s Park in Limerick city included hurling and an unidentified form of football in a list of proposed, existing organised sports. A counter argument denying any need for hurling to be facilitated in the park noted that the class from which the players were drawn had emigrated – a simple, stark conclusion.<sup>917</sup> Earlier than these direct references was an implied criticism of the practice of hurling and football on Sundays dating to 1860. A pleading, near exasperated *resumé* of the law against sports on the Sabbath points to the very neglect of the law i.e. the sports complained of are continuing. The text read;

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<sup>914</sup> *Mungret College Annual*, 11, June 1907, 98-9.

<sup>915</sup> Clongowes is important in the history of rugby union in Ireland, Garnham, Neal, *The origins and development of football in Ireland; being a reprint of R.M. Peter’s Irish Football Annual of 1880, (introduction by Garnham)*, (Ulster Historical Foundation, Belfast, 1999), 1-7.

<sup>916</sup> *LC* 6, 27 Sept 1873.

<sup>917</sup> *LC* 22, 24 June 1871

‘The 7<sup>th</sup> of William the 3<sup>rd</sup>, Cap. 17 enacts that “any person who shall be found playing at hurling, foot ball, hand ball, wrestling, or *at any other game*, sport or pastime, on the Sabbath shall on being produced before any justice of the peace be liable to a fine of twelve pence and costs.” This act may be laughed at, but it is still the law.’<sup>918</sup>

It is possible that the editor’s italicisation of ‘any other game’ means the newspaper was delivering an oblique criticism of non-Gaelic sports practice on Sundays, but as the meekness of such an admonition does not ring true to the general tenor of the *Chronicle*’s surveillance of Limerick society, it must be concluded that hurling and football were largely the target of this censure. Only two other references to hurling appear in the *Limerick Chronicle* in the two decades before 1884. First, an incidental note on the zeal with which hurlers played all day in warm sunny weather – and this by a reporter lodged at an athletics event in deepest Clare in the mid-winter of 1877.<sup>919</sup> The second note highlighting the presence of the game in the region was in the margins of a court report about an assault. On that occasion a man was summonsed for savagely beating three men at a hurling match near Cappamore in early 1882 – two months shy of three years before the formation of the GAA.<sup>920</sup>

The mentions of *caid* or pre-organisation-led football, football of indeterminate rules and organisation (not including rugby union) are equally sparse. The novel one hundred a-side football match between Listowel and Lixnaw on the frozen river Feale in early 1881 is the most remarkable.<sup>921</sup> A large variation in the forms of football in North Munster was discernible at this time. The Kerry game involving two one hundred strong squads may be contrasted with a (similarly decimal-based) contest between ‘a ten’ of the farming classes and a ten of the military in a game of unknown

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<sup>918</sup> LC 11 Aug 1860

<sup>919</sup> LC 27 Dec 1877.

<sup>920</sup> LC 24 Jan 1882.

<sup>921</sup> LC 25 Jan 1881



rules in south Tipperary in 1866. The occasion obviously had an incendiary character and among the huge crowd were enough followers to cause the inevitable conflict.<sup>922</sup> It is not known what numbers lined out for the two teams at a football match in Dromcolliher in 1882, though three thousand was the estimate for spectators. Suspecting a Land League meeting under the guise of a football game the police gathered in large numbers to intrude, but their subsequent withdrawal leaving the game to proceed suggests the real intent of the gathering was recreational.<sup>923</sup>

The reported assault at the hurling match near Cappamore in early 1882 brought that game into view only because the injuries and crime were worthy of publication.<sup>924</sup> A hurling match in Corbally in 1887 also achieved visibility only when an accidentally injured player was taken to Barrington's hospital and this, not the game was worthy of note.<sup>925</sup> At the least it tells us that the *Chronicle* was ignorant of hurling and non-rugby union football; at its worst it tells of a deliberate neglect of these sports. By associating the games with violence the *Chronicle* was casting them in an extremely negative light and this contrasts sharply with the paper's effusive, practically fawning approach to many rugby union issues.<sup>926</sup>

The difficulty of quantifying the scale and tracing the distribution of indigenous sports before 1884 is significant. Nationalist historiography suggests, self-servingly, that the games of *caid* and hurling were almost extinct until the GAA, as *deus ex machina*, emerged to save them from cultural obscurity. This makes the GAA's contribution to Irish sports history more noteworthy than it would otherwise be. The games were, however, not extinct. Whether they were undervalued and under-reported or simply

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<sup>922</sup> LC 6 Feb 1866.

<sup>923</sup> LC 7 Mar 1882.

<sup>924</sup> LC 24 Jan 1882.

<sup>925</sup> LC 15 Mar 1887.

<sup>926</sup> LC 27 Dec 1884.

moribund has yet to be concluded. In any case the formation of the GAA produced a renaissance in the organisation, practice and appreciation of the games. A hurling game between Clare and Tipperary teams in July 1886 was described as one of the first since the formation of the GAA.<sup>927</sup> The renaissance in indigenous sports had uncanny similarities with the existing sports infrastructure. Singing and dancing concluded the sports of that day in a manner not unlike those sporting fêtes of the gentry and comfortable middle classes in previous decades and bands were prominent features of the GAA run events.<sup>928</sup>

More new clubs emerged to cater for athletics, hurling and Gaelic football. Shamrock Garryowen, St. John's, St. Michaels, Ballysimon and the Grocers Assistants clubs snapped into action soon after the lead given nationally by the GAA. These were Limerick city clubs.<sup>929</sup> County clubs included Plan of Campaign, Murroe, Liberties and Castleconnell.<sup>930</sup> Clare was a vibrant centre, particularly of hurling: Killaloe, Scariff Independents, Barefield, Cratloe, Newmarket-on-Fergus and Thomas Davis were similarly swift out of the traps.<sup>931</sup>

By early 1887 the GAA for Limerick could muster thirty-one clubs for an organisational meeting in Limerick's Town Hall.<sup>932</sup> One symbolic and one numeric feature of this meeting stand out. The use of the town hall was a symbol of the intent of the new organisation to occupy the centre of Limerick cultural life by literally

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<sup>927</sup> *LC* 15 July 1886.

<sup>928</sup> *LC* 23 Mar, 15 July, 2, 5, 7 Oct, 1886, 26 Mar 1887.

<sup>929</sup> *LC* 23 Mar 1886, 15 Feb, 26 Apr 1887. A Shamrock hurling club is noted from early 1886, *LC* 23 Mar 1886. In early 1887 a club of the same name and composed of CBS pupils from Sexton Street in Limerick City played football against Nenagh Emerald, *LC* 19 Mar 1887. It is likely, though not stated clearly, that this was under Gaelic football rules – the rugby team in Nenagh was Nenagh Ormond. The return game was played soon after and this is also a feature of the GAA practice of the times, *LC* 29 Mar 1887.

<sup>930</sup> *LC* 5 July 1887.

<sup>931</sup> *LC* 23 Mar, 15 July 1886, 15, 26 Mar, 16 July 1887. In case there is any confusion about the political categorisation of the Thomas Davis title, even the *Limerick Chronicle*, a loyalist and Unionist journal, had little difficulty with Thomas Davis and even praised his poem 'A nation once again.' *LC* 17 Mar 1887.

<sup>932</sup> *LC* 15 Jan 1887.

occupying its political and governmental centre. The figure of thirty–one clubs is also resonant as it is precisely one half the figure of sixty–two cricket clubs for which there is evidence in Limerick, Clare and adjacent parts of Tipperary over the two previous decades. In two years the GAA reached half the number of clubs in one county that cricket managed in three decades in three counties. It was a remarkable explosion in sports organisation.

The early Limerick GAA favoured large athletics meetings, hurling and football tournaments and return tournaments. A hurling and football extravaganza in Cork attracted thirty thousand people in 1886.<sup>933</sup> Limerick clubs visited Bansha in Tipperary by train in January 1887 and the Tipperary clubs returned the courtesy, visiting Limerick two months later.<sup>934</sup> The practice was popular and brought Limerick clubs into contact, not just with local rivals, with whom they travelled, but with opposition in other counties, witness the Limerick Commercials' exchange of visits with the Lee GAA club in Cork in April and May following the Bansha games.<sup>935</sup> The sporting 'trade' was not confined to athletics and field games: the Cork Gaelic Cycle Club and the Gaelic Bicycle Club of Limerick also exchanged visits that year.<sup>936</sup> This grand, wide, well–organised and regular diet of games gave clubmen and supporters the chance to enjoy games in many counties, to witness many different playing styles, and at regular intervals through the year. The sense of a national mission was also being cultivated by these popular sporting migrations.

The GAA had an open and clearly stated national mission statement to live up to, but localism was a significant component of the engine propelling the movement.

Divisions between the Gaelic football and rugby union supporters of Limerick were

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<sup>933</sup> *LC* 31 Aug 1886.

<sup>934</sup> *LC* 6 Jan, 1 Mar 1887.

<sup>935</sup> *LC* 9 Apr, 31 May 1887.

<sup>936</sup> *LC* 12 July 1887.

not apparent at this very early stage in the GAA's existence, local feeling remaining paramount. At a game between the Lee Club (Cork) and Limerick Commercials in 1887 there were some hisses for the Cork lads, though the ill feeling on the occasion actually arose from a QCC game versus Limerick FC in the Munster Cup rugby union final some time earlier.<sup>937</sup> That the geographical factor trumped the sporting factor, as seen in this attitude among Limerick supporters, indicates as much.

Co-existing with this hometown fraternity among footballers of different codes was some confusion between the football of the Gaelic code and of the rugby union variety. In 1887 a Great Southern and Western Railway Company Offices team played against the Company Stores in a game under Gaelic rules, on a Sunday, yet the score was, confusingly, 2 tries to 1 goal and 1 try.<sup>938</sup> There may have been mis-reporting or a lack of knowledge among the playing or organising personnel, but the possibility that for those players a game of football was just a game of football must not be discounted. The cleavage along 'sportarian' lines between the codes had yet to become more obvious. An ambiguous set of fixtures in 1887 involving the Garryowen, Kincora and Shannon clubs exacerbates the confusion. The code is not stated in the press reports, though it must have been rugby as these are rugby club names; but the games were lined up for a Sunday at the Market's Field.<sup>939</sup> That those clubs would play rugby on a Sunday seems unlikely, but not impossible: it does not clear up the confusion that must have existed in the public mind about two competing codes of football. The tantalising possibility also exists that those rugby clubs sought to capitalise on GAA practice to appeal to the public on the day it was most likely to respond in big numbers, Sunday. If this is the case then the competition between football codes was very intense, very early in the GAA era. The choice now offered by the GAA to potential footballers was

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<sup>937</sup> *LC* 2, 5, 9 Apr 1887. Further ill feeling arose following the return game when a disputed goal became the source of tension, *LC* 31 May 1887.

<sup>938</sup> *LC* 15 Mar 1887.

<sup>939</sup> *LC* 19 Mar 1887.

to play Gaelic football on a Sunday or rugby union on Saturdays, generally, but occasionally on weekdays. Laune Rangers, a rugby club in Killorglin, County Kerry responded to the choice and switched *en masse* to the Gaelic football code in the late 1880s. One cannot discount the intriguing possibility that Garryowen FC may well have faced the real temptation to move from rugby union to Gaelic football in those early months and years after their common year of formation, 1884.

Hurling and Gaelic football had no official or establishment patronage or support in this period. It took the emergence of a cadre of middle class cultural entrepreneurs to formalise and regularise the game. Only then did the field games it promoted become visible. However, the lack of noble patronage was not total: the Newmarket on Fergus football team was received at the home of Sir Augustine Fitzgerald in 1887 when the membership thanked him for the use of his demesne.<sup>940</sup> Gaelic games took patronage from another proto-gentry, the clergy of the Roman Catholic church. The GAA's receipt of the patronage of Archbishop Croke was a significant move for the organisation, but the emergence of the co-patrons Michael Davitt and Charles Stewart Parnell gave the GAA a trinity of patrons encompassing religious, economics and political interests. This trio symbolised the seriousness and ambition of the new organisation and offered the promise of support and co-operation at a local level, of most, if not all, of the local 'Parnells', 'Davitts' and 'Crokes' i.e. Land and National League organisers, Fenians, and priests and bishops. This was a sporting version of the New Departure of five years previously.

More informal and less team-based sports such as skating, chess, swimming, gymnastics and billiards form a fourth category of sport in this period. Though chess

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<sup>940</sup> LC 23 July 1887.

and gymnastics were organised in club form, most activity in these sports was individually based unlike the team pursuits of the New–Model sports.

### **Skating**

The simplest experience of skating was the practice by street scamps of throwing water on pavements to create a slide on the following icy morning, this tradition creating a great nuisance and drawing the ire of citizens and police alike.<sup>941</sup> Lake and pond skating was the more ordered and fashionable form of the sport and there were many sites that froze in winter to provide icy arenas, and for free.<sup>942</sup> The last week of 1870 allowed many to indulge their ‘rage’ for this ‘popular amusement’.<sup>943</sup> Loughmore at Raheen on the outskirts of Limerick city was the most popular venue, a product of its proximity to such a large population.<sup>944</sup> Thousands were reported to have visited its frozen pond in 1881, with many remaining into the night.<sup>945</sup> The increasing use of lamps to illuminate the pond in the early 1880s was a necessity for many people at work during the day: it allowed them a few hours of an extraordinary recreation, but the local paper also noted how lamplight ‘enhances [the] skating experience’ – an intriguing suggestion of romance.<sup>946</sup>

One grand notion in 1879 was to flood Corcanree, the marsh area adjacent to the floating dock in the city, and to charge city folk to use it.<sup>947</sup> It was a reflection of the popularity of the amusement, but an impractical idea, not least because it would counter efforts at land reclamation in the area.<sup>948</sup> Other suburban locations that offered skating possibilities were the Canal fields and the Abbey River, frozen over for the

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<sup>941</sup> *LC* 4 Dec 1875; 20 Nov 1880.

<sup>942</sup> *LC* 5, 9 Dec 1871, 12, 15 Jan 1885.

<sup>943</sup> *LC* 29, 31 Dec 1870.

<sup>944</sup> *LC* 7 Dec 1875, 25 Jan 1879.

<sup>945</sup> *LC* 13, 15 Jan 1881.

<sup>946</sup> *LC* 9 Dec 1882, 15, 17 Jan 1885, 18, 21 Dec 1886.

<sup>947</sup> *LC* 4 Dec 1879.

<sup>948</sup> *LC* 7 Oct 1879.

first time in 40 years in 1881.<sup>949</sup> Lough Gur, in south Limerick, was another potential ice rink when the weather allowed.<sup>950</sup> Though the sport was open to all, an idea of many of its adherents may be gained from the report that local servants were sent out to sweep it clean each day.<sup>951</sup> The River Feale also froze over at Listowel in 1881 offering locals an opportunity for skating as well as football and athletics.<sup>952</sup> The accounts of skating episodes invariably note the mixed nature of the sport with comments such as ‘not a few women were out’. Mixed male and female participatory sporting environments were otherwise very rare and this made the skating experience all the more exciting for that.<sup>953</sup>

The infrequency of ice-skating opportunities may have frustrated its *aficionadi*, but a commercial development of the mid 1870s offered the chance of year-round roller-skating, this time at a price, in the commercial, Limerick Skating Rink.<sup>954</sup> Commercial skating rinks grew like mushrooms in Ireland in 1876: between April and December rinks opened in Dublin, Limerick, Waterford and Clonmel in order to capitalise of the ‘rage’ identified by the *Limerick Chronicle* in 1870 and as an overflow from similar commercial developments in Great Britain; at that time rinks in Britain were in competition with theatres and concert halls for customers and were viewed as serious new leisure time providers.<sup>955</sup> An ‘exclusive’ rink club was organised in 1879 and arranged to reserve the rink on certain days for members only; just how socially elevated the club members were can be deduced from the fact that a military band was deemed necessary to accompany their exertions.<sup>956</sup> This club was short-lived, but that it was deemed necessary by some of the rink’s more comfortable patrons to separate

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<sup>949</sup> *LC* 25 Jan 1879, 22 Jan 1881.

<sup>950</sup> *LC* 17 Dec 1878, 15, 17 Jan 1885.

<sup>951</sup> *LC* 6, 9 Dec 1879.

<sup>952</sup> *LC* 25 Jan 1881.

<sup>953</sup> *LC* 17, 26 Jan 1871.

<sup>954</sup> *LC* 8 Apr, 13, 20, 27 May, 1, 15, 17, 27 June 1876.

<sup>955</sup> *LC* 15 Apr, 8 July, 19 Sept, 21 Nov, 21 Dec 1876.

<sup>956</sup> *LC* 23, 30 Jan, 8 Feb 1879.

from the rest of the general population shows the social cleavages in Limerick sport crossed all sporting disciplines.

The rink performed a sporting and an entertainment role with patrons using its facilities by day and professional skaters engaged on occasion to provide skating spectacles to an appreciative, paying public. Champion American skaters appeared in costume in the rink accompanied by a band on each evening they performed in 1877.<sup>957</sup> On many occasions bands, usually military, played in the rink, bringing it valuable business, but tempering its sporting function and emphasising its status as a wider entertainment provider.<sup>958</sup>

The rink was a commercial operation and as income from skating customers was plainly not sufficient to keep it solvent the rink management attempted innovations like flower shows and more and more spectacles so that it became a form of circus.<sup>959</sup> The rink's position was precarious; only a year and a half after opening there were rumours it would be sold and it was temporarily closed.<sup>960</sup> The purchase succeeded and it re-opened in time for its second anniversary in June 1878.<sup>961</sup> From Sept 1877 the rink hosted endurance walking contests, costume skating competitions, figure skating, 'comic' and 'artistic' skating displays – and even a bicycle skating display.<sup>962</sup> Bums on seats was the imperative driving the rink's old and new backers and exhibitions such as a sale of paintings or a demonstration by Siemens of electric light technology were other offerings by the only sporting institution in Limerick not dependent on sporting sentimentality for its survival.<sup>963</sup>

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<sup>957</sup> *LC* 21, 30 Jan 1877.

<sup>958</sup> *LC* 13 Jan, 14 Aug, 13 Sept 1877, 13 June 1878.

<sup>959</sup> *LC* 21, 26 28 July 1877.

<sup>960</sup> *LC* 12 Feb, 23 Mar 1878.

<sup>961</sup> *LC* 28 May, 4, 8, 13 June 1878.

<sup>962</sup> *LC* 15, 29 Sept, 4 Oct 1877, 23 July, 13, 15, 20 Aug, 12, 17 Sept 1878, 31 July, 14, 23 Aug, 9 Oct, 13, 29 Nov, 11 Dec 1879.

<sup>963</sup> *LC* 23 Nov 1878, 27 July 1880.



Some reasonable suggestions for the rink were not acted upon while others were attempted against large odds. In the former case the possibility that tennis could be played at the rink, though a perfectly reasonable one, came to nothing.<sup>964</sup> The rink owner did, however, flood the floor and upon freezing created a frozen urban pond, that, however accessible was not free as the Loughmore pond was.<sup>965</sup>

One move that proved popular was a mix of competition, talent contest and entertainment gala that modern figure skaters and gymnasts would understand. This was the scoring by the audience of competitors in skating contests initiated in 1878.<sup>966</sup> The last meeting in this period involved five couples, each in costume and their performances were judged by the public. The *Limerick Chronicle* approved of the public scoring system and said it did much to revive sport, normally at low ebb in summer. More controversial, however, was the same journal's suggestion that the five pairs in competition should dress in the national costumes of the five great powers, another instance of politics seeping into the most unlikely of sporting enterprises.<sup>967</sup> The pantomime the *Chronicle* sought came to pass with the incongruous exhibition of Zulu warriors and Chinese bicycle skaters at the venue in 1879.<sup>968</sup> These sporting theatricals merely presaged the eventual collapse of the rink as a sporting endeavour and in late 1882 it was converted into a theatre, hosting a week of opera in the spring of 1883.<sup>969</sup>

## Chess

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<sup>964</sup> *LC* 18 Sept 1877.

<sup>965</sup> *LC* 17, 19 Dec 1878, 20 Jan 1881.

<sup>966</sup> *LC* 13, 15, 20, 22 Aug 1878.

<sup>967</sup> *LC* 12, 17 Sept 1878.

<sup>968</sup> *LC* 23 Aug, 30 Sept, 2 Oct 1879. Fancy costume for rink, *LC* 6 Jan 1880.

<sup>969</sup> *LC* 31 Aug; 7 Sept 1882, 21 Apr 1883.

Chess was formally organised in Limerick in 1885. The evil of betting on chess was ‘rare’ according to a *Limerick Chronicle* editorial welcoming moves to establish a local club to promote the game and provide an agency to hold competitions. Note was also made of previous failures to get a club going.<sup>970</sup> A few days later a familiar lamentation in that paper’s sports pages noted the recent formation of an Irish association for the sport and expressed regret that Limerick should be behind other towns. It also reported a recent game of chess and repeated the hopes that a club would be formed.<sup>971</sup> A small meeting followed soon after the editorial and the epistolary jeremiad. The Limerick Chess Club was formed in the Limerick Athenaeum on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> June 1885.<sup>972</sup>

The foregoing description, detailed far beyond the histories of other local sports clubs, is a result of the late development of the sport, one feature that chess ironically shares with organised Gaelic games. Chess shares with Gaelic games another feature of its formal organisation. The local club only came into existence after a national body was founded to regularise the game.

A tournament among the chess club members was the rather democratic method used to determine the captain for each session. All members appear to have been active in the game and this may be contrasted with the large number of older non-active members attached to the rowing clubs, for instance. The Chess Club’s tight membership had important financial implications. Unlike Limerick’s boatmen, the chessmen had more freedom to run their affairs without the drag of older, non-playing members, but the price was to forego the membership dues of a large non-playing

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<sup>970</sup> *LC* 2 June 1885.

<sup>971</sup> *LC* 6 June 1885.

<sup>972</sup> *LC* 13, 23 June 1885.

cohort; fortunately the game was not resource thirsty and the club could make this less than onerous sacrifice.

The annual subscription for the Limerick Chess Club was ten shillings.<sup>973</sup> The club possessed twenty members in the spring of 1886 and held regular meetings.<sup>974</sup> The annual general meeting of the club in October 1886 revealed a club in good fettle.

Though some members had left town, the new arrivals saw a net gain of two members by year's end. An interesting and unique contest illustrating the extra-local reach of the game exercised eight of the club's members. They were involved in an international match, fifty-a-side, between Ireland and Scotland. They played by correspondence arranged through the Irish Chess Association, to which the club subscribed £1 annually. A system of handicapping was also in use in the club to provide greater opportunity for new and developing players.<sup>975</sup>

The Irish Chess Association's second meeting was held in Queen's University, Belfast in September 1886 so, taken with Limerick's Athenaeum chessmen, the middle class and educated elite tended to be the constituency of the organised form of the game.<sup>976</sup>

The narrow appeal of the club became more pressing by 1887. The second AGM resolved to admit new members in the new session without the need to pay a subscription.<sup>977</sup> The president of the club throughout this period was N.A. Brophy, a man who also held the position of honorary treasurer of the Limerick FC in 1890.<sup>978</sup>

## Swimming

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<sup>973</sup> *LC* 1 Oct 1885.

<sup>974</sup> *LC* 22 Apr 1886.

<sup>975</sup> *LC* 2 Oct 1886.

<sup>976</sup> *IT* 20 Sept 1886.

<sup>977</sup> *LC* 4 Oct 1887.

<sup>978</sup> *LC* 8 Mar 1890.

An 1869 letter promoting the value of swimming, aimed at school headmasters, claimed that they ‘should send boys with an usher to learn to swim every fine day in summer.’ Elaborating further, the writer declared; ‘Physical health, manly accomplishments, and habits of cleanliness at least equal book cramming, and are equally necessary to fit boys for the army or navy, or any other position in active life.’<sup>979</sup> The absence of any consideration of fun in the epistle was of a piece with the revolution of logic overcoming sports and leisure in the late nineteenth century. In this period swimming was marked by four key features; deaths by drowning, the tremendous popularity of nude bathing as a recreation; the importance of sea-bathing to the economies of resort towns and tentative local authority moves to establish better facilities for Limerick’s bathers.

Drowning while swimming was a common event, especially in the summer months.<sup>980</sup> The perils of water were not fatal, though, to two boys who died, not from drowning, but from sunstroke developed while out swimming in 1874.<sup>981</sup> Though men counted for the bulk of deaths in the water some women were not spared either, including one woman who died while bathing at Westport in 1851.<sup>982</sup> An 1879 editorial on the subject of people found drowned broached the subject that not all drownings were accidental and more than hinted at the possibility of suicide in many cases.<sup>983</sup>

The ‘bathing nuisance’ was composed of three elements, outraged witnesses, shy male bathers and shy female bathers. The bathing nuisance may be summarised as an objection by some to the practice of many men and boys swimming without trunks in

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<sup>979</sup> *LC* 4 Sept 1869. Also 25 Feb 1852.

<sup>980</sup> *LC* 5, 17 June, 24, 27, 31 July, 10 Aug, 28 Sept 1850, 20, 23 Aug, 13, 24 Sept 1851, 13 Mar, 14 Apr, 13 Oct 1852, 27 July 1865, 29 May, 21, 24, 26 July 1866, 24 Oct 1868, 3 Apr 1877, 13 Aug 1878, 26 June 1880, 28 July 1885.

<sup>981</sup> *LC* 21 July 1874.

<sup>982</sup> *LC* 8 June 1850.

<sup>983</sup> *LC* 14 Oct 1879.

leisure spaces close in the town's centre and its environs as well as some of the popular resort towns. King's Island, Arthur's Quay and the Canal Bank were some of the central bathing spots where such outrages to late century decency were witnessed.<sup>984</sup> Two hundred soldiers disporting themselves on the Island bank were described in 1886, topically and melodramatically, as 'Zulus'.<sup>985</sup> Sometimes, as the objection included the observation that swimming was also conducted on Sundays, the taint of Sabbatarianism crossed another sports boundary.<sup>986</sup> The 1874 letter of 'Bartholomew Bashful' concerning the presence of women at bathing places suggests that the nuisance was sometimes felt by the swimmers and bathers and not outraged witnesses.<sup>987</sup> Women swimmers in Kilkee similarly felt uncomfortable at the practice of some local men collecting seaweed in Kilkee.<sup>988</sup> A rally of letters on the subject was commenced in the *Irish Times* in August 1868 following one correspondent's complaints that naked bathers could be seen from passing trains at Booterstown, Co. Dublin.<sup>989</sup>

Just as with poaching the constabulary were discreet in their application of public nuisance laws, but they were not completely inactive.<sup>990</sup> Police threats were often issued, such as an 1885 warning to Kilkee swimmers, but the bark of the constabulary was often worse than its bite – particularly in a town reliant on its bathing visitors for its wealth.<sup>991</sup> The police were bounced into occasional clampdowns on nude bathing in large part due to the large amount of negative press it received.<sup>992</sup> Two juveniles unlucky enough to be prosecuted in 1875 for nude bathing were let off with cautions,

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<sup>984</sup> *LC* 13, 17 Sept 1851, 26, 28 July 1866, 4 Sept 1869, 1, 8, 15, 19 Aug 1871, 9 Mar, 30 July 1872, 25 Aug 1874, 18, 22 May 1875, 14 Mar, 19 May 1876, 23 July 1878, 17 June 1879, 3 July 1880, 10 Aug 1882, 10 June 1884, 15, 20 July 1886, 21 June 1887.

<sup>985</sup> *LC* 15 July 1886.

<sup>986</sup> *LC* 26 July 1866.

<sup>987</sup> *LC* 25 July 1874.

<sup>988</sup> *LC* 10 June 1876.

<sup>989</sup> *IT* 5,7, 8, 10 Aug 1868.

<sup>990</sup> *LC* 27 June 1874.

<sup>991</sup> *LC* 12 Sept 1885.

<sup>992</sup> *LC* 28 July 1866, 25 Aug 1874, 22 May 1875, 17 June 1879, 20 July 1886, 21 June 1887.

and this liberality, apart from encouraging the swimmers and the police to see the offences as minor ones, was believed to be unlikely to have much effect on the miscreants.<sup>993</sup> That same report noted that police attendance on King's Island and the canal bank on Sundays could have some effect; of course, with a cop on every corner there would be no crime, then as now.<sup>994</sup> A more serious issue, hard to quantify among the many cases of 'nuisance', was the element of indecent exposure while bathing. A rare, successful 1884 prosecution for indecent exposure while bathing appears to be likely to be a true account of one such incident.<sup>995</sup>

The commercial possibilities of good bathing facilities were identified early in the century and the growth of seaside resorts such as Kilkee was achieved largely on the back of this single pastime and sport.<sup>996</sup> Resort entrepreneurs were happy to have visitors for a month, a week or even a day; excursions by rail to Salthill in Galway for bathing were heavily advertised, with the promoters hoping to influence patrons with a promise that travellers would not have to encounter any bands.<sup>997</sup> The attractions of Kilkee for bathing were frequently publicised via notes, poems, articles, letters and editorials.<sup>998</sup> Kilkee was celebrated as potentially the first sea-bathing place in Ireland in 1852, but this was a just two years after a disastrous season when one hundred lodges were left vacant.<sup>999</sup> Despite that poor post-Famine drop in fortunes the resort grew in popularity, especially when the steamer connection from Limerick city was improved. Commercial interests in Kilkee were not the only beneficiaries of an influx

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<sup>993</sup> LC 22 May 1875.

<sup>994</sup> LC 3 July 1880, 14 Aug 1884.

<sup>995</sup> LC 10 July 1884.

<sup>996</sup> Knott, Mary John, *Two Months at Kilkee*, (first edition Dublin, 1836, facsimile reproduction by Clasp Press, Ennis, Co. Clare, Ireland, 1997). Byrne, Thomas J., 'Charlotte Brontë's Kilkee Honeymoon', in *Old Limerick Journal*, 35 (Winter 1998), 24-31. Murphy, Ignatius, *Before the Famine Struck: Life in West Clare, 1834-1845*, (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1996). Murphy, Ignatius, *A People Starved: Life and Death in West Clare, 1845-1851*, (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1996).

<sup>997</sup> LC 17 July 1873.

<sup>998</sup> LC 20 July 1850; 21 May, 7 June, 19 July, 10, 13 & 17 Sept 1851; 1 May & 31 July 1852. Q. (M.F.), 'At Kilkee', *Irish Monthly*, XXIX Dec 1901, 620-1.

<sup>999</sup> LC 20 July 1850, 31 July 1852.

of wealthy, or at least comfortable, visitors; ladies holidaying in Kilkee donated an altar to the church in 1851.<sup>1000</sup>

The influx of bathers to resort towns was not an untrammelled boon to those localities. An Orange versus Green confrontation in Kilkee in July 1852 demonstrates that it was not always the wholesome place it is portrayed.<sup>1001</sup> Respectable young men vandalised bathing lodges in Kilkee in 1870 and again in the following year.<sup>1002</sup> It is tempting to view these outbreaks as nineteenth century manifestations of the contemporary rage for cheap holidays to east European cities by groups of young men on jollies and stag breaks – out of the confines of domesticity, community and work they felt less inhibited about defying normal conventions of behaviour.

Swimming shares a rare distinction with horse racing in this period; both activities, one informal the other an industry, were the only sports for whose infrastructural deficiencies a local authority was held fully or partly responsible.<sup>1003</sup> The Harbour Board did offer sites to the elite rowing clubs of the city while the Board and the Town Council also subscribed funds for the Limerick Regatta, but though such grants qualify as a local authority aid they do not imply local authority responsibility for the development of the sports.<sup>1004</sup> The Town Council in Limerick was mandated in its bathing facility endeavours by a desire to improve public health and to ameliorate the growing embarrassment, detected locally, at the scale and visibility of nude swimming.<sup>1005</sup> Those factors behind the Council's efforts were made even more necessary, however, by the lack of any agency for the organisation and promotion of

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<sup>1000</sup> LC 13 Sept 1851.

<sup>1001</sup> LC 31 July 1852.

<sup>1002</sup> LC 8 July 1871.

<sup>1003</sup> LC 1 Aug 1871, 16 July 1872, 14 Mar, 19 May 1876. Horse racing, LC 19 May, 23 June, 17 Nov 1874. Town Council Minute Book, 8, 22 June 1874.

<sup>1004</sup> LC 5, 7, 24 May, 2, 4 Aug 1870, 5 Sept 1871, 6 Aug 1872, 28 Mar, 30 June 1874, 4 Jan 1876, 4, 9 June 1885.

<sup>1005</sup> LC 1, 19 Aug 1871, 9 Mar, 30 July 1872.

the recreation in the region. With no swimming society or association for interested citizens to work through to realise such objectives the Corporation was compelled as early as 1870 to act.<sup>1006</sup> Action was, however, stalled by reports, investigations and funding issues.<sup>1007</sup> The town council was not entirely passive, however, councillors in 1871 looked at the potential of different sites with a purpose of having two spots for men and one for women, an important, if unintentional nod to notions of gender equality.<sup>1008</sup> The council's efforts were not blessed with success and five years later the problem still awaited a resolution.<sup>1009</sup> The link between the nuisance issue and the provision of public bathing places was clear; without designated official bathing spaces and officials to administer them, there was little incentive for the nude bathers of Limerick to modify their behaviour – and in that case the timidity of the police and courts in their treatment of the nuisance seems wise.

Swimming was a simple, cheap, accessible and refreshing recreation and its very ubiquity and simplicity seems to have militated against any moves to organise in any form other than its primary state. It is, nonetheless, surprising that no society, club or association was organised to combine the many swimmers into a common purpose and to further their enjoyment of a popular pastime. Only one suggestion that swimming races should be attached to the Limerick regatta, dating to 1872, has been recorded.<sup>1010</sup> This is another surprise. It would appear even at this distance to be a propitious match to add swimming contests to the regatta, but this was not attempted. In 1878 a prize was offered for a quarter mile swim race on the Shannon in 1878, for what was termed a nominal entry fee of a shilling, and its rarity was clear from the report.<sup>1011</sup> Two well contested swimming matches at the end of the LBC scratch races of June 1884 indicate

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<sup>1006</sup> *LC* 9 May 1876.

<sup>1007</sup> Town Council Minute Book, 3 Aug, 7 Sept 1871.

<sup>1008</sup> *LC* 15 Aug 1871.

<sup>1009</sup> *LC* 14 Mar, 19 May 1876.

<sup>1010</sup> *LC* 27 June 1872.

<sup>1011</sup> *LC* 21 Sept 1878.



that the dozen years from first proposal to execution is one marker of the Cinderella status of the sport.<sup>1012</sup> The evidence for the experiences of the real Cinderellas of the sport, women, is scant; one woman's ten-mile swim in the River Thames in 1875 was notable, but the general tenor of debate on women and bathing emphasised the elements of health and hygiene and eschewed considerations of any 'Zulu'-like fun that might be obtained in the seas and rivers of the region.<sup>1013</sup> The tension between fun and earnestness, the ludicrous and logical was present in all sports and pastimes in the second half of the nineteenth century.

### **Gymnastics**

In 1877 the LPYMA, which identified gymnastics as an activity proper to the formation of fine young Protestant men, built a state of the art gymnasium, that included a trapezium and a moveable floor, to the rear of its George's St. building.<sup>1014</sup> The costs of this element of the society's work were considerable, with the result that members had to pay a small supplementary fee to use the gym facilities.<sup>1015</sup> Gym classes were held twice weekly with instruction provided.<sup>1016</sup> Events called assault-at-arms were held occasionally to demonstrate the standard of skills achieved and as promotional opportunities for the society – such as the one in 1890 that included boxing.<sup>1017</sup> These assault-at-arms were inspired by similar displays by some army regiments, abroad and in Limerick. The pure gymnastic portion of the army displays was often small with more spectacular and martial contests in fencing, broadsword, boxing, quarterstaff, bayonet, sword and lance exercises taking prominence.<sup>1018</sup> The civilian LPYMA displays veered towards the true gymnastic set of exercises. In 1882

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<sup>1012</sup> LC 14 June 1884.

<sup>1013</sup> LC 21 Sept 1875. *Sanitary Record* journal articles on swimming reproduced in the *Chronicle* for a local audience, hints for bathers LC 1 Apr 1875, swimming for women LC 21 Sept 1878.

<sup>1014</sup> The same hall remains at the back of the LPYMA building a century and a quarter later, LC 20 Oct 1877, 5, 10 Nov 1887.

<sup>1015</sup> LC 22 Feb 1877, 9 Nov 1878.

<sup>1016</sup> LC 4 Dec 1884, 23, 27 Sept 1890.

<sup>1017</sup> LC 1, 27 Feb, 11 Mar 1890.

<sup>1018</sup> LC 17 Feb 1876, 25 Nov 1882.

thirty five members were enrolled in the gym classes and though that was a relatively small number it was an advance on the previous year.<sup>1019</sup>

The sum expended by the association to build and equip the gymnasium was £523 – before any professional instructor could be engaged. In this enormous statistic may lie part of the reason the sport failed to take off more widely in late nineteenth century Limerick. The LPYMA, however, did its level best and as late as 1920 could celebrate the twenty–eighth year of its Gymnastic Class – and a £2 6s 6d credit balance on its operating costs.<sup>1020</sup>

### **Billiards**

Billiards was a popular game among the wealthier elements of society; it was a prominent feature of the attractions of the Royal Hotel, Limerick, the Limerick Club, and of the local garrison's racket club.<sup>1021</sup> Its popularity received a boost in the early 1870s when its previously louche reputation was revised and somewhat rehabilitated in the eyes of many.<sup>1022</sup> Many of the concerns people had about the game's adherents were vindicated by occasional irruptions, such as the yob behaviour of some middle class male holidaymakers at a billiards hall in Kilrush in 1870, or the transfer to the courts of billiard room disputes, but in general, the progress of the game was towards respectability and profit.<sup>1023</sup> A great inter–generational dispute in the Catholic Literary Institute in 1883, ostensibly over the billiard room, was less about the game itself than about the propriety of having the game room open for members on Sundays. The fact that it was resolved in favour of the young wing favouring Sunday playing indicates a growing ease about the game, though lingering concerns about gambling were voiced

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<sup>1019</sup> Report of Annual General Meeting of Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association, 1882.

<sup>1020</sup> Report of Annual General Meeting of Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association, 1920.

<sup>1021</sup> *LC* 25 Mar 1865, 16 Dec 1865, 28 May 1878, 28 June 1884, 27 Nov 1884.

<sup>1022</sup> *LC* 22 Apr 1871, 28 July, 15 Aug 1874.

<sup>1023</sup> *LC* 27 Sept 1870, 15 July 1884, 11 Dec 1884.

in the debate.<sup>1024</sup> By the late 1880s among the seminarians of (Jesuit) Mungret College, the game was well patronised and enjoyed.<sup>1025</sup>

Finally, in a category of its own, is sailing. This sport does not fit simply into the earlier categories. The wealthy elite that enjoyed field sports also enjoyed sailing, but this was not a sport involving violence. Sailing had some of the teamwork of the New-Model sports, but could not be described as a middle class pursuit. A lawn or well tended sward was unsuitable for a sailor so it does not sit well with the lawn sports and it certainly does not match the relatively resource-light individual pursuits of skating, chess, swimming, gymnastics and billiards.

### **Sailing**

Sailing was an important sport in the nineteenth century and was preceded in terms of formal organisation only by those other aristocratic sports of horse racing and hunting with hounds; it was the aquatic sport of kings.<sup>1026</sup> John Russell, one of Limerick's food processing barons, received much positive press after the purchase of a forty ton yacht in 1879.<sup>1027</sup> A JP in Athlone received an altogether different type of attention two years later when, following some notices of ejectment issued by him, his £1,000 yacht was burned.<sup>1028</sup> In Lough Derg and along the Shannon River and its estuary from Limerick to the Atlantic Ocean, local aristocrats availed of lake, estuarine and ocean highways to enjoy this most expensive of sports.<sup>1029</sup> The Royal Western Yacht Club of Ireland dates from a meeting of aristocrats in Kilrush in 1828 and included not just Shannon-side

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<sup>1024</sup> *LC* 2 June 1883.

<sup>1025</sup> *Mungret College Annual*, 1905, 64.

<sup>1026</sup> *LC* 8 June, 31 July, 3, 7 Aug, 11, 18, 25 Sept 1850, 2, 9, 30 July, 13, 27 Aug 1851, 2, 9 June, 10, 14, 24, 28, 31 July, 16 Oct 1852.

<sup>1027</sup> *LC* 6 Feb 1879, 18 May 1880.

<sup>1028</sup> *LC* 29 Sept 1881.

<sup>1029</sup> Killaloe, 28 Mar 1874. Kilrush, 6 June 1871. Doonbeg, 14 Aug 1875. Mountshannon Bay, 31 Aug, 4 Sept 1875. Limerick city, 24 June, 6 July 1876. Ballyvaughan, 18 Aug 1877. Clarecastle, 1, 6 Sept 1877. Bunratty, 4 Oct 1877. Lough Derg, 12 July 1883; 13<sup>th</sup> match of the season, 13 Aug 1885. Luska Bay, 26 July 1883. Foynes, 29 Jan, 8 May 1884. Tarbert, 1 July 1884. Carrigaholt, 4 Sept 1886. Dromineer, 9 July 1887. Williamstown, 17 July 1847. Portumna, 17 July 1847.

sailors, but yacht owners from the entire west coast of Ireland, Cork, Dublin and Belfast cities, and even Great Britain.<sup>1030</sup> In its reach and membership the RWYCI was a Great British sporting institution as its flag, incorporating the crown of the Prince of Wales with a wreath of shamrocks, displays.<sup>1031</sup> The RWYCI was not simply a sporting institution, like its predecessor the Water Club of Cork Harbour, the first aquatic sports club in the world, it was a forum for yachting folk to develop and improve sailing craft with, over time, the long term aim of improving sailing technology to meet the needs of globalising trade. In this respect those early, aristocratic yacht clubs resemble contemporary high performance car racing companies in Formula One and Nascar, constantly ratcheting up the efficiency and performance of leisure craft and exploiting emerging technologies in maritime communications and distribution industries.<sup>1032</sup>

In mid-century the Lough Derg Yacht Club played the most significant role in maintaining the sport in the region and its regatta, and ball afterwards was a highlight of the social season in the surrounding counties.<sup>1033</sup> The LDYC and the RWYCI were important institutions in Munster's sporting infrastructure and were foci for social and sporting festivals. They offered their members and followers the opportunity to experience the whole island of Ireland as a playground by joining the aquatic caravan from one regatta to the next throughout the summer and autumn.<sup>1034</sup> Both the LDYC and RWYCI organised before the Famine and it took almost half a century before new sailing clubs emerged to follow their examples. Local businessman and conservative councillor Ambrose Hall was one entrepreneur who launched a vain attempt to get the

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<sup>1030</sup> [www.westernyachtclub.com/history](http://www.westernyachtclub.com/history)

<sup>1031</sup> anonymous, *Members of the Royal Western Yacht Club, Irish Division*, (Limerick, 1837).

<sup>1032</sup> *LC* 2, 9 July 1851, 17 Oct 1871, 6 Feb, 8 Apr 1879, 18 May 1880

<sup>1033</sup> *LC* 17, 24 July, 4 Aug 1847.

<sup>1034</sup> *LC* 1 Aug 1868, 17, 19 Aug 1871, 25, 28, 30 July, 25 Aug, 24 Sept 1874, 12, 14 Aug 1875, 18 Aug, 1, 6 Sept, 4 Oct 1877.

RWYCI to ‘give’ a regatta on the Shannon in 1865.<sup>1035</sup> Finally, efforts such as Hall’s were rewarded when Kilrush and Foynes, in 1871 and 1884 respectively, became sites of the Kilrush Boat Club and Shannon Yacht Clubs, while in between the Limerick Boat Club, though pre-dominantly a rowing institution, made a game effort to develop yachting and sailing in the city environs.<sup>1036</sup> The LBC’s yachting output began in the summer of 1874, when there was ‘delight’ at its revival, and continued through 1875 and 1876, but tailed off after that year, and after the emergence of the Shannon Yacht Club in 1884 the likelihood of yachting thriving under the LBC banner was reduced: rowing was cheaper, more exciting and had a wider appeal.<sup>1037</sup> The LBC hosted sailing matches again in 1887, but the competition from the other sailing clubs on the river and from its own rowing wing meant that it trailed a poor last to the region’s other clubs.<sup>1038</sup>

Sailing provides an insight into the meaning of sport in the early and mid-nineteenth century through an assessment of its material culture. The early century conception of sportsman was heavily reliant on the possession of the material culture of sport; horses, kennels, packs of hounds, boats, rods, guns, fishing and hunting rights, estates and the professional retinue to build, staff, maintain and operate a sports infrastructure, was what counted.<sup>1039</sup> Possession of such apparatus and what it indicated, i.e. power, was what mattered, and power was virtuous.<sup>1040</sup> To the multitudes lacking sufficient resources to devote to building such a materially rich infrastructure for play, sporting virtue became a function of what a man’s physique might permit him to do. His body was the material culture of his sports such as pugilism, throwing, wrestling, football,

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<sup>1035</sup> *LC* 3 June 1865. See replies to his claims, *LC* 13, 29 June 1865.

<sup>1036</sup> *LC* 6 June 1871, 24 June, 6 July, 5 Aug 1876, 29 Jan, 8 May 1884.

<sup>1037</sup> *LC* 18 June, 15, 25, 29 Aug, 26 Sept 1874, 7, 18 Sept 1875, 24 June, 6 July, 5 Aug 1876.

<sup>1038</sup> *LC* 11, 25 June, 5, 9 July 1887.

<sup>1039</sup> *LC* 2, 9 July, 13 Aug 1851, 16 Oct 1852, 22, 25, 27 July 1865, 25 Mar 1869, 14 May 1870, 7 Mar, 21 Dec 1872, 21 Feb, 31 Mar, 9, 11 Apr 1874, 9 Jan 1875, 11 Apr 1876, 16 Jan, 5 June 1877, 9 Aug 1879.

<sup>1040</sup> ‘Power confuses itself with virtue’, Fulbright, J. William, *The Arrogance of Power*, (Penguin, London, 1970).

running, swimming and many other resource-free pursuits; it was in this environment that Kickham conceived of the virtuous Matt the Thresher.<sup>1041</sup>

The middle class eventually triangulated between these two poles to create a new sports infrastructure, commensurate with its means and tailored to its values and objectives; it would be neither excessive like its aristocratic predecessor, nor parsimonious like its folk variants, the middle class sought a Goldilocks solution to its leisure needs.

Through the mechanism of the club and under the stewardship of its captains, sport was transformed from an end in itself to a means to an end – with the ends determined by those societal groups that arranged the formal organisation and control of clubs. Before the late nineteenth century frenzy of sports organisation sport concerned gambling, performance, socialising, the ritual days of a calendar year, carnival and entertainment. By the second half of the nineteenth century such loose, frivolous, even pagan, unregulated and irrational motivations for sports practice were losing their purchase in a more earnest age. Though such desires remained among the sporting public it is noticeable how swiftly a new, more utilitarian set of justifications for sports practice were embedded in the culture. These novel additions to the lexicon of sport included muscular Christianity, sport as a trial of personal qualities and physical fitness.

The processes of privatisation, commercialisation and *embourgeoisement* accompanied the increasing rationalisation, organisation and bureaucratisation of sport – much as late twentieth century association football observers lamented the ‘gentrification’ of the ‘people’s game’ whereby the middle-classes were deemed to have somehow

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<sup>1041</sup> Kickham, Charles, *Knocknagow*, (Gill & Son, Dublin, 1962 – first edn. 1879).

nefariously infiltrated the workingman's sport. Limerick sport was also politicised and consciously moulded around a British educational culture that was channelling a mock-Hellenic ideal, particularly with the adoption of the 'Olympic' brand to sell even a parish sports day. A more codified, rigid and chauvinistic form of masculinity was also interwoven into the tapestry of sport in the region.

The lack of university town status was the last significant factor governing the differing development of sport in Limerick compared to Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Galway. These were university towns and enjoyed an annual influx of squads of students to provide a permanently renewing core of sports club membership.

University towns also capitalised on the fact that most of the young men arriving had previous experience in their second level school of origin and they were precisely the age that sports clubs demanded for their programmes. The development of sport in Limerick lacked this particular engine of development and Limerick was left to its own, local devices.

# Chapter 3

## Localism



The new Irish may be integrating faster than we think. Inquiring as to the nationality of a worker at Farrenfore [sic] railway station in Kerry, I was told; “No, he’s not a foreigner, he’s a local Pole.”<sup>1042</sup>

But the map of the world was too large for me that morning, and I was longing to look at the local one and find out how far it was to Heron’s Gate (and where it was).<sup>1043</sup>

large numbers of youngsters from Boherbuoy and the district of St. John’s have been in the habit of upholding their respective localities by engaging in conflicts in the public streets,<sup>1044</sup>

When man goes to the moon, how will people react? They will think more and more about their own little parish.<sup>1045</sup>

Localism still rules.<sup>1046</sup>

I inclined to lose my faith in Ballyrush and Gortin  
Till Homer’s ghost came whispering to my mind  
He said: I made the Iliad from such  
A local row. Gods make their own importance.<sup>1047</sup>

In the late nineteenth century sports and sportspeople made their own importance; they were increasingly seen as representative of localities, institutions, communities and nationalities.<sup>1048</sup> A strong claim was put forward in 1870 for the importance of sports to national communities in the first editorial of the *Irish Sportsman and Farmer*, it said; ‘there is a clear link between a country’s history and its sports’, and in a fit of ebullience further announced that the story of a nation’s sports presented; ‘the sunniest aspect of its history.’<sup>1049</sup> What was considered representative of the past was also

<sup>1042</sup> O’Connor, Tom, *II*, 3 Nov 2007, 28.

<sup>1043</sup> Sassoon, Siegfried, *Memoirs Of A Fox-Hunting Man*, (Faber & Gwyer, London, 1928), 53. Sassoon, Siegfried, *Sherston’s Progress*, (Penguin, London, 1948), 62-86.

<sup>1044</sup> *LC* 1 Aug 1876, 1 Dec 1885. This echoes a contemporary Paris phenomenon, *LI* 30 Nov 2004, 22.

<sup>1045</sup> Corkery, Daniel, cited in *IT* 25 Oct 2003, Sports, 5.

<sup>1046</sup> Bruton, John, review in *II* (Review) 25 Sept 2004, 9.

<sup>1047</sup> Kavanagh, Patrick, ‘Epic’, in *Patrick Kavanagh - The Complete Poems*, (Goldsmith, Newbridge, Ireland, 1992 edition), 238.

<sup>1048</sup> Mangan, J.A., *Athleticism in the victorian and edwardian public school*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981). Mangan, J.A., *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal*, (Frank Cass, London, 1998).

<sup>1049</sup> *ISF*, 19 Feb 1870.

considered representative of the present; to journals like the *Irish Sportsman and Farmer* sports in Ireland were characteristic of the Irish national community.<sup>1050</sup>

It is clear that territorial allegiances, from national down to community level, are associated with sport, and these allegiances are intense.<sup>1051</sup> The *Irish Sportsman and Farmer* failed, however, to stress that sport was, arguably, a more important component of local or communal identity.<sup>1052</sup> A neat vignette illustrating this tendency occurred in 1852 when a brand new international dancing ‘furore’ swept through fashionable society eliciting a localised reaction that produced the ‘Tipperary Polka’.<sup>1053</sup>

The gap left by nineteenth century journalists in the study of geographically rooted communal identity and sport has not been fully addressed by twentieth century historians.<sup>1054</sup> Sport history is a discipline of growing academic interest, but the relationship between sport and geographically defined communities is, with exceptions, a peripheral concern.<sup>1055</sup> This myopia in sports historiography is surprising considering the connections between communities and their sporting representatives.<sup>1056</sup> The entry on community, civic pride and sport in the *Encyclopedia*

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<sup>1050</sup> LC 28 Feb, 18 Sept 1852, 16, 21 Aug 1866.

<sup>1051</sup> O’Caithnia, Liam P., *Scéal na hIomána*, (An Clóchmhar Tta, Baile Átha Cliath, 1980). O’Maolfabhail, Art, *Camán: Two Thousand Years of Hurling In Ireland*, (Dundalgan, Dundalk, 1973). Marschik, Matthias, ‘The Sportive Gaze: Local v. National Identity in Austria 1945-50’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 15:3 (December 1998), 115-24. Little, Charles, ‘Rethinking the relationship between sport and ‘community identity’: gender, sport and identity in an Australian suburb’, paper given at the 21<sup>st</sup> British Society of Sports History Conference, University of Southampton, April 2003.

<sup>1052</sup> Whelan, Kevin, ‘The Geography of Hurling’, in *HI*, vol.1, no. 1 (Spring 1993), pp.27-31. Parratt, Catriona M., ‘Of Place and Men and Women: Gender and Topophilia in the “Haxey Hood”’, *JSH*, 27:2 (Summer 2000), 229-45.

<sup>1053</sup> LC 27 Mar 1852.

<sup>1054</sup> Vamplew, Wray, ‘Sports Crowd Disorder in Britain, 1870-1914: Causes and Controls’, *JSH*, vol. 7, no. 1, (Spring 1980), pp.5-20.

<sup>1055</sup> Hardy, Stephen, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915*, (Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1982). Bouchier, Nancy Barbara, ‘For the love of the game and the honour of the town’: organized sport, local culture and middle class hegemony in two Ontario towns, 1838-95’, Ph.D. Thesis, (University of Western Ontario, Canada, 1990).

<sup>1056</sup> Mason, Tony, *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915*, (Harvester Press, Sussex, 1980), pp.233-5. Mason, Tony, ‘Our Stephen and Our Harold: Edwardian footballers as local heroes’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 13:1 (March 1996), 71-85. Fahy, Desmond, *How the GAA Survived the Troubles*,

*of British Sport* even attests to the powerful influence of communities on sports. The entry argues that an idealised sense of community has infected sports discourse, dictating that communitarian values require sport to be rational and provide a means to the desired ends of its sponsoring community.<sup>1057</sup> This concept, its author proposes, defines sport as a means to the particular ends of a community and not simply as an end in itself – the latter being the preferred perspective of most sports historians. Sports historians endeavour to study sport in and of itself, this ambition is thwarted if they are required to study a community first and its relationship to its cultural output, including sports, second.

Historians of society, culture and politics tend to give less ‘weight’ to sport than do ‘sport historians’. Hoppen’s light-touch analysis of sport in Great Britain is typical of this tendency, though his work has the merit of noting, if not investigating, the relationship of sport and localism in its development stage. For him,

Many popular sports in the second half of the century – bowling, quoits, dog racing, handicapped foot races – had extensive followings in particular regions (indeed their attraction lay precisely in their localness).<sup>1058</sup>

Hoppen, intuitively understood, in a way many ‘sports historians’ do not, the alternating values and rival meanings attached to localism by middle class and working class footballers when he concluded:

The initial middle-class arguments in favour of football, that it improved fitness, built character, reduced drinking, increased social harmony, gave way to working-class imperatives emphasizing a sense of local belonging and of competition (gambling came later). While, therefore, the game may indeed, have eased class

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(Wolfhound, Dublin, 2001). Brown, Peter, ‘Representations of place: Imaging Newcastle through media coverage of the 1997 Australian Rugby League Grand Final’, in *ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal*, 45:4, 1998, 5-9

<sup>1057</sup> Cox, Richard; Jarvie, Grant, & Vamplew, Wray, (eds.), *Encyclopedia of British Sport*, (ABC-Clio, Oxford, 2000), 76-77.

<sup>1058</sup> Hoppen, K. Theodore, *The mid-victorian generation, 1846-1886*, (Clarendon, Oxford, 1998), 364.

tensions, it also strengthened the idea among working men that they were part of a group with experiences and interests not shared by the bulk of another group, the middle-classes. Far more than cricket or any other sport, football not only reflected but helped to reinforce a particularly inward-looking view of how working people lived and, more importantly, how they should live.<sup>1059</sup>

Sports and local attachment have not been completely disregarded by sports historians.<sup>1060</sup> Metcalfe, outlining the remarkable degree of social cohesion in mining communities in the northeast of England, concluded that, after survival needs, sport was more important than any other aspect of the lives of the miners.<sup>1061</sup> The localism of homogeneous mining communities differs from the sense of local attachment in urban areas where, as Holt suggests, sport became a means of creating local attachments in industrialising, urbanising, nineteenth century Great Britain.<sup>1062</sup> Hardy, studying sport and the community in America, imagined Boston as a framework for a set of small sub-city autonomous communities that were not geographically defined, but were ‘interest communities’ which transcended local geographic boundaries.<sup>1063</sup>

This chapter steers a course between the approaches of Metcalfe and Hardy: it looks at the meaning of sport to a locale, and examines how interest communities responded to local patriotisms; it investigates how sports created a sense of ‘we-ness’ based on geographic boundaries – requiring an acknowledgement of sports that created an

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<sup>1059</sup> Hoppen, K. Theodore, *The mid-victorian generation, 1846-1886*, (Clarendon, Oxford, 1998), 363.

<sup>1060</sup> Daly, John A., *Elysian Fields: Sport, Class and Community in Colonial South Australia 1836-90*, (Available from author, Adelaide, South Australia, 1982). Hill, Jeff, and Williams, Jack, *Sport and Identity in the North of England* (Keele University Press, Keele, Staffordshire, 1996). Lamoureux, Christophe, ‘Factory, sport, and local life: tradition and evolution in working-class sport in a commune of the Basse Loire, 1877-1977’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 7:3 (December 1990), 414-31.

<sup>1061</sup> Metcalfe, Alan, ‘Organized sport in the mining communities of South Northumberland, 1880-9’, in *Victorian Studies*, 25:4 (Summer 1982), 469-95. Metcalfe, Alan, ‘Football in the mining communities of East Northumberland, 1882-1914’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 5:3 (December 1988), 269-91.

<sup>1062</sup> Holt, Richard, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, (Clarendon, Oxford, 1992), 148-178.

<sup>1063</sup> Hardy, *Organized Sport: .. Boston, 1865-1915*, 1980. Rader, Benjamin G., ‘The Quest for Subcommunities and the rise of American sport’, in *American Quarterly*, 29: 4 (Fall 1977), 355-369.

alternative sense of ‘we-ness’ ignoring local attachments. The term ‘interest community’ is sometimes replaced by a more abbreviated term – public.<sup>1064</sup>

Localism is a form of patriotism that emphasises the familiar over the ‘strange’ and ‘foreign’, and which views immediate local difficulties as more significant than greater external problems – in this worldview ‘here and now’ trumps ‘there’ and ‘in the future’.<sup>1065</sup> Local feeling seems to have been behind a militia confrontation with officers of the regular army on the King’s Island in 1865. An argument about use of open ground there, with the militia requiring it for drilling while the officers insisted they continue a cricket game, ended when the militia, with bayonets fixed, expelled the cricketers.<sup>1066</sup> This local versus outsider tension within military structures was widespread; enlisted men revealed similar tendencies a week after the cricket incident when 12th Depot men clashed with militiamen in Boherbuoy.<sup>1067</sup>

The sources of localism are familial, social, economic, political, historical, literary and topographical.<sup>1068</sup> If, as Limerick’s geographer poet Patrick J. O’Connor rhapsodised (quoting Seán Ó Faoláin), all of Ireland is in and about Rathkeale, we can further particularise the universal and national, as County Monaghan’s poet laureate Patrick

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<sup>1064</sup> ‘Politics are the death of the place, and the life of its publics,’ Hurlbert, W.H., *Ireland Under Coercion - The Diary of an American (vol.2)*, (David Douglas, Edinburgh, 1888), pp.6-7.

<sup>1065</sup> *LC* 22 Mar 1856, 1 Aug 1876, 9 Sept 1882, 29 Sept, 20 Oct 1883. The term ‘strange’ meaning outside or extra-local was much used in mid-century reportage. Writing of the previous regatta it was noted that the ‘absence of strange crews deprived it [the regatta] of usual interest’, *LC* 17 Mar 1874. Cricket match pitting Castlegarde versus ‘Strangers’, *LC* 5 July 1873.

<sup>1066</sup> *LC* 10 June 1865.

<sup>1067</sup> *LC* 20 June 1865.

<sup>1068</sup> Bax, Mart, ‘The small community in the Irish political process’, in Drudy, P.J., (ed.), *Irish Studies*, 2. *Ireland: Land, People and Politics*, (Cambridge, 1982), 119-40. Borchert, James, ‘Urban Neighborhood and Community: Informal Group Life, 1850-1970’, in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XI:4 (Spring 1981), 607-31. Buse, Dieter K., ‘Urban and National Identity: Bremen, 1860-1920’, in *Journal of Social History*, 26:3 (Spring 1993), 521-37. Conley, Carolyn, ‘The Agreeable Recreation of Fighting’, in *Journal of Social History*, 33:1 (Fall 1999), 57-72. Clarke, Howard B., *Irish Cities*, [Thomas Davis Lecture Series for Radio Telefís Éireann], (Mercier, Dublin, 1995). Pearson, Robin, ‘Knowing one’s place: Perceptions of community in the industrial suburbs of Leeds, 1790-1890’, in *Journal of Social History*, 27:2 (Winter 1993), 221-44. *LC* 20 Feb 1850.

Kavanagh suggests, down to a half a rood of rock in some field in Rathkeale.<sup>1069</sup>

Similarly, with a historical microscope it is possible to describe larger designs (the national) using much smaller patterns (the local) in a process similar to the mathematical study of fractals or the scientific understanding of atoms – a quantum approach.<sup>1070</sup> Gillespie defines local history as a primarily concerned with ‘people in places over time’ – demanding a focus on people and communities, locales, however well sketched or understood, and a clearly defined time period in order to extract the clearest meaning from one’s research.<sup>1071</sup> This study satisfies these basic principles.

Localism describes those forces (familiar, historical, economic), akin to the forces within an atom, which bind people together within a locale. The tensions wrought in a society by economic, gender, religious, ethnic, and political divisions are analogous to the competing electrical forces that drive atomic bodies apart. In contrast, localism can be viewed as the countervailing nuclear force that holds disparate people and groups together, and which helps them agree a common identification as, for instance, *Limericensis (hoi aristoi)* or ‘Garryowen boys’ (*hoi polloi*).<sup>1072</sup> The atom analogy is apposite because nuclear forces are, like local feelings, extremely powerful over short distances, but weak over long distances. Another physical force, gravity, is also strong over small distances, but this assumes a great disparity in size between two agents, for example, the nation and a single individual – and this force is analogous to the action of nationalism.

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<sup>1069</sup> O’Connor, Patrick J., *Exploring Limerick’s Past: An Historical Geography of Urban Development in County and City*, (Oireacht na Mumhan, Newcastle West, 1987). O’Connor, Patrick J., *All Ireland is in and About Rathkeale*, (Oireacht na Mumhan, Newcastle West, 1996).

<sup>1070</sup> Mandelbrot, Benoit, & Hudson, Richard L., *The (Mis)Behavior of Markets: A Fractal View of Risk, Ruin and Reward*, (Perseus, Cambridge MA, 2006). Mandelbrot, Benoit, *Fractals and Chaos*, (Springer-Verlag, New York, 2004).

<sup>1071</sup> Gillespie, Raymond and Hill, Myrtle, (eds.), *Doing Irish Local History: Pursuit and Practice*, (Institute of Irish Studies, Queen’s University, Belfast, 1998), 16.

<sup>1072</sup> LC 6 Jan 1866, 16 Sept 1882, 7 Feb 1885. *The Irish Builder*, XIII ; 279, 1 Aug 1871, pp.191-2.

In using scientific analogies to model the interaction of individuals, society and the great themes of history there is a danger of emphasising a deterministic view of agents and events in the past. This is not intended.<sup>1073</sup> Such analogies offer useful explanatory tools to compare history's approach to the past with physics' approach to the universe. The approach to history that deals with grand themes, great forces and super-individuals is equivalent to the world of Newtonian physics that seeks to explain the operation of powerful universal bodies and forces. Einstein's later role in developing the science of Relativity and its offspring, Quantum physics, to explain the action of tiny units of the universe for which Newton's explanations were insufficient presented the world with contrasting (yet extremely attractive) theories to explain the actions of energy and matter. Newton's macro view of the universe failed to adequately explain the micro perspective; it seems more than possible that the macro view of history, concentrating on nations, alliances, wars, grand themes and other weighty matters is open to contradiction by a micro theory of history matching Einstein's postulation of the relativity theory and his successors' definition of quantum theory. Science has moved beyond its Newtonian physics stage, but history is still under the sway of its Newtons.<sup>1074</sup> Forests of paper (and cyberspace) are devoted to globalisation, nationalism, conflict of civilisation theories and macro social and economic treatises – mere copses to families, streets and communities.<sup>1075</sup> To paraphrase de la Rochefoucauld; it is easier to know the world in general, than one part of it in particular.<sup>1076</sup>

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<sup>1073</sup> Ball, Philip, *Critical Mass: how one thing leads to another*, (Heinemann, London, 2004) does, however, pursue such theories – an ad hoc physics of society.

<sup>1074</sup> Ferguson, Niall, *The War of the World: Twentieth Century Conflict and the Descent of the West*, (Penguin, 2006). Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History and the last man*, ( ). Hobsbawm, Eric, *Age of extremes: the short twentieth century*, (Abacus, London, 1995). Judt, Tony, *Postwar, A History of Europe since 1945*, (Penguin, 2005).

<sup>1075</sup> The *Oxford Dictionary of Local and Family History* devotes itself to the 'numerous amateurs' actively pursuing 'their own research', (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997), preface.

<sup>1076</sup> The French writer's observation was: "it is easier to know man in general than to understand one man in particular", de la Rochefoucauld, Francois, *Maxims*, (Penguin, London, 1959), 92.

Localism, however, defies the concentration on the general; it is a function of the particular, of self pre-occupation within a locale.<sup>1077</sup> ‘Civic narcissism’ is an accurate term to apply to Limerick’s pre-occupation with its own affairs, business and concerns.<sup>1078</sup> The Rev. Lee, in a speech berating the Chamber of Commerce’s usurpation of the Town Council’s right to represent the people of Limerick by welcoming the Prince and Princess of Wales in 1885 on behalf of those same people, struck an undeniably localist tone. He said a prince’s smile would not fill *their* river with sails; would not restore the hum of industry to *their* streets, nor give bread to *their* starving poor.<sup>1079</sup> The *Limerick Chronicle*, usually a fierce defender of Limerick, ahead of a lecture by a female representative of the ‘Purity Society’, conceded it was a ‘parochial’ place.<sup>1080</sup> Parochial was at least an advance on the claim that it was ‘backward’ by failing to respond to the commercial opportunities anticipated from the Great Exhibition of London of 1851.<sup>1081</sup>

Though the city was self preoccupied it was not self-possessed, that is, confident and outward looking. The amazing level of discussion of national and international issues in local political debate might seem to contradict such an analysis, but very often the popular discourses involving international affairs were simply proxies for more significant local debates. Thus, the cheers for General Gordon’s nemesis The Mahdi, and those other scourges of the Empire, the Boers, in the 1880s and late 1890s, were uncommonly lusty in Limerick not from an especially cosmopolitan assessment of foreign affairs, though there were sincere arguments made, but from an earthier, more significant, local opportunity for Nationalists and Advanced Nationalists to torment

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<sup>1077</sup> Limerick’s self-preoccupation is legendary and the sensitivity of many of its citizens to outside scrutiny of the city and environs is unusually acute.

<sup>1078</sup> Term from Armistead Maupin in Patterson, John, ‘Out there’, *MG*, G2, 14 Sept 2006, 14.

<sup>1079</sup> *LC* 7 Apr 1885

<sup>1080</sup> *LC* 19 May 1885.

<sup>1081</sup> *LC* 13 Nov 1850.



Tories, Loyalists and Unionists.<sup>1082</sup> In response, Conservatives, Tories and Unionists tried to expose the more advanced wing of nationalism, whose violence they feared, by carefully selecting and utilising the international stories whose moral fitted their purposes – including such events as the assassination of President Garfield of the U.S.A. in 1881.<sup>1083</sup>

Self-preoccupation and localism are not phenomena exclusive to the life of a small or distinct locale. Alexis de Tocqueville's analyses of early nineteenth century democracy in the United States perceived a tendency to self-congratulation among majorities in that society. The person who first coined the term "American exceptionalism" was withering in his judgement:

The majority lives in the perpetual utterance of self-applause, and there are certain truths which the Americans can learn only from strangers or from experience.<sup>1084</sup>

The notion of American 'exceptionalism' in areas of culture, religion, economics and politics is simply an attempt to name a 'localism' great enough to encompass that society which occupies half the North American continent. Tony Judt even goes so far as to describe contemporary United States as "an anxious country curiously detached from its own past as well as from the rest of the world."<sup>1085</sup>

Artists have ploughed the furrow of localism ahead of political scientists and historians. The first deliberate landscape in European art was that of Siena and its

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<sup>1082</sup> Cheers for the Mahdi, *LC* 7, 14 Apr 1885. The Tories' total political eclipse, at a local level, was assured when they could not even muster a candidate for the General Election of 1886 and the Mayor of Limerick, Stephen O'Mara, expressed a personal sadness that the Nationalists of Limerick had not another opportunity of beating their opponents at the polls. *LC* 3 July 1886. Cheers greeted the assertion that the Tories' main standard-bearer (in seven elections), James Spaight, was most recently defeated 'with contempt', *LC* 7 Apr 1885. A horse called Mahdi ran at Tipperary steeplechases, *LC* 11 June 1885.

<sup>1083</sup> *LC* 12 July 1881.

<sup>1084</sup> De Tocqueville, Alexis, *Democracy in America*, (Library of America, New York, 2004), Book 1 Chapter XV.

<sup>1085</sup> Judt, Tony, 'A story still to be told', in *New York Review of Books*, 53:5 (23 Mar 2006).

surrounding countryside painted on the walls of the Palazzo Pubblico of that famous Tuscan town. The series of paintings commissioned by the town's leadership from Ambrogio Lorenzetti entitled *The effects of good government on town and countryside*, *Allegory of good government* and *Allegory of bad government* demonstrate a clear link between civic pride, topography, economic success, urbanisation and local government.<sup>1086</sup> Localism does not even rely on the grand, imposing power of a Sieneese palace of government. Mat Donovan, the hero of Kickham's *Knocknagow* found inspiration when 'turning round quickly, the thatched roofs of the hamlet caught his eye. And, strange to say, those old mud walls and thatched roofs roused him as nothing else could.'<sup>1087</sup> The terms that describe the phenomenon of localism in Europe – *Heimat* (Germany), *campanilismo* (Italy), *l'esprit de clocher* (France) and the Kickhamesque "credit of the little village" again emphasise the connection of individuals to local institutions, sentiments and cultures. It is these institutions, sentiments and cultures that are the two-way conduits linking locals to locales, and locales to their extra-local counterparts – churches being the prime example of the latter. A speech at the Sacred Heart College prize giving in 1887 extolled, explicitly, the merits of cultivating 'a local spirit – a spirit of pride in our own city, and a desire to maintain an honourable position amongst the cities of the country.'<sup>1088</sup> The local to national connection via the church (and *vice versa*) was made explicit in this exhortation.

Localism relies on topophilia, the love of place or landscape, and on the relationship of individuals to family, neighbourhood, and local institutions.<sup>1089</sup> In late 1865 a controversy emerged about the Limerick arms and one contributor to the debate, "Archaiologist", [sic] commented that;

<sup>1086</sup> Piper, David, *The Illustrated History of Art*, (Bounty, London, 2000), pp.86-7.

<sup>1087</sup> Kickham, Charles J., *Knocknagow or The Homes of Tipperary*, (Gill & Son, Dublin, 1962), 453.

<sup>1088</sup> LC 5 Nov 1887.

<sup>1089</sup> *Limerick You're A Lady, Slievenamon, The Fields of Athenry, The Mountains of Mourne et al.*

Limerick, I regret to say, has little now left to boast of. She is surpassed in commerce by Belfast, Cork, and, I believe, even Waterford; but there are some things left - her antiquity and historical associations.<sup>1090</sup>

What was even more remarkable in the debate was the esoteric nature of the dispute about the true nature and meaning of the city's coat of arms; it was an indication that this heraldic emblem had some purchase on part of the citizenry. Such a love of place and familiar relationships faces less competition from outside influences in independent, geographically discrete communities such as mountain valleys and islands.<sup>1091</sup> Rugby union capitalised on tribal, local patriotism to create the once powerful, though currently weakening, caricature of the Welsh valleys.<sup>1092</sup> Even in huge conurbations sport has drawn on localism to emphasise the separate identities of, for instance, towns like Bury and Crewe from Greater Manchester or Bray and Dun Laoghaire from Dublin. The rage for topophilia in nineteenth century Irish story, song and poetry hardly needs elucidation here, so an examination of the phenomenon in the world of competitive play offers a greater context in which to view localism.<sup>1093</sup>

A literary view of the local also yields more than village pump gossip.<sup>1094</sup> Many writers, including Limerick's Kate O'Brien and Michael Curtin, twentieth century inheritors of a vibrant nineteenth century tradition, have written Ireland into the

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<sup>1090</sup> LC 28 Dec 1865.

<sup>1091</sup> George Monbiot suggests that nomadic peoples favoured monotheism compared to the religious practice of settled people who invested fixed places with 'parochial spirits', *MG*, 4 Nov 2003, 23.

<sup>1092</sup> Andrews, David L. 'Welsh indigenous! and British imperial? - Welsh rugby, culture and society 1890-1914', in *Journal of Sport History*, 18:3 (Winter 1991), 335-49. Jarvie, Grant, (ed.), *Sport in the Making of Celtic Cultures*, (Cassell, London, 1999). Smith, D., and Williams, G., *Fields of Praise, the official history of the Welsh Rugby Union, 1881 - 1981*, (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1980). Morgan, Rhodri, *LI* 6 Aug 2003, 15.

<sup>1093</sup> McBride, Lawrence W., 'Imagining the Nation in Irish Historical Fiction, c. 1870-1925', in Brown, Stewart J., & Miller, David W., (eds), *Piety and Power in Ireland, 1760-1960: Essays in honour of Emmet Larkin*, (University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 2000), pp. 81-107 (especially 83-88).

<sup>1094</sup> Carr, Simon, *LI* 9 Apr 2003, 10. Carr wrote: 'Feuds are what hold the community together. You look out for your neighbour so you can report on what on earth they thought they were wearing. The reason we can get on so well in our large, complex, democratic society is that we don't know each other, and by and large try to keep out of each other's way.'

parochial settings of their novels.<sup>1095</sup> Such writers treat of the individual, the locality, Ireland and universal themes. To date, however, criticism of literature in Ireland has fetishised the national sphere over local horizons.<sup>1096</sup> Yeats's importance in Ireland's literary heritage must not cloud the proud assertion of local pride by his airman that 'My country is Kiltartan Cross.'<sup>1097</sup> An acknowledgement is necessary that writers saw themes through the lens of the local. Dylan Thomas, Thomas Hardy and William Faulkner explored universal themes against the fictional small-time backgrounds of Llareggub, Casterbridge and Yoknapatawpha County respectively.<sup>1098</sup>

A sense of place haunts James Joyce's tales in *Dubliners* and his *uber*-novel *Ulysses*.<sup>1099</sup> Joyce jested that were Dublin to be destroyed, its reconstruction could be facilitated by reference to the complete description of the city offered by him in his reworking of the *Odyssey*.<sup>1100</sup> The triumph of cosmopolitanism over localism and parochialism was Joyce's ambition.

Localism may sometimes equate to parochialism, a resistance to outside influences and a necessary acceptance of old gods and unreconstructed local leaderships – Marx's

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<sup>1095</sup> Curtin, Michael, *Sing*, (Fourth Estate, London, 2001). Curtin, Michael, *The Cove Shivering Club*, (Fourth Estate, London, 1996). Curtin, Michael, *The Plastic Tomato Cutter*, (Fourth Estate, London, 1991). Curtin, Michael, *The League Against Christmas*, (Fourth Estate, London, 1989). Curtin, Michael, *The Self-Made Men*, (Penguin, London, 1982). O'Brien, Kate, *The Land of Spices*, (Virago, London, 2000). O'Brien, Kate, *The Anteroom*, (Virago, London, 1988).

<sup>1096</sup> Kiberd, Declan, *Inventing Ireland*, (Vintage, London, 1996).

<sup>1097</sup> Yeats, W. B., 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death'. There is an earlier echo of this tendency in an *Irish Times* editorial on the connection between the militia and its locality, *IT* 28 Sept 1865.

<sup>1098</sup> Thomas, Dylan, *Under Milk Wood*, (Everyman, London, 1988). Turner, Paul, *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, (Blackwell, Oxford, 2001). Gray, Richard, *The Life of William Faulkner*, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1996).

<sup>1099</sup> Joyce, James, *Dubliners*, (Harmondsworth, London, 1992). Joyce, James, *Ulysses*, (Harmondsworth, London, 1992).

<sup>1100</sup> Budgen, Frank, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses*, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1960), 67-8. *People Make Places* may be the reality in any investigation of localism, but given Joyce's hubris it is not inconceivable that had he been aware of the science of genetics and DNA his boast would have expanded to include the ability to recreate (à la Mary Shelley) the human agents that populate his stories. If that is making too bold a claim for Joyce it is certainly within the compass of one writer who laboured under his shadow, the comic genius Flann O'Brien, whose mad scientist, De Selby, was committed to even more ludicrous schemes. O'Brien, Flann, *The Dalkey Archive*, (McGibbon & Kee, Bristol, 1964). O'Brien, Flann, *The Third Policeman*, (Flamingo, London, 1993).

‘idiocy of village life’.<sup>1101</sup> Since he coined the phrase localism has competed with cosmopolitanism against a background of urbanisation, industrialisation, increasing racial and ethnic diversity, and globalisation – processes that dilute the power of localism and promise instead the vainglory of McLuhan’s ‘Global Village’.<sup>1102</sup> The corollary of a local fear of wider foreign influences is the cosmopolitan fear of strange locales in American films like *Deliverance*, *Warriors* and *Southern Comfort*, where strangers, in unfamiliar territory, are made unwelcome, and endure a murderous campaign by the ‘natives’.<sup>1103</sup> The labels ‘rednecks’ and ‘backwoodsmen’ (even to describe recalcitrant urbanites) attest to the frequently made link between parochialism, conservative social and political ideologies and ‘strange’ and small-town locales.<sup>1104</sup> The practice of labelling the centres of power in developed western societies in terms of ‘villages’ is another interesting attempt to reduce great societal and economic personalities and dramas to more understandable, accessible ideas and agents. Few politicians have lost votes attacking opponents inside the ‘Beltway’ (Washington D.C., U.S.A.), ‘Dublin four’ (Ireland) and the ‘Westminster village’ (United Kingdom).<sup>1105</sup>

The economic aspect of localism is vital.<sup>1106</sup> In the absence of an agricultural society to foster improvements the *Chronicle*, in 1879, viewed Limerick’s agricultural economy as ‘lamentably backward’ in comparison with that in Great Britain.<sup>1107</sup> The complaint

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<sup>1101</sup> Marx, Karl & Engels, Friedrich, *The Communist Manifesto*, (Penguin, London, 1985 – Samuel Moore translation of 1888), 84. LC 19 May 1885. LI 20 Mar 2003, Rvw 6. LI 31 July 2003, Rvw 18.

<sup>1102</sup> Barber excoriates (à la Marx) ‘parochialism’, ‘dogmatic traditionalism’ and ‘tribalism’. Barber, Benjamin R., *Jihad Vs. McWorld: Terrorism’s Challenge to Democracy*, (Little Brown, London, 2003).

<sup>1103</sup> Directors: John Boorman (1972); Walter Hill (1979); and Walter Hill (1981), respectively.

<sup>1104</sup> II, 14 Feb 2004, Review, 1. SI, 15 Feb 2004, 23. Fennell, Desmond, *Nice people and rednecks: Ireland in the 1980s*, (Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1986).

<sup>1105</sup> Fennell, Desmond, *Nice people and rednecks: Ireland in the 1980s*, (Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1986), introduction; 12-14; 51-55; 86-94; 107-9.

<sup>1106</sup> Munting, Roger, ‘The Games Ethic and Industrial Capitalism Before 1914: The Provision of Company Sports’, in *Sport in History*, 23:1 (Summer 2003), 48-9. LC 8 Dec 1885. LC 13 Nov 1850. LC 19 Apr 1851.

<sup>1107</sup> LC 16 Oct 1879.

was not a new one, fourteen years previously the absence of such a society was equally, trenchantly condemned;

That the important and populous, enterprising and improving county of Limerick should be without such a society [Agricultural] – should be without its annual cattle show – should be deprived of all the benefits which flow from these competitive exhibitions – is not creditable. Scarcely any circumstances we can assure our readers, more thoroughly astonishes any stranger to our county, who happens to be well acquainted with what is going on in almost every other part of Ireland, than the statement that Limerick has no agricultural society and no cattle show. We believe there are few counties in Ireland of which the same thing can be said, while in many parts of the country there is a flourishing society in each poor law union.<sup>1108</sup>

This deficiency demonstrates that not only was sport not organised, neither was an important component of the region's economy organised – agriculture. Economic competition was behind a violent threat to a public works steward in Kildimo not to employ workers from a neighbouring town in 1852.<sup>1109</sup> Cork city stonemasons and carpenters had a practice of charging a form of 'hello money' from non-Cork tradesmen wishing to practice their trade in that city.<sup>1110</sup> This economic form of 'extreme localism' indicated a stratified, straitjacketed economy in which different interests fought strenuously to check the powers of all other interests. Skilled labour exploited local trade restrictions while fearing unskilled labour. Mid-century competition from Dublin, Cork and Galway exercised Limerick's business interests in mail distribution, brewing, distilling and baking, and by 1879 Chicago's huge (and growing) capacity in the meat trade elicited envious (and some fearful) glances in Limerick's food processing circles.<sup>1111</sup> Fresh Canadian salmon was another North American product with the potential to rival another speciality of Limerick's

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<sup>1108</sup> LC 2 May 1865

<sup>1109</sup> LC 14 Aug 1852.

<sup>1110</sup> Murphy, Maura, 'The working classes of nineteenth century Cork' in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, LXXXV, no. 241 and 242, Jan-Dec 1980, pp. 43-4.

<sup>1111</sup> LC 5, 9 Oct, 13 Nov 1850, 31 Jan, 26 May, 16, 23 June 1852, 5 July 1879, 25 May 1880, 4, 30 Nov 1882, 8 Mar, 8, 18 Nov 1884, 31 Jan 1885, 3 July 1886.

economy.<sup>1112</sup> Such concerns as Limerick merchants and workers expressed about growing national and global economic competition serve to bolster Tip O’Neill’s saw; ‘All politics is local’.<sup>1113</sup>

Through an examination of the representative function of sport can be seen the connection between local identity and sports in the communities, urban and rural, of North Munster in the late nineteenth century.<sup>1114</sup> The representation of a community, in a sporting sense, was achieved in three different ways that may be loosely labelled venue, victory and virtue. Sports inspired communal pride was a function of the possession of a sports apparatus or infrastructure, i.e. venue; of the accumulation of achievements and victories; and *via* the celebration of a sport or local heroes in whom those communities saw virtue – the best in themselves and their communities.<sup>1115</sup>

## Venue

The possession of a sporting infrastructure was a vital marker of the significance of a locale.<sup>1116</sup> The desire not to lag behind national and international trends in sport and leisure provision encouraged cultural, economic, political and social entrepreneurs to support and actively pursue the newest and best possible in clubs (agents), events (actions) and venues (places).<sup>1117</sup>

A chief concern in the debate surrounding the proposal, location, use and proper running of the People’s Park in the early 1870s was the necessity to match

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<sup>1112</sup> LC 4 Oct 1881.

<sup>1113</sup> Singh, Robert, *American Government and Politics: A Concise Introduction*, (Sage, London, 2003).

<sup>1114</sup> Ó Ceallaigh, Séamus, *History of the Limerick G.A.A.*, part 1, (The Kerryman, Tralee, 1937). Murphy, Sean, *Pedal Power by Shannonside: The Story of Limerick Cycling, 1876-1991*, (Limerick Treaty 300 Committee, Limerick, 1991). Mulqueen, Charles, *Limerick’s Rugby History*, (Limerick Leader, Limerick, 1978).

<sup>1115</sup> O’Dwyer, Michael, (ed.), *The Parish of Emly – A History of Gaelic Games and Athletics*, (Emly GAA, Tipperary, 2000). O’Flaherty, Michael, *The Home of the Spirit: A Celebration of Limerick Rugby*, (Limerick Leader, Limerick, 1999).

<sup>1116</sup> LC 27 July 1865.

<sup>1117</sup> LC 15 Apr, 1 Aug 1871, 28 Nov 1874, 15 Dec 1877.

developments in other cities.<sup>1118</sup> Similarly, talking of a series of yacht races to be held by LBC in 1890 the hope was expressed that Limerick could soon boast of a sailing club ‘such as are established in other Irish cities.’<sup>1119</sup> In 1885, moves to establish a chess club for Limerick were welcomed as broadening Limerick’s social infrastructure.<sup>1120</sup> In like vein, the lack of a pack of foxhounds to hunt North Tipperary in 1851, for the first time ever, was, to some, a stain on the character of that Riding’s gentry.<sup>1121</sup> The proposal to provide two general race meetings in Limerick in 1852 was explicitly linked to the city’s economic development and to the process of enlivening local society:

Consequent upon the growing importance of our City – the opening of the Great Munster Fair, the establishment of the Transatlantic Packet Station at Foynes, and the erection of the new markets sanctioned by Act of Parliament, the nobility and gentry of the County and City, the leading members of the Turf, and patrons of sport, are making preparations for holding two general race meetings in each year, one in spring, the other in autumn, contemporaneous with the Munster Fairs; so that in the ensuing spring an enlivening scene may be anticipated.<sup>1122</sup>

Tranter regards the enhancement of the prestige of communities as one of the four major motivations which persuaded the upper and middle–classes to patronise sports in mid and late nineteenth century Scotland.<sup>1123</sup> Pride was affronted if, in the provision of sporting facilities or in competition, a district was deemed to fall behind its neighbours.<sup>1124</sup> This pattern was as apparent in the mid-west of Ireland as it was in central Scotland.<sup>1125</sup> In one of the clearest arguments showing the importance of local pride above even sporting or financial concerns, a County Limerick Hunt meeting was

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<sup>1118</sup> *LC* 21 Mar, 16 Apr, 19, 30 May, 16, 20, 23, 25, 27 June, 2 July, 22 Aug, 24, 27 Oct, 17 Nov 1874. Letter to council from Mr. Harris, Limerick Town Council Minutes, 2 July 1874.

<sup>1119</sup> *LC* 29 July 1890.

<sup>1120</sup> *LC* 2 June 1885.

<sup>1121</sup> *LC* 8 Nov 1851.

<sup>1122</sup> *LC* 18 Sept 1852. *ISF* 18 June 1870.

<sup>1123</sup> Tranter, N.L., ‘The patronage of organised sport in Central Scotland, 1820-1900’, in *JSH*, vol.16, no.3 (Winter 1989), p.241. Mason, Tony, *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915*, (Harvester, Sussex, 1980), pp241-2.

<sup>1124</sup> Limerick Boat Club AGM report for year 1899 (p.10).

<sup>1125</sup> Howell, Reet A., & Howell, Maxwell, ‘Diffusion of Sport: The Queensland Pattern 1850-1900’, in Mangan, J.A., & Small, R.B., *Sport, Culture, Society*; pp.21-2.



told in 1879 that £550 was immediately needed to ‘keep up the prestige of the hunt’.<sup>1126</sup>

In competing to provide sports infrastructures to rival and out-do their neighbours, the upper and middle class leaderships of society in Scotland and Ireland were not entirely parochial. There was a flavour of micro-imperialism to many organisers’ efforts. Cork sports administrators sought to label their main athletics event the South of Ireland Champion sports, while Limerick tennis promoters claimed the right to host the South of Ireland championship at their tournament.<sup>1127</sup> Further afield, the loss of the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team to Los Angeles in 1957 merely confirmed that particular locale’s decline from city status to that of a mere borough of a brighter, shinier metropolis, begun a century before and entrenched by the consolidation of New York City in 1897. The creation of that super-city was, in turn, partly motivated by the desire to check Chicago in the American sphere and to confirm the city as the equal of London and Paris *et al.*<sup>1128</sup>

The possession and development of facilities and the organisation of clubs were tangible symbols of a community “going ahead”, and presented the positive face of those communities and their leaderships.<sup>1129</sup> Even if those facilities and clubs were not objectively the best in the land, they exemplified how the community was keeping pace with local, national or international trends, obviating feelings of shame at being eclipsed by infrastructurally richer neighbouring communities.<sup>1130</sup>

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<sup>1126</sup> LC 21 Jan, 4 Aug 1860, 24 June 1875, 12 Apr 1879.

<sup>1127</sup> IT 26 May 1875. LC 20 July 1886.

<sup>1128</sup> Prince, Carl E., *Brooklyn’s Dodgers: The Bums, the Borough, and the Best of Baseball, 1947-1957*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1997). Kahn, Roger, *The Boys of Summer*, ( ). Anderson, Sam, ‘Exorcising the Dodgers’, *New York Magazine*, 17 Sept 2007. Hammack, David C., *Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1987).

<sup>1129</sup> Term ‘go-ahead’ - Gaskell, Elizabeth, *North and South*, (Penguin, London, 1995), 420. LC 6 Aug 1851, 25 Apr, 21 July 1860.

<sup>1130</sup> LC 11 July 1878, 14 Aug 1880, 14, 16, 19 July 1887.

In addition to the impulse to make the worth of one's locality manifest, the desire to keep abreast of sporting developments pointed to the need for sports patrons to assert their received societal leadership roles.<sup>1131</sup> The entire decade of the 1880s saw increasing competition between the former masters of sporting ceremonies, the gentlemen of the fading Ascendancy, and the confident thrusting Nationalist/Home Rule middle class, for control of social and cultural rituals such as sporting events.<sup>1132</sup> The contest for leadership in local sports administration was a significant front in the larger national contest between Nationalism and Unionism for the favours of the majority of the people.<sup>1133</sup>

Epitomising this competition was a controversy in 1874 about which club, Shannon Rowing Club or Limerick Boat Club, should organise that year's Limerick Regatta, an event that had previously been the preserve of the latter club. For a time the regatta had two rival organising committees, but the LBC demurred and an agreement was struck whereby the clubs organised the event on alternate years.<sup>1134</sup> This arrangement lasted until 1885 when Limerick Corporation, the Harbour Board and the two boat clubs agreed a resolution to share the duties of organising the event.<sup>1135</sup> The organisation of Limerick's second most important sporting event after the Limerick Races finally devolved to local Home Rulers and nationalists in a 'high water' year for their political aspirations.

Simple possession of a sports infrastructure was crucial, but was not on its own sufficient to elicit community pride.<sup>1136</sup> Related to possession were three further determinants of local pride, the variety within the infrastructure, the necessity to

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<sup>1131</sup> *LC* 4 Apr 1874, 15 Nov 1881, 7 Oct 1884.

<sup>1132</sup> *LC* 17, 24, 26, 28 Mar, 2, 4, 9, 30 Apr, 4 June 1874.

<sup>1133</sup> *LC* 19 July 1881, 22 July, 7 Oct, 16 Dec 1884.

<sup>1134</sup> *LC* 24, 26, 28 Mar, 2, 4, 9, 30 Apr, 21 May, 4 June, 9, 11, 14, 16, 18 July 1874.

<sup>1135</sup> *LC* 4, 9, 18, 20, 27 June, 23, 25 July 1885.

<sup>1136</sup> *LC* 9, 22, 24 July 1874, 7, 9 Sept 1886.

improve the infrastructure, and a requirement to demonstrate a high degree of efficiency in the utilisation of that infrastructure.<sup>1137</sup>

Responses to the provision and development of sports facilities and clubs can be categorised as positive, neutral, and (only occasionally) negative.<sup>1138</sup> Athletics was, by 1879, so well established that the LPYMA could afford the luxury of questioning their worth in an academic debate typical of that association's willingness to challenge, in safe intellectual space, some of Limerick society's more sacred cows.<sup>1139</sup>

As sports became more organised, each new addition to the region's sports infrastructure was welcomed as reflecting the best of the organising communities and institutions.<sup>1140</sup> The welcomes accorded to the formation of clubs and to the organisation of sports events often referred to the long-standing desire for them and a support for their arrival that was bound to ensure success.<sup>1141</sup>

In contrast to the positive nature of the welcome given to most clubs, others were welcomed in neutral terms which suggested delight that, if the locality was not setting a standard, at least in sporting terms it was managing to maintain a parity with its past performance.<sup>1142</sup> One club, Furnell's Harriers, formed in 1876 was received in an underwhelming tone that noted merely; 'the sporting spirit of our county does not seem likely to degenerate'.<sup>1143</sup> Such feelings as are revealed in this quote also suggest that there was not always great pride in new additions to the region's sports infrastructure, merely a sense of resignation that things were not getting worse mixed with pleasure

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<sup>1137</sup> LC 15 Apr 1871, 16 June 1874, 14 Mar, 26 Oct 1876, 4 June 1878.

<sup>1138</sup> LC 16 June 1874, 28 Nov 1874, 28, 31 Aug 1875, 15 Dec 1877, 4 June 1878, 2 June 1885, 2 Oct 1886.

<sup>1139</sup> LC 30 Jan 1879.

<sup>1140</sup> LC 29 May 1869, 5 Feb 1870.

<sup>1141</sup> LC 18 June 1887, 5 June 1880.

<sup>1142</sup> LC 6 May 1871, 23, 26 May, 9 July 1874, 20 May 1879.

<sup>1143</sup> LC 11 Apr 1876.

that the local sports heartbeat had not flat lined.<sup>1144</sup> Local pride was a function of the increase in the quantity of local sports structures and a comparison of those structures with developments in competing centres.<sup>1145</sup> Limerick, it was once claimed, was ‘doomed to fall behind other towns’ if it did not invest more in its horse racing amenities.<sup>1146</sup>

Local pride in the organisation of sports was not always explicitly stated. In its welcome for the formation of a Hare and Hounds club in Limerick, in 1884, the *Chronicle* paid an inadvertent and back-handed compliment to the vibrant state of rugby in the city by hoping that the move towards more athletics would provide a ‘welcome change’ from football.<sup>1147</sup> Besides indicating a concern for variety in local sports provision the desire for a change *from* football on the part of the press implied there was an increasing appetite *for* football in the city and its surrounds.<sup>1148</sup> The delight at the formation of a new athletics club proved there was no lack of local pride at the growth of the city’s sports infrastructure, but that pride was tempered by a great concern for variety within that infrastructure.<sup>1149</sup>

The attitude to the progress of rugby in Limerick revealed in the *Chronicle*’s ‘welcome change’ comments might suggest some local disappointment at sports development, yet there was anything but disappointment following growing sports organisation.<sup>1150</sup> The September 1884 remark was, in four decades, one of only a small number of ambiguous, or apparently negative comments from the press, which usually

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<sup>1144</sup> *LC* 20 Oct 1883.

<sup>1145</sup> *LC* 22 Sept 1863, 7, 9 July 1874.

<sup>1146</sup> *LC* 10 Oct 1874.

<sup>1147</sup> *LC* 27 Sept 1884.

<sup>1148</sup> *LC* 16, 20 Oct 1883.

<sup>1149</sup> *LC* 4 May 1865, 20 Apr 1875, 29 June 1878, 28 May 1881.

<sup>1150</sup> *LC* 31 Jan 1852, 5 Sept 1868, 1, 3 Aug 1872, 12, 15, 17 Apr 1879, 2 June 1885.

wholeheartedly welcomed all efforts to organise sports, and not least because of the local pride they inspired.<sup>1151</sup>

Liquor, gambling and violence were the invariable targets of complaint when sports were seen as disreputable or unwelcome.<sup>1152</sup> Though these vices were not among sport's declared list of social benefits they did arrive in the wake of most sporting caravans.<sup>1153</sup> Most of the negative responses to sports development, therefore, were elicited less by sport *per se*, than by sport's catholic capacity to attract both the sybarite and the puritan to its circus. The Tipperary steeplechases and Limerick regatta of 1882 clearly demonstrated this capacity; many complaints were made about the extent of 'unwonted' gambling and the proximity of the bookies to the women and children.<sup>1154</sup>

These cavils aside, the almost complete lack of public controversy from the process of creating a sports and leisure infrastructure suggests that sports were seen as public assets, and this perception would have huge implications for localism and communal identity. The most significant consequence for localism, of the identification of sport as a desirable asset, was that in order for a community to have a greater asset portfolio local sports structures should be seen as intimately of that community.<sup>1155</sup> As a result, those communities that most sought coherence, a coherence that could be projected – within and without – came to see sports and their provision as an important element of community organisation.<sup>1156</sup>

The possession of a sports infrastructure by a community contributed to local pride but, the amount of sporting activity alone was not enough. Just as important was the

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<sup>1151</sup> LC 16 June 1874, 22 Jan 1876, 4 June 1878, 27 Feb 1883.

<sup>1152</sup> LC 26 Sept 1872, 4 June 1878, 21 Aug 1883, 11 Sept 1884.

<sup>1153</sup> LC 26 Sept 1872, 16 June 1874, 4, 6 June 1878, 18 Sept 1883, 14, 16 Aug 1884, 22 Sept 1885.

<sup>1154</sup> LC 22 June, 15 July 1882.

<sup>1155</sup> LC 10 Oct 1874, 7 June, 18 Oct 1884, 1, 18 Aug 1885.

<sup>1156</sup> LC 9 Aug 1873.

range.<sup>1157</sup> In any community there were groups for whom one sport had a greater appeal than others, horse racing was one of those pursuits with a universal appeal, but cricket certainly could not be so categorised. The greater the variety of sports that were catered for, the greater was the likelihood that people, through their favourite sports, were drawn to participate and to watch those rituals which promoted and celebrated communal identity.

The ‘county set’, for instance, instituted a set of intimately connected and similarly organised clubs devoted to coursing, hunting with hounds, horse racing, cricket, lawn tennis, athletics, bicycling, rowing, rugby union, sailing and archery. This set and its network of clubs possessed tremendous coherence and vibrancy. The clear links between Limerick County Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club, Limerick Amateur Athletic and Bicycle Club, Limerick Boat Club and Limerick Football Club came about as a result of common memberships, shared resources and sympathetic scheduling practices that allowed each branch of sporting endeavour to thrive. Limerick County Cricket Club’s moves towards establishing a tennis branch announced its intentions to place itself at the heart of the interest community, the county set.. The club field on the Ennis Road catered for the local county set’s penchant for cricket, but also hosted promenade concerts on weekday afternoons, sometimes in conjunction with cricket games.<sup>1158</sup> The introduction of tennis to the club grounds in the spring was complemented by the formation of the first city rugby club in the autumn of 1875. The winter game, rugby union, added to the summer pursuits of cricket, tennis and croquet thereby establishing the Cricket Club grounds as the year-round sporting heart of its particular interest community.<sup>1159</sup>

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<sup>1157</sup> *LC* 1, 3 Aug 1872, 28, 31 Aug 1875, 19, 26 Aug, 2, 14 Sept 1876, 11, 13 Mar, 27 May 1884.

<sup>1158</sup> *LC* 24 June 1880, 28, 30 July, 25 Aug 1881, 11 May 1882.

<sup>1159</sup> *LC* 27 Jan, 30 Mar 1876.

A significant concern for variety within the local sports diet lay behind the Limerick County Cricket Club's decision to move into the provision of lawn tennis in 1875 – four years after the formation of the cricket section.<sup>1160</sup> The ostensible reason for branching into tennis was to provide sport for women, but other motivations including localism and the desire to create a more exciting social outlet were also at work.<sup>1161</sup> The desire to create a facility where men and women of a similar background could enjoy each others society seems to have been as important, if not a more important motivation than the simply sporting one.<sup>1162</sup>

Over time, however, the expense and energy required to maintain all those separate sporting operations at the requisite social level became more onerous. The construction of rival clubs in most of these categories by the Roman Catholic and Home Rule sections of Limerick society posed sporting, cultural, political and financial challenges to the county set's local sporting leadership; the GAA opposed the LAABC, the SRC opposed the LBC and Garryowen FC usurped Limerick FC's number one position in athletics, rowing and rugby union, respectively. While trying to expand its sporting infrastructure the 'county set' spread its efforts too thinly; in defence of Limerick's rowers in 1883, one correspondent claimed there were too few rowers taking on too many races.<sup>1163</sup>

Though the community which sponsored the various clubs housed at the cricket club grounds conforms to one of Hardy's non-spatial 'interest communities', the role of localism and the extent to which that community was actually geographically defined cannot be discounted. In the 1870s Limerick students at Trinity College, Dublin contested an annual rowing match against the 'Rest' of the University Boat Club and

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<sup>1160</sup> *LC* 20 Apr 1875, 27 Sept 1884.

<sup>1161</sup> *LC* 17 Sept 1878, 20 Aug 1881, 7 July 1883, 13 July 1886

<sup>1162</sup> *LC* 24, 26 Sept 1878.

<sup>1163</sup> *LC* 16 June 1883.

its result was watched closely.<sup>1164</sup> In the Limerick context, too, the county set certainly saw itself as representative of the county; all of their clubs for instance linked their activities to that particular geographical entity.<sup>1165</sup> Its definition of its sporting representative function was limited to a ‘high sporting’ role analogous to the ‘high church’ element of the Anglican branch of Christianity. The elevation of muscular Christian, gentleman amateurism to the status of a creed placed it a remove from violent, low ‘church’, folk sporting ventures such as the rowing races organised and run by fishermen in 1874 that were followed by fights.<sup>1166</sup> The competition for local pre-eminence between the county ‘high sporting’ infrastructure and a new, equally respectable, middle class Home Rule and Roman Catholic alternative sports infrastructure was complemented by a rush of rivalries between neighbouring localities.

A ‘sports race’ began involving neighbouring communities to complement the economic, cultural and social forms of competition between them. This competition reached a high pitch when the national sports calendar filled up as more and more clubs offered events clashing with their fellows in the other large towns. Regattas in Cork and Limerick often clashed and it took some diplomacy to resolve those scheduling issues.<sup>1167</sup> This ‘sports race’ involved a push to develop more, bigger, and better sports facilities than one’s neighbours. In the 1880s, in particular, the number of horse racing meetings in the region grew enormously while older long-lapsed meetings were revived: Rathkeale’s meeting in 1880 was the first in forty years.<sup>1168</sup> The motto of the later de Coubertin branch of the Olympic movement, ‘faster, higher, stronger’, was concerned with improved performance. The motto of the Limerick

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<sup>1164</sup> *LC* 14 Apr 1870, 11 Apr 1878.

<sup>1165</sup> County Limerick Foxhounds, Limerick Harriers, Limerick County Cricket Club, Limerick County Football Club, Limerick Boat Club, Limerick Amateur Athletic Club.

<sup>1166</sup> *LC* 16 June 1874.

<sup>1167</sup> *LC* 15 Mar, 12, 19 July 1884, 20 June 1885, 14 Aug 1886.

<sup>1168</sup> *LC* 13 Mar, 20 Apr, 17, 24 July, 19 Aug 1880



region's sports organisers could be categorised, therefore, as 'more, greater and better' sports provision.

This impulse in local culture matched closely a contemporary rivalry among European and North American cities for pre-eminence evidenced by the institution of a series of rolling world's fairs, commencing with the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London in 1851, to the grandiose Eifel Tower statement of Paris's Universal Exposition in 1889, and the World's Fair in St. Louis, Missouri in 1904. The latter fair is significant, in a sporting context, in that the Olympics were also held at this venue. To a 'who's got the biggest world's fair?' competition among these and other cities in the industrial, commercial, engineering, political and cultural realm was now added a sporting dimension. At a smaller, County Clare level in 1869, the preparations for the regular Ennis Races at Ballycoree inspired similar moves to organise races in Kilrush and quickly led to moves to re-establish the races in Kilkee. The process of town leaderships emulating near rivals had the effect of inspiring other sports enthusiasts into action and in the same county at the same time a private horse race was held in Corofin for the decent purse of £20.<sup>1169</sup>

The practice of bidding to host the summer and winter Olympic festivals by cities aspiring to a special 'World Class' standard is but an advance on this earlier, more local, inter-parish and inter-town rivalry. The success of non-capital, second-string cities like Montréal, Barcelona and Atlanta in securing the Summer Olympics in 1976, 1992 and 1996, respectively, placed those cities on a world stage ever after and entered them on a roll of cities that included much bigger and more prestigious competition. In the ambitions of those cities, however, can be seen phenomena that even two small neighbouring villages could recognise – localism plus some attendant regionalism and

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<sup>1169</sup> LC 27 May, 10 June, 19, 26 Aug, 14, 16 Sept 1869.

nationalism. Montréal and Barcelona, representing nations within nations, Quebec within Canada and Catalunya within Spain, demonstrated to the world the worth of their economies and societies, but no less significant, they out-rivalled the capitals and traditional centres of power in those countries, Ottawa, Toronto and Madrid. Atlanta's 1996 games may not have presaged the rise of the old South, but a festival that was mocked by many in the northern United States as the 'Bubba games' was about more than simply sport, it showed how a vibrant, confident, once defeated city could rise and out-perform many of the States's other great cities – New York has yet to host the games. It is instructive too that Sydney's Herculean efforts to produce the biggest and best games ever in 2000, out-done in 2008 by Beijing, cannot simply be viewed as the games of either Australia or China and their largest cities, but those cities' attempts to even the score with their traditional rivals, Melbourne, host in 1956 and Tokyo, host in 1964.

As sport in Limerick became more organised, the aim of organisers and supporters became to surpass the standards of sports provision in previous years, and of neighbouring communities.<sup>1170</sup> The disappointing outcome of the 1873 Ennis Races led to the appointment of a new committee the following year to remedy this local shame.<sup>1171</sup> Newport, County Tipperary could not match the efforts of larger towns, but by having a race meeting very early in the year it appropriated the title and prestige of the first race meeting in the South of Ireland.<sup>1172</sup> The Castleconnell regatta had a fitful existence in the 1870s and 1880s, failing from 1877 until its revival in 1884 and its repeat in 1885; the revival led to the formation of a Boat Club there, as well as giving a stimulus to trade.<sup>1173</sup>

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<sup>1170</sup> *LC* 30 Oct, 3 Nov 1852.

<sup>1171</sup> *LC* 30 Apr 1874.

<sup>1172</sup> *LC* 18 Jan 1872.

<sup>1173</sup> *LC* 17 July 1877, 11 July 1878, 16 Feb, 19 July, 21 Aug 1884, 1, 18 Aug 1885.

There was great concern that sports infrastructures should not be allowed go to seed but should be rationalised and improved. Two Clare cricket clubs found it was necessary to merge in April 1865, the town-based Ennis C.C. and the countywide Clare C.C. The new united club took the name of the larger territory.<sup>1174</sup> In this significant concern for the improvement of sports infrastructures can be seen further evidence of the link between sports and localism.

Positive responses to an improving sports infrastructure revealed local pride certainly, but the significance of many such responses lay in the terms in which that pride was expressed.<sup>1175</sup> The Limerick Coursing Club was once described as second to none in the United Kingdom, a designation that left little doubt about the pride it inspired.<sup>1176</sup> Less exalted, but no less significant was the praise in 1879 for the young Limerick Amateur Athletic Club as the best club in the south of Ireland.<sup>1177</sup> Such remarks revealed the practice by which local moves in sports organisation were frequently set beside, and compared in the light of developments elsewhere, particularly the metropolis.<sup>1178</sup> Clubs in the capital had, of course, a different frame of reference; the *Freeman's Journal* sports meeting in Dublin sought greater competition to establish itself as the 'Boss' athletic meeting of the world.<sup>1179</sup>

This type of comparison made in press claims for the worth of local sports structures is interesting for the link between pride and geographic entities. An interesting comparison was made between the hunt clubs of various counties at the end of each year and rudimentary league tables of their levels of activity published covering such

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<sup>1174</sup> LC 15 Apr 1865, 31 May 1866.

<sup>1175</sup> LC 20 July 1886.

<sup>1176</sup> LC 30 Nov, 9 Dec 1865, 27 Nov 1879.

<sup>1177</sup> LC 19 June 1879.

<sup>1178</sup> LC 27 Mar 1875.

<sup>1179</sup> LC 20 July 1886.

statistics as numbers of days out hunting and the number of foxes killed.<sup>1180</sup> Local hunting and racing supremo, John Gubbins, was presented with a testimonial by grateful hunters in 1874 for offering such good sport, and it was noted how few counties were hunting better than Limerick.<sup>1181</sup> The amount of local pride expressed was proportional to the size of place with which local sports organisations were favourably compared. On one occasion the County Limerick Foxhounds were adjudged the best in the world for instance, but generally the best of local organisations were lauded as the best in the United Kingdom, while less important sports successes were considered the best in Ireland.<sup>1182</sup> The more faint praise of being considered the best sports provider in the south of Ireland, or in the region was, in comparison, a reflection of a lesser degree of local pride.<sup>1183</sup>

Crucially, since the number of local sports structures which could stand favourable comparison with similar or larger centres in Britain and Ireland was small, and because there was a great number of local structures which could bear comparison with structures in Munster or the south of Ireland, success in sports provision was most often seen as simply doing better than one's immediate neighbouring community. An inability to match the sports provision standards of the metropolis was, consequently, not seen as a total failure, but an inability or a disinclination to match the sports provision standards of neighbouring communities most certainly was. The major rivals with which the LCCC and the LFC were compared were their Cork counterparts, Cork CC and Cork FC. These rivalries were the most significant for the Limerick clubs.<sup>1184</sup>

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<sup>1180</sup> *LC* 21 May 1878, 24 Nov 1883.

<sup>1181</sup> *LC* 21 Feb 1874.

<sup>1182</sup> Limerick Boat Club Annual General Meeting 1903, LBC minutes, p.11. *LC* 9 Nov 1865.

<sup>1183</sup> *LC* 23 Aug 1881, 18 July 1885.

<sup>1184</sup> *LC* 1 Aug 1871, 23, 25 June 1874, 8, 13 Dec 1877, 7, 11 May 1878, 6 Jan 1880, 7, 10 Feb 1885.

While there was a demand for the development of a varied and an improved sports infrastructure, there was one further marker of the dependence of localism on communal possession of a sports infrastructure, i.e. how well the existing, and the new sports structures were utilised. There was a tremendous concern that whatever sports infrastructure the community possessed, it should be efficient. Administrators often exaggerated the worth of their efforts: the LAABC sports were often described as the best in Ireland. These assertions appear to have arisen less from a true conviction that they were holding the best event possible in Ireland, than from a need to ‘boost’ their position locally and to justify their efforts to local subscribers keen that their cash was put to the best possible use.<sup>1185</sup> The managerialism imposed on sports entrepreneurs from the very beginnings of sport’s codification came from the watchful eyes of local backers keen to get value for their cash inputs.

Because the worth and the organisational capabilities of sports clubs were seen to reflect on the sponsoring community, responses to the organisational competence of sports clubs can illustrate how local feelings ebbed between triumph and hollowness. The plaintive cry of one rowing enthusiast denied a regatta in 1887 may be compared unfavourably with the positive developments in rugby union at the same time; more players, large crowds and the inauguration of a Munster Cup competition gave great impetus to the latter sport.<sup>1186</sup>

While negative comments regarding the formal organisation *of* sport were negligible, there were negative responses to any lack of competence *in* the organisation of sport. Responses to failures in sports organisation revealed localism in action when it was deemed that the community had been let down, but reactions to failures of organisation also revealed a great concern for efficiency. Even rowing, the most efficiently

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<sup>1185</sup> LC 14 Aug 1883, 22 July 1884, 13 June 1885.

<sup>1186</sup> LC 26 Sept 1885, 12 Jan 1886, 1, 8, 11, 13, 15 Jan, 19, 24 Mar, 26 Apr 1887.

organised sport in the last quarter of nineteenth century Limerick, could on occasions have been viewed as having brought discredit to the town.<sup>1187</sup> The response to the poor performances and inadequate representation of local crews at the badly organised Limerick regatta of 1884 was that Limerick had been humiliated.<sup>1188</sup> The shortcomings of the rowing community were not in failing to win cups and trophies, but in not putting on a show worthy of the city, and indeed of the local clubs' traditions.<sup>1189</sup> Rowing's lassitude, which caused the *Chronicle* to describe the LBC as an 'ornamental institution' in 1884, lasted from 1886 to 1896, a period in which no Limerick regatta was held, and dealt a great blow to local pride.<sup>1190</sup> The size of that blow to pride may be gauged from the fact that during that decade the membership of the Limerick Boat Club, for instance, never dipped below 146 members yet, on four occasions had no competitive rowing representation at any regatta in the country. Despite possessing the best facility of any sports club in the city, a facility which had been maintained and improved upon yearly, the Limerick Boat Club's late 1880s and early 1890s record was deemed unacceptable. The Limerick Boat Club experience demonstrates that enhancement of local pride through sport was not a simple case of possessing a sports infrastructure, even an improved one, the efficient deployment of human resources, both organisers and performers, was also essential.

A great concern for efficiency permeated sports reports in the early years of formally organised sports in the region, the LCCC athletic sports promised to 'excel' in 1877.<sup>1191</sup> Consistently, reports referred to the 'arrangements' and preparations made by organisers, and through the use of a simple scale, organisational standards were

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<sup>1187</sup> LC 18, 25 July 1874, 24 July 1883.

<sup>1188</sup> LC 22, 24 July 1884.

<sup>1189</sup> LC 26, 28 July 1881, 9, 12, 14, 16, 19 June 1883, 29 May 1884.

<sup>1190</sup> LC 24 July 1884.

<sup>1191</sup> LC 14, 16, 21, 23 June 1877.

determined.<sup>1192</sup> Standards were judged by a simple satisfaction rating, and by variants of that term. Dissatisfaction was expressed for poor organisation, satisfaction for adequate arrangements, and finally, well-run events were adjudged eminently satisfactory.<sup>1193</sup> The highest accolade for sports organisers, awarded infrequently, was perfection. The arrangements at the fourth South of Ireland tennis tournament at the Limerick County Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club in 1880 were ‘perfect, and not a hitch occurred from beginning to end’.<sup>1194</sup>

The ‘tory’ or big house sport infrastructure of mid nineteenth century Limerick had the outward appearance of haphazard organisation when compared to the later middle class organisers’ attention to meetings, committees, resolutions and votes. Tory sports entrepreneurs, however, administered and organised their sports at the events themselves, at hunts, coursing meetings etc, or at the margins of the accompanying social events such as banquets, luncheons, balls and parties. In contrast, the middle class sports entrepreneur had a more utilitarian, business-like approach, with rounds of meetings and mounds of correspondence. These approaches had considerable political consequences as the latter process seemed to fit the more democratic times of the 1870s and 1880s; such a public, open, formal and systematic way of administering sport helped to shift public opinion towards accepting that sport was a public asset, in a public space for all the public – this was a necessary precondition for sport to become a more popular expression of local patriotism.

The provision, maintenance, and improvement of a varied and efficient sports infrastructure were complicated tasks for any community to undertake.<sup>1195</sup> Any

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<sup>1192</sup> *LC* 11, 18 May, 15 June, 13, 15, 17 July 1875, 3 May, 19, 28 Aug, 2, 6, 9, 18 Sept 1879.

<sup>1193</sup> *LC* 23 Sept, 12 Oct 1865.

<sup>1194</sup> *LC* 24 Aug 1880.

<sup>1195</sup> Sports event failures illustrate the obstacles to be overcome; *LC* 1 June, 23 Nov 1872, 23 Nov 1878, 17 Nov 1881, 22 July, 16 Dec 1884, 20 Mar 1886.

community that made such undertakings relied on, and developed further, a reservoir of local pride and a large degree of community coherence. But, as the ‘sports race’ escalated between neighbouring communities, the test of community worth was now transformed from a simple comparison of the quantity of clubs, members and facilities to the issue of the quality of performance and the objective measure of sporting competition.

### **Victory**

Performance was the second determinant of sport-linked local pride; that pride was boosted following victories, but was diminished where sports performances were regarded as less than acceptable. Victories by local athletes and teams, particularly at events outside Limerick, generated tremendous excitement and pride.<sup>1196</sup> Whether celebrating minor or major sports successes by local athletes and teams, local pride was considerable; psychological analyses of football followers term it ‘basking in reflected glory’.<sup>1197</sup> That pride was always further boosted if a good performance or victory occurred at events outside the region.<sup>1198</sup> The Munster Cup semi-final win by Garryowen F.C. over Queen’s College Cork in Tralee in 1886 and the victories of Shannon Rowing Club at regattas in 1872 elicited two reactions which reveal both the spontaneous, and the planned ways in which local pride was manifest.<sup>1199</sup> On their return to the city the footballers were received at the train station by a huge crowd at 11pm and led in procession through the town by a band. Following the SRC’s victory at the 1872 Limerick regatta the club committee presented expensive watches to the

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<sup>1196</sup> LC 1 Apr 1875, 16 July, 17, 19 Sept 1878, 11 Apr, 22 Aug 1882, 14 June 1883, 31 May 1884.

<sup>1197</sup> ‘Spectating offered an escape from mundane lifestyles and allowed citizens to identify positively with their community’s or their nation’s team. Psychologists have referred to this identification as the *BIRG Phenomenon* - Basking In Reflected Glory.’ Cialdini, R.B., Borden, K.J., Thorne, A., Walker, M.R., Freeman, S., & Sloan, L.R., ‘Basking in reflected glory: Three (football) field studies’, in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34, pp.366-75.

<sup>1198</sup> LC 1 Apr 1875, 8 Aug, 19, 30 Sept, 7, 10 Oct 1876, 6, 9 Jan 1877, 24 Mar 1881.

<sup>1199</sup> LC 10 Aug 1872, 18 Mar 1886.



victorious rowers.<sup>1200</sup> Their victory also received a well-planned public tribute.

Following public subscriptions by the mayor and the leading citizens of the city the rowers received, in January 1873, valuable watches as testimonials of their efforts.<sup>1201</sup>

The double presentation of watches to the successful sportsmen was a significant pointer to the importance of local sentiment towards the men and their club. The moves which brought about the mayoral testimonial must have been considerable given the fact that a significant club presentation had already been made and was well publicised. The men who 'maintained the honour of Limerick' had been rewarded twice. Approbation for sports achievements came mostly from the clubs themselves, and from official or public bodies, but other groups often made testimonials to athletes and teams.

In recognition of the representative power of sport, the organisation of tributes to local sportspeople was deemed to be the preserve of representative local organisations, but where there was a dispute between sections as to local leadership the duty of leading public celebration of sports successes were important symbols, and recognition of local legitimacy, and confirmation of local leadership.<sup>1202</sup> Sports celebrations did not just reflect the growing importance that was attaching to sport, nor were they simple expressions of local pride, but they were vital public rituals of legitimation for the organising bodies.

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<sup>1200</sup> LC 24 Aug, 5 Sept 1872.

<sup>1201</sup> LC 15 Feb 1873, 18 Mar 1886, 26 Feb 1889.

<sup>1202</sup> Jarvie, Grant, 'Highland gatherings, historical sociology and sport', in Mangan, J.A., & Small, R.B., (eds.), *Sport, Culture, Society, International Historical and Sociological Perspectives; Proceedings of the VIII Commonwealth and International Conference on Sport, Physical Education, Dance, Recreation and Health*, (University Press, Cambridge, 1986), 68-75. Jarvie, Grant, 'Highland Gatherings, Sport, and Social Class', in *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 3:4 (Dec 1986), 344-55. Jarvie, Grant, 'Balmorality, cultural production and the Highland Gatherings', in *Scottish Journal of Physical Education*, vol.17, no.1 (April 1989), 9-11. Jarvie, Grant, 'Culture, Social Development and the Scottish Highland Gatherings', in McCrone, David; Kendrick, Stephen, and Straw, Pat, (eds.), *The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture and Social Change*, (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1989).

Sporting and public bodies were not the only groups to celebrate local sports achievements. Through organising sports celebrations *ad-hoc* and semi-organised groups also made claims for local leadership. To celebrate the performances of the Barrington brothers as members of the Dublin University crew at the U.S. centennial regatta in Philadelphia, the tenants of the Barrington estate made a presentation to the rowers.<sup>1203</sup> The importance of the demonstration by the tenants for the Barrington brothers was that they were not representing a local aquatic tradition or club, in fact the young men rowed for Dublin University, so the tenants could not be represented in a sporting sense by possession of their own rowing club and by any victory of that club. The Barrington estate tenants' testimonial demonstrated another way in which communities were represented by sports or by sportspeople – by claiming a share of the glory associated with the sportsmen's achievements and capitalising on an opportunity to create a spectacle and a party that would ground a distant victory in a local context.

Among sponsoring communities sports-inspired pride was most dependent on athletes making a sincere and demonstrable effort to do their best. Defeat could be borne, but was least acceptable when athletes could not demonstrate they had made the best possible effort. In June 1883 there is evidence of a consensus within Limerick City that the Limerick Boat Club and the Shannon Rowing Club were failing to put enough effort into winning. The level of inactivity within the clubs – reflected in their results – was considered, in 1883, to be disgraceful. The results impacted the morale of aquatic sportsmen

who have had too often reason to deplore the carrying away of prizes by other clubs than our local ones, are loud in their expressions of hope that the training of Limerick crews may this year be a credit, and not a disgrace to their respective clubs.<sup>1204</sup>

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<sup>1203</sup> LC 10 Oct 1876, 6, 9 Jan 1877.

<sup>1204</sup> LC 9 June 1883.

Demonstrating the seriousness with which the poor performances of the rowing clubs was viewed locally, an editorial comment in the *Chronicle* one year later said that if they were not prepared to train they should simply become ‘summer recreation’ clubs.<sup>1205</sup>

However, the *Chronicle*’s helpless frustration with rowing’s inertia was not shared by all, as is demonstrated by the anger and barely disguised bitterness in the stance of one frustrated Harbour Commissioner to the Limerick regatta committee request for its usual subscription from that body. Commissioner Phillips was completely against subscribing the funds to the regatta organisers arguing that no effort was being made at the regatta to keep prizes in the city and that local crews were unable to prevent aristocratic metropolitans from claiming the expensive trophies.<sup>1206</sup>

Phillips’s ‘lack of will’ argument seems to have had some merit when it is considered that of the large membership which the Limerick Boat Club had, only nine members (12.5 per cent of the club membership) attended each training evening in the early part of the season.<sup>1207</sup> The recreation club jibes resonated even further when it was considered that the club was at an all-time high in numbers of paid members.

According to Bruce Murray, the club’s Honorary Secretary; ‘It is a remarkable fact that as your [club’s] membership increases and your finances improve rowing declines.’<sup>1208</sup>

Rowing inaction was seen to reflect on the club more than the locality, but when the LBC again became active and started to represent the city in outside regattas, their lack of success (and the lack of victories by other local clubs) was viewed as bringing ridicule on the city. Once again Bruce Murray, in 1898, drew attention to the inability

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<sup>1205</sup> LC 12, 14, 16, 19 June 1883, 24 July 1884.

<sup>1206</sup> LC 12 June 1883.

<sup>1207</sup> LC 6 Mar, 16 June 1883.

<sup>1208</sup> Limerick Boat Club AGM reports for year 1892 – 95.

to defend Limerick pride and noted that local crews were happy to contend only for the lesser prizes at the Limerick regatta. Through the failure of local clubs to train sufficiently, outside crews participated in and won the important races, while local sides fought for supremacy in the minor races. With a touch of homespun philosophy Murray described the situation in stark terms, saying that local crew rivalry was

analogous to that of the landlord and tenant striving for possession of the cow one pulling by the horns, the other pulling by the tail, while the lawyer quietly extracts the milk.<sup>1209</sup>

Unlike Harbour Commissioner Phillips's criticism sixteen years earlier, of the local rowing club's less than spirited efforts against outside opposition, Murray's comments highlighted at least a spirited local inter-club rivalry. That local inter-club rivalry was obviously more important to the Limerick rowers than was their rivalry with the aquatic representatives of Cork, Dublin, and other centres. By electing to compete against their immediate rivals, Limerick rowers demonstrated that localism was the greatest motivating element within their competitive spirit. This is not surprising when one considers that in 1898 when Murray made his comments, there had existed over three decades of rivalry between the Limerick Boat Club and the Shannon Rowing Club, and before that an even longer commercial rivalry between the employees of competing city department stores who formed both clubs.<sup>1210</sup>

The Shannon Rowing Club and the Limerick Boat Club were sponsored by interest communities, and were, in representing their rival publics, seeking local predominance. The rivalry between both clubs was such that there were fears of violence should, as was proposed, Shannon Rowing Club be granted a site for a club-house for the next to that of Limerick Boat Club's own premises on Wellesley Bridge Pier. Some Harbour

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<sup>1209</sup> LBC AGM report for year 1898, p.8.

<sup>1210</sup> LC 26 Aug, 12 Oct 1865, 28 Aug 1866.

Commissioners, whose decision on the land grant was necessary, felt that the proximity of the two clubs to each other might lead to situations that could escalate into violence.<sup>1211</sup>

Rowing was not the only culprit in the matter of inadequate effort. Following a particularly poor performance in 1880 by the Limerick County Cricket Club the *Chronicle* decried the players' lack of practice and hoped that they would pay more attention to the 'manly game'. Aside from the fact that six players went out for zero, two aspects of the club's defeat by County Cork C.C. particularly rankled, both of which demonstrate the pattern of comparing current local worth against past performances and against present rivals. First, the club's standard of play had deteriorated in comparison to its own previous levels, and second, the club was failing to hold its own in games against country teams of comparable, or even lesser, standing.<sup>1212</sup>

The extent to which sportspeople saw themselves as representative of their communities and defenders of local pride was evidenced by the fact that athletes grew more concerned about performances and results and became more sensitive to defeat than were their backing communities. Sensitivity to sporting defeat led to three outcomes; first, the previously discussed and insulting practice of designating a club team as *an XI* instead of *the XI* of the club, second, the doubtful practices of violent play or play of borderline legality, and third, the pursuit of victory in committee rooms.

In 1873 one irate Newcastle West cricketer protesting against the practice of deceptive team nomenclature criticised what to him was inaccurate press reporting, stating:

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<sup>1211</sup> LC 16 Aug 1870.

<sup>1212</sup> LC 22 May 1880.

you had it an eleven of the County of Limerick C.C. v the Newcastle C.C.'. Now this is quite incorrect. We never accepted a challenge from 'an eleven of the county'. The challenge we accepted, and the match we played and won, should have been described as 'The County of Limerick versus the Newcastle C.C.'. This may seem too trivial a matter for comment, but in a cricketer's eyes it means a good deal, 'an eleven' being almost equivalent to saying the second eleven of the club.<sup>1213</sup>

The practice of naming a team as lesser representatives of a club placed the result of a game at the centre of the practice of the sport, and made a mockery of the muscular Christian ethic which suggested that participation was the most important part of sport, but also revealed how insecure was the club's pride. The fact that it was a practice of many cricket sides to designate temporarily weakened sides as *an XI*, or somehow not entirely representative, was a remarkable one. The muscular Christian ethic was further brought into disrepute by another practice, not endemic but, noteworthy from an early stage in the organisation of sport – violence.

Violent play was the second indicator of the importance of victory and the fear of defeat. Though the causes of violence are complex there can be little doubt that under emotionally charged circumstances the propensity to violent conduct was greater. Local rivalries produced the most tense sporting encounters, and were as a result the most likely to feature violent or unsporting conduct.<sup>1214</sup> Incidents of violent play were not frequent, however, and were deplored by the press, but in all cases, criticism of rough or dangerous play was directed at non-local sides. In comparison to the criticism of visiting players' conduct there was an inability to identify and to criticise local based athletes for foul play. One account of 'objectionable play' in a local rugby game, in 1883, in the entire period of this study of establishment sports institutions is a remarkable statistic.<sup>1215</sup>

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<sup>1213</sup> LC 7 June 1873.

<sup>1214</sup> LC 2, 4 Apr 1887.

<sup>1215</sup> LC 27 Oct 1883.

This sports variety of moral equivocation compromised criticisms of outside athletes, and suggested a mentality that attributed local defeats to outlander perfidy. By implication, and through innuendo, some outsider victories over local opposition were thus cheapened, and indicated the presence of that most touchy element within local sports discourse – indignation. One such unpleasant controversy in 1882 involving rugby union saw Limerick involved in disputes over scoring, this time with the Queen’s College Cork club, the most significant opposition to Limerick in the province of Munster, therefore, Limerick FC’s most important rival.<sup>1216</sup>

Sensitivity to defeat and the importance of victories were demonstrated in a third way by the frequency with which races, games, and matches already decided ‘on the field’ were removed from the arena to the committee room. There were two chief grounds for recourse to off–field arbitration, one technical and concerned with rules, the other relating to play itself. The results of some matches in football, rugby, hurling, athletics, rowing, and of horse races in particular, were queried, and disputed victories were subject to scrutiny by committee.<sup>1217</sup> While it could be argued in the case of horse racing (and some rowing matches) that there was a financial issue to be decided, in the case of the other sports only victory and local pride was at stake in these disputations.<sup>1218</sup> Even the indefatigable Mr. Rugby Union, W. L. Stokes, was himself forced to review an umpiring decision he made in a game featuring the second fifteen of Limerick FC and the first team of the Catholic Literary Institute in 1883. Having initially judged in favour of Limerick (his own club) on a contentious score, he was obliged to review his decision and award the game to the newer, hungrier club.<sup>1219</sup> In

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<sup>1216</sup> *LC* 11, 16, 21 Mar 1882.

<sup>1217</sup> *LC* 9 Aug 1884.

<sup>1218</sup> *LC* 6, 17, 20 Nov 1883, 24 June, 15 July 1884, 31 May 1887.

<sup>1219</sup> *LC* 17, 20 Nov 1883.

racing, the ‘prolific objections’ at Miltown Malbay races in 1875 were noticed even in England.<sup>1220</sup>

### **Virtue**

The third way in which communities and localities were represented through sports was in the celebration of sports and of sportspeople for embodying the virtues and character of their place or group of origin. Local sports–heroes were elevated, virtues that they may or may not have possessed were attributed to them, and the successes were accounted for by their possession of that virtue. Crucially, the most virtuous thing that an athlete could do was to dedicate what he did to that community. The process by which a community saw the best in itself through sports and its representative sportspeople led to a heroicisation of athletes that had romantic and irrational characteristics.<sup>1221</sup>

The heroicisation of sports and sportspeople involved the magnification of the presumed virtues of a sportsperson out of all proportion. This process was revealed through the use of romantic language, and the classical allusions and comparisons employed to describe sports of which the designation of athletics meetings as ‘Olympic Games’ was the most obvious example.<sup>1222</sup> Romantic allusions from antiquity were complemented by medieval references, shooting gentlemen and archers were described as, and compared to knights, for instance, and in a similar Walter Scott-like moment a report of a cricket match in Tipperary noted that;

Tipperary sent forth its fairest daughters to incite the combatants to a vigorous struggle for the palm.<sup>1223</sup>

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<sup>1220</sup> *LC* 12 Oct 1875.

<sup>1221</sup> *LC* 16 July, 2 Aug 1881, 15 July 1882, 28 Aug 1884.

<sup>1222</sup> *LC* 29 June 1878, 8 Nov 1884.

<sup>1223</sup> *LC* 17 June 1865, 1 June 1871, 26 Aug 1873. Limerick Boat Club AGM report 1899, p.6.



This sporting romantic rhetoric was not a new phenomenon. The classical tales of heroic mortals elevated to the status of Olympians by virtue of exceptional deeds and trials offered a neat and favourable ancient comparison to nineteenth century sports entrepreneurs and athletes intoxicated with the power vested in sports champions by society. A respectable nineteenth century privileged education such as many early sports entrepreneurs would have received prepared those athletes and future sports administrators to see their endeavours in a romantic light. It is an enduring motif in sport.

In the later twentieth century, Irish ‘champions’ like Jack Lynch, Jimmy Deenihan and John Wilson were elevated to the Mount Olympus (Dáil) of Irish politics by grateful constituencies, but the similar experiences of Jesse Ventura and Arnold Schwarzenegger in the United States of America demonstrate a wider appreciation of athletic virtue by electors in other liberal democracies.<sup>1224</sup>

The distance between romance and delusion was sometimes bridged in flights of sporting rhetoric, in one fit of ebullience the *Chronicle* boasting that a local football side had the credentials to checkmate each and all of Britain’s rival European empires.<sup>1225</sup> The *Chronicle* ought to have been more aware of the pitfalls in this kind of hero-making. One article some years earlier had addressed such contemporary practices of ‘modern hero worship’; a sign that sports mania was gaining considerable ground in Great Britain and Ireland.<sup>1226</sup>

The representation of a community by a sport or by a sporting individual or team was not achieved without an element of make-believe or delusion on the part of that

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<sup>1224</sup> Two day conference on Jack Lynch’s place in Irish politics and sport at UCC, *IT* 4 Oct 2008, 7.

<sup>1225</sup> *LC* 27 Dec 1884.

<sup>1226</sup> *LC* 25 Sept 1879.

community. The hero-making process within sport, for instance, involved the projection of virtue on to individuals, and was a form of make-believe by that community. Veblen suggested that the large element of make-believe and 'ostensible mystification' employed by individuals that participated in sports was evidence of the histrionic nature of sport. For Veblen also an addiction to sports marked 'an arrested development of the man's moral nature'.<sup>1227</sup> But, he was not just concerned with individuals and argued that under the influence of a leisure class, communities also exhibited 'an arrested spiritual development'. Whether labelled delusion, arrested spiritual development, or make-believe, the consequence for a community was a suspension of rationality as evidenced by the heroicisation of its sporting representatives, and perhaps as significantly, the designation of a sport as 'national' – that it somehow embodied the virtue of the national community.

Veblen's analysis did not state, but suggested another consequence for localism and parochialism that arose out of the arrested spiritual development of a community as a result of the institution of a leisure class. The institution of the leisure class had, he argued, a conservative trend. The significance of sport implied in Veblen's analysis, would be as a vehicle to confirm received values and to promote orthodox behaviour within a community. It is undeniable that such a process existed in most societies where one or more sports were designated 'national', and around which national myths were drawn. Myths around sport were harnessed to idealise and promote the values and characteristics of a society. Hurling, cricket, and baseball have performed this function for the Irish, English, and American cultures respectively, and all of them once assumed the status of unquestioned and unquestionable secular religions.

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<sup>1227</sup> Veblen, Thorstein, *The Theory Of The Leisure Class*, (Penguin, London, 1994, 1st published 1899), p.256.

Cultural myths around sport can survive even after they are demonstrably unreliable, if they were ever so, as was clear when former United Kingdom Prime Minister John Major, quoting Orwell, envisioned a Britain at peace with itself where young men played cricket on summer lawns as women cycled to church services.<sup>1228</sup> The use of sport in prescriptive definitions of a national community are not the preserve of late twentieth century English Tories however, the tendency of the Gaelic Athletic Association to appropriate to itself the right to define the late nineteenth century Irish national community was a similar case of narrow cultural definition famously mocked in Joyce's portrait of Michael Cusack, founder of the Gaelic sports movement.<sup>1229</sup>

There was a pattern of patrician and elitist concern about rugby union in late nineteenth century Limerick: concerns were expressed, not about the greater development of rugby locally, but about the character of that development. In 1880s Limerick, a feeling existed that rugby was becoming vulgarised in class terms as its popularity grew and as it expanded to include sections of society outside its original gentleman amateur constituency.<sup>1230</sup> This development suggests that local and fellow feeling was overcoming class, status, political, and religious divisions, at least in rugby, but in cricket too there was some leavening of gentry influence with the participation of some from the tenant farmer and labourer classes to extend the link between the sport and the locality rather than the one social group.

While duplicitously claiming the paper had no objections to some of Limerick FC's existing membership, it nonetheless suggested that a clear (and more selective) membership policy would relieve the captain "of the disagreeable duty of rejecting

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<sup>1228</sup> *Guardian*, 23 April 1993. Seldon, Anthony, with Baston, Lewis, *Major: A Political Life*, (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1997).

<sup>1229</sup> Joyce, James, *Ulysses*, (Paris, 1922).

<sup>1230</sup> *LC* 31 July, 20 Oct 1883.

objectionable members.”<sup>1231</sup> Clearly, the base of the aristocratic rugby club’s membership was widening to encompass the local because of a less rigorous participation policy than existed in cricket and rowing for instance. The development of rugby *per se* was not the issue, but that if rugby should grow then new players and clubs should accept and conform to the gentleman amateur orthodoxies of the originators of the rugby code. The tension between class and local orthodoxies revealed in such concerns and disputes shows how accurately sports administration paralleled the cultural and political divisions in society as a whole.

There is no doubt that class was more important than local feeling when it came to sports club entrance policies. Aspiring local rowers were excluded by the practice of blackballing from membership of the Shannon Rowing Club and the Limerick Boat Club. The policy of exclusion was carried to the extent that those who were denied membership, and those who expected not to be admitted as members banded to form a third rowing club in the city in 1880. The Commercial Rowing Club, as it was named, immediately became the largest of the city’s rowing clubs, an indication of the extent of the pent-up demand for rowing club membership.<sup>1232</sup> The elitism of rowing, hunting, and cricket demonstrated, unsurprisingly, that local identity within those sports was bound by, and not as strong as, considerations of class.

But, the relatively unforced elitism of early rugby in Limerick must be considered a significant qualification to an otherwise rigidly observed class–before–localism rule. An examination of early rugby in Limerick thus offers an insight into localism and, in addition, gives us a greater understanding of the processes, which included localism, by which rugby was able to establish roots across a wider class base than any other Irish city (despite, or perhaps because of, the fact it was not a university town).

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<sup>1231</sup> LC 20 Oct 1883.

<sup>1232</sup> LC 5, 12 June 1880.

It is most likely when the Limerick County Football Club emerged out of the shadow of the aristocratic Limerick Club that the socially–orientated rules of membership of the Football Club were understood, and therefore not enumerated in the sporting branch’s constitution. Gradually, this lack of a formal prohibition on participation by men outside the gentry class combined with a demand for sufficient player numbers to field a side over the season, led to the inclusion of some Roman Catholic, Nationalist, and middle–class men who by no means conformed to the typical membership of that gentlemen’s club. The tension between the gentlemen’s club which sponsored the football club and the footballers within the team who could not hope to gain membership of the Limerick Club appears to have led in 1880 to the formation of a new team, catering for non–club men, the Limerick Rovers.<sup>1233</sup> The Rovers did not survive long which suggests that there were not yet sufficient playing riches within the city to sustain two class and politically defined rugby clubs. The identity of the Rovers, which may be inferred by the refusal of the *Chronicle* to carry any reports of its activities, appears to have been young, educated, ambitious, Roman Catholic, and Nationalist.<sup>1234</sup> Thus locked in a symbiotic embrace, the footballers within Limerick Football Club could not maintain a rugby side except with the participation of footballers from without the Club, while those non–Limerick Club men who aspired to possess a football club where their society was more acceptable could not yet go it alone.

The two principal motivations which led to these men overlooking class and social differences were first, the desire for sport, to play the game, and second, the desire to represent one’s place which was inspired by civic pride i.e. localism. While the joy of playing the game, and the camaraderie involved need little elucidation, the motivation

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<sup>1233</sup> *LC* 23 Sept 1880.

<sup>1234</sup> *IT* 26 Oct 1880.

that arose out of local feeling and civic pride cannot be underestimated. In the late 1870s and early 1880s the only sports in which civic Limerick was represented at regional, provincial, and national levels were cricket, athletics, and rowing, all of which had restrictive entry requirements, and rugby which had relatively few. Consequently the organised sport which was most accessible to middle-class, Roman Catholic, Nationalist minded young men who sought a stage where they could represent their place and community on a wider stage, was rugby.<sup>1235</sup> The pact which allowed this latter group of men to represent their place through rugby was no less important to the Limerick Club set who, without that player pool, would have had to forego the chance of representing *their* Limerick. It is well not to over-emphasise that the aristocratic rugby men were solely representing their place, no doubt they simply want to play the game. The first decade of the Limerick County F.C. was thus one in which two competing socio-religio-political blocs were accommodated under a single sporting banner, a banner representing the common ground between the groups – the fact that whatever they were, they were Limerick men.

Social, class, and political differences between players, which were overcome in the interests of maintaining a rugby presence in Limerick, assumed greater proportions when the Roman Catholic middle-class produced sufficient player numbers to make the secession from the Limerick County FC, and the formation of new rugby clubs viable options. Rugby experienced great growth in the 1880s, and the departure of many players to other clubs left Limerick County F.C. with a more socially homogeneous membership. This player haemorrhage meant that Limerick County FC was now more representative of an ‘interest’ community than a strictly geographically defined one.

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<sup>1235</sup> LC 5 June 1880.

In the gentry–leadership (tory) stage of sports development localism was solidified into the foundations of the sporting culture, but in the later stage of middle–class and club–based control of sports the importance of localism reached an even higher pitch.<sup>1236</sup>

This is because a landlord patronised and controlled sports infrastructure was superseded by a more democratic, popularly based infrastructure more in sympathy with public feeling.

The gentry’s conception of ‘locality’ was different from that of town and rural dwellers for whom the street or parish was the first layer of communal attachment. Instead of involving the denizens of their district – a move that would have involved ‘devolving’ down sport within that district, the gentry often sought to ‘claim’ a territory large enough to contain a population of like–minded people to sustain the style of club that conformed to gentrified notions.<sup>1237</sup> Emphasising the competition which existed between the foxhunters from county to county, was the territorially–shaped instruction by the *Irish Times* to take note of the excellent season enjoyed by the Louth Hounds who, in the season 1879–80 hunted on fifty–six days with no blanks (failures to draw a fox), and captured twenty and one–half brace foxes while running thirty–four to ground.<sup>1238</sup> One of the clearest examples of claiming the representation of a territory was the transformation of the Castle–Connell Archery Society to the Munster Archers in 1865.

Archery, new to the region, lacked sociability and spectacle because small, dull groups operating independently practiced it.<sup>1239</sup> A group in Castle–Connell led a move to

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<sup>1236</sup> Kenmare hurling match sponsored by the local gentry pitted Town parish versus Country parish – implicitly establishing the gentry as cultural patrons of both entities and thus, the natural leadership of local society. *IT* 31 Oct 1870.

<sup>1237</sup> Hunt clubs had their own ‘territories’, areas in which a club had exclusive hunting rights and for which they were also responsible.

<sup>1238</sup> *IT* 15 Apr 1880.

<sup>1239</sup> *LC* 17 June 1865.

rationalise the game and its initial aim was to form a countywide society.<sup>1240</sup> The designation Limerick Archers seems to have prejudiced the whole-hearted participation of archers from two counties in the natural hinterland of that north county Limerick village, i.e. Clare and Tipperary.<sup>1241</sup> The former county was just yards across the Shannon River from Castle-Connell, the latter only a few miles away to the east and north. The name eventually arrived at by the game's local promoters was the Munster Archers, and if its coverage did not extend to three of the six counties in the province after which it was named, the name had the advantage of not representing a single county which could alienate participants from without that county. The counties of Kerry, Cork, and Waterford were not represented in the so-called Munster Archers, which was in effect the Limerick and district archery society, though such a designation would give undue emphasis to one county over the others. The merit of the Munster name is that all existing and potential participants and spectators were satisfied that if the club was not named after their district, it was not named after any other district either. The difficulty with nomenclature for a local archery club showed that even within what was classed a non-spatial interest community local feeling was still a significant factor. If local feeling was absent it is likely that the organisers of sports clubs would have sought more esoteric or symbolic names for clubs, to emphasise their 'interest community' origins. This seems to have been a factor in rugby union in the south of England where the principal teams were named, not after localities but after such icons as wasps, harlequins, and Saracens.

The fact that the gentry sought a wide territory to represent, and did not devolve down sports within their home districts suggested the triumph of considerations of class over local and communal identity in the genesis of sports organisation, but this does not represent the complete picture. It is too fanciful to suggest that the gentry could make

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<sup>1240</sup> *LC* 4 May 1865.

<sup>1241</sup> *LC* 6, 8 July 1865.



common sporting cause with all the people and groups within their locality. Such an all-local cross-class project would have stretched beyond belief the social possibilities of later nineteenth century Ireland, fissured as it was on class, religious, national, political, and social lines. For the gentry, participation in sports was only permissible under the orthodoxies of gentleman amateurism, thus any cross-class truly locally based sports organisation was impossible. In addition, the gentry were the representatives of their districts in politics, society, the law, and economy. In this social, cultural and economic context David Vandeleur Roche's stewardship of the County Limerick Hunt Club in the seventh and eighth decades of the nineteenth century was a natural assumption of the sporting representation of that same territory and this was a simple progression to his and the gentry's 'natural' inherited leadership role.<sup>1242</sup> The scions of Limerick's gentry class, for instance, took on their Cork equivalents, both crews being subsets of the Dublin University Boat Club, in 1872, with Limerick victorious.<sup>1243</sup> The Limerick Boat Club's presidency and vice-presidencies for 1875 were held by a former Mayor and city magistrate, William Spillane, the last Tory M.P. for Limerick city, a Limerick Union ex-officio guardian and similarly a city magistrate, James Spaight, another city magistrate, Robert McDonnell, and bacon magnate, Joseph Matterson. The boat club was the sporting wing of the city's socio-economic elite.<sup>1244</sup>

Thus within the confines and demands of society's conventions, on their own terms the gentry were actually, and consistently localist. They saw themselves as representative of their territory as surely as any hurling team saw itself representative of its parish, or as any group of stone throwing youths were in upholding their street.

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<sup>1242</sup> He was one of the Deputy Lieutenants of the County and a magistrate in Croom, but his position at the social apex of the county set was his most visibly appreciated public endeavour. *Bassett's Directory of the city and county of Limerick, 1875-76*, LC 3, 14 Mar 1868, 1, 3, 5, 29 Jan, 10 Sept 1870, 24 Feb, 20 Oct 1877, 21 May 1878, 18 Feb, 12 Apr, 6 Nov 1879, 22 May, 29 July 1884, 19 Aug 1886.

<sup>1243</sup> LC 30 Apr, 2, 4 May 1872.

<sup>1244</sup> *Bassett's Directory of the city and county of Limerick, 1875-76*.

The locality impressed itself on many initially non–locale based sports clubs. Some clubs started out as patron’s clubs such as Mr. Keays XI, but later became townland representative clubs then parish or district sides. Localism impressed itself on these organisations. Stoneville, a townland in Rathkeale – fifteen miles west of Limerick City, had its own cricket team in the late 1860s, but this club seems to have been the basis for the Rathkeale C.C. which emerged in 1870, and which covered the town and district of the mid–county Limerick town.<sup>1245</sup> ‘Strongbow’s’ letter recommending the rationalisation of archery was crystal clear on the gentry’s territorialism;

Say, let each county have its own colour and its flag, and the hearts of the fair combatants will beat the higher, and the bow will be more strongly bent and more straightly levelled at the “gold,” and –

Those now will shoot, who never shot before:  
And those who always shot, will shoot the more.<sup>1246</sup>

In terms of localism, the expansion of rugby in the early and mid–1880s, and the formation of many new clubs such as Garryowen F.C. in 1884, was especially significant because this movement confirmed that the localities (and non–spatial communities) which sponsored rugby clubs were moving to accept rugby as an idiom within which local rivalries could be ritualised and celebrated. In this movement rugby established an organised and popular foothold in Limerick city and its environs, and in many county towns in the region – ever before the emergence of the G. A. A.

Rugby has, however, much in common with the territorially organised Gaelic games movement in that most Limerick rugby sides were, and continue to be into the early

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<sup>1245</sup> LC 12 May 1866, 6 Oct 1868, 13 Aug 1870.

<sup>1246</sup> LC 17 June 1865.

twenty–first century, attached to distinct localities within the city and county. The principal reason behind the identification of Limerick as a rugby stronghold since the 1880s has its origins in the neglect of social differences in favour of a common localism to help popularise the game, and in the vibrancy of localism and local rivalries which fuelled the game’s popularity and expansion since then. The emphasis on the story of rugby and localism does not mean that local pride, and the localism that pride represented, was bound up with just that sport.

In the mid nineteenth century the Ordnance Survey’s efforts to generate a cartographical expression of country supported a more bureaucratic understanding of the economic ‘geology’ of Ireland achieved following surveys such as Griffith’s Valuation.<sup>1247</sup> Sport’s divisions applied the imaginative social component to those divisions, and sport played a part in solidifying the divisions. Borders previously understood or taken for granted were now codified. Gillespie has even noted that ‘Before the advent of the county newspaper, the GAA, and county–based electoral units in the nineteenth century, few outside the elite probably identified with their county.’<sup>1248</sup> According to this analysis the later GAA simply advanced the designs of the template devised by its one time political and cultural adversary. The result of the growth of the representative function of sport was an increase in inter–district and inter–county rivalries and competitiveness. People were increasingly persuaded to choose or adhere to a locality, and while this was less of a question for those at the centre of a district or county it was more problematic for those on the ‘frontier’. Sport thus enhanced a growing appreciation of borders and divisions between parishes, districts, unions, counties, provinces and countries.

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<sup>1247</sup> Andrews, J. H., *A paper landscape: the Ordnance Survey in nineteenth-century Ireland*, (Clarendon, Dublin, 1975). Doherty, Gillian, *The Irish Ordnance Survey: History, culture and memory*, (Four Courts, Dublin, 2004). Hennessy, Mark, (with H.B. Clarke, H.B. and Prunty, Jacinta), *Surveying Ireland’s Past*, (Geography Publications, Dublin, 2004).

<sup>1248</sup> Gillespie, Raymond and Hill, Myrtle, (eds.), *Doing Irish Local History: Pursuit and Practice*, (Institute of Irish Studies, Queen’s University, Belfast, 1998), 16.

Participation by communities in the sports movements of the late nineteenth century led to the cosmopolitan homogenisation of culture that did seem to be the very antithesis of localism. It is paradoxical that localism was harnessed by a movement that contributed to the formation of a less diverse, and a much less local culture than existed up to that time. Though the sports movements were rationalising culture and reducing its diversity, they were neutralising, but not destroying localism. Sport, therefore, in yet another illustration of its promiscuity, flattered cosmopolitanism while squiring localism.

Sport exploited, unconsciously, the essence of the myths of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and this explains much of its psychological power. The players assumed the roles of Achilles, Odysseus and Hector; the spectating women, Helens all. The female followers of sport constituted an important audience for Limerick athletes and their attendance at events drew much comment, with some even wearing the ‘favours’ of competing cricket players at one cricket game – like medieval damsels admiring their knights in the lists.<sup>1249</sup> The supporters became companions of the heroes and were witnesses to the combat; the journalists and correspondents so many Herodotuses. Early sports reports were, in fact, letters from the participants recounting a day’s hunting or coursing, professional journalism came much later.<sup>1250</sup> The victory of a Limerick individual, team or crew in Cork, or elsewhere, was equivalent to the victory of the Greeks at Troy, while a home victory equated a successful defence of Troy. The necessity for force and cunning to gain a victory was no less celebrated on a sporting field than on the plains before Troy. A season of competition became a form of sporting odyssey to be endured and contested at every stage against opponents of many

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<sup>1249</sup> LC 19 Oct 1869, 13 Aug 1870, 14 June 1881.

<sup>1250</sup> LC 11 Feb 1865 – a letter from ‘An observer of the hill side concerning a hunt of the Glenville and Ballystein [sic] Harriers.

types and strengths. The playground, track, pitch, crease or court became a Troy to the home player or team, a place to be defended stoutly; the visiting team's home then became an Ithaca. The aim was to return in glory and safety to the acclaim of Ithaca and the arms of Penelope.

The mythical and histrionic elements of sport in Limerick has produced its late twentieth century sceptic general, Michael Curtin, whose sports dissident hero in *The League against Christmas* offends all sporting, localist and mythical pieties. This accounts for Curtin's lack of popular acceptance in his hometown. Bateman, the lead conspirator in the League, commits the most heinous sins possible for a Limerick man, throwing a game against the mortal enemies of his, and his father's, rugby union football club; he returned to his hometown not to claim his own and live in happiness into old age, but to plunder the Christmas savings club his father supervised, and finally, he chose to return to Troy/London and effectively disown his hometown.<sup>1251</sup> Curtin's fictional anti-Odysseus represents a type against which Limerick's sporting myths rail, in contrast to the very much real, but now dead actor and rugby enthusiast, Richard Harris, whose observance of these local sporting pieties was celebrated by the commissioning of a lacklustre statue of the thespian in the centre of the city.

Local heroes are exceptional, local sporting heroes are peerless.<sup>1252</sup>

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<sup>1251</sup> Curtin, Michael, *The League Against Christmas*, (Fourth Estate, London, 1989).

<sup>1252</sup> Sheedy, Kieran, *Peerless Tom Malone*, (Bauroe, Ennis, Co. Clare, 2000).

# Chapter 4

## Nationalism: Sport as a cultural hydrangea

Following the American and French revolutions the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed a process of churning nationalisms; like the universe's formative violent millennia after the Big Bang/Bounce, nationalisms were created and destroyed.<sup>1253</sup> The process goes on; Scotland, Flanders, Padania, Kurdistan, Northern Cyprus, Iraq, Aceh, Tamil Eelam, Ossetia, Uyghurstan/Xinjiang, Tibet and Western Sahara are only some of the regions and countries facing and posing fundamental questions about identity, territory and nationalism in the early twenty-first century.

Just how confusing this churning cycle was in nineteenth century Limerick can be seen in the various narratives constructed by the participants in, and observers of, the visit of the Lord Lieutenant to the city in 1871, his first since 1853.<sup>1254</sup> The Limerick Boat Club saw fit to mark the occasion with a display of flags with, apparently, an Italian one above the Austro-Hungarian standard. Some sailors from a vessel of the latter empire, then docked in Limerick port, objected, and contradictory reports of violence followed. The confusion did not end there; some Limerick citizens saw fit to dip their oars into this distant affray by claiming the Italian flag betokened the Boat Club's sympathy with the newly formed Italian state and, therefore, a clear indication of the (alleged) anti-Pope, anti-Roman Catholic credentials of that sporting institution, claims that were strenuously denied.

The controversy had a final, unexpected twist, a cricketing and boating outfitting establishment in Cecil Street – Roche, Hogan and Company – that sought to mark the auspicious day by setting off fireworks, was attacked and its windows were smashed, the Home Rule flag the shop displayed proving an ineffective political prophylactic against the upset citizenry. What made the series of incidents so delicious was the mix of nationalities,

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<sup>1253</sup> Hobsbawm, E.J., *Nations and nationalism since 1780*, 2nd edition, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995). Mangan, J.A., (ed.), *The Cultural Bond: Sport, Empire, Society*, (Frank Cass, London, 1992). Kedourie, Elie, *Nationalism*, (Blackwell, Oxford, U.K., 1993, 4th edition). Gellner, Ernest, *Nationalism*, (Phoenix, London, 1997). Biddiss, Michael, 'Nationalism and the Moulding of Modern Europe', in *History*, 79:257 (Oct 1994), 412-32.

<sup>1254</sup> LC 10, 13, 15 June 1871.

politics, indignation, accusations of sectarianism, a sports club, a commercial sporting outlet, a crowd, the Lord Lieutenant, fireworks, flags and violence. The disturbances rippled around the town and resembled the riots that are a staple of *The Simpsons* television series, and represented just one portion of the smorgasbord of sport and nationalism still enduring in the twenty-first century.<sup>1255</sup>

The nineteenth century offered a restrictive environment to nationalists: in Europe the balance of power between the great states was all-important. European politics resembled a chess game, utilising one board, but with the added confusion of two or three players opposing a similar number of opponents; so, Great Britain and France sought to check Russia in the Crimea, while simultaneously irking Austria-Hungary by incorporating Piedmont/Sardinia in their endeavour. Local loyalists planned to erect a monument to one local participant in that distant Black Sea ‘bother’. Viscount Fitzgibbon, who died at Balaclava, was to be remembered by a statue in heroic pose in Richmond Place (The Crescent), but the initiative was spoiled by a significant political and denominational counter-plan. Advocates of Repeal instead arranged to put a statue of the Roman Catholic ‘Liberator’, Daniel O’Connell, in its place, one of the most prominent locations in the city.<sup>1256</sup> The young soldier was relegated to a position on the Wellesley (now Sarsfield) bridge and decades later suffered the Nelson’s pillar-like indignity of destruction by dynamite.<sup>1257</sup> There were few great international events that could not find a local political context.

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<sup>1255</sup> Abrams, Nathan D., ‘Inhibited but not ‘Crowded Out’: The strange fate of soccer in the United States’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12:3 (December 1995), 1-17. Arbena, Joseph L., ‘Generals and Goles: Assessing the Connection Between the Military and Soccer in Argentina’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 7:1 (May 1990), 120-30. Bairner, Alan, ‘Ireland, sport and empire’, in Jeffery, Keith, (ed.), *‘An Irish Empire’: Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996), 57-76. Berryman, Jack W., ‘The tenuous attempts of Americans to ‘Catch-up with John Bull’: speciality magazines and sporting journalism, 1800-35’, in *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*, X:I (May 1979), 33-61.

<sup>1256</sup> Potter, Matthew, *First Citizens of the Treaty City*, (Limerick City Council, 2007), 113-115.

<sup>1257</sup> In May 1875 the sword of the statue was bent and had to be repaired by the Corporation, LC 7 May 1875.



The Crimean foreign policy initiative by Cavour, independent of Austria–Hungary, advanced moves towards Italian independence (while upsetting Limerick’s Roman Catholics) only because it suited British and French strategic geo–political interests, while Austria–Hungary had not the power to prevent such a move – its power was being (quadruply) checked, in a five–way chess game, by the British, French, Russian and the Ottoman Empires.<sup>1258</sup> The contradiction between Limerick’s Roman Catholics’ world–view and British Great Power interests was keenly appreciated. The extent of the hold of the entire quintet of great powers on the public imagination in Limerick also emerged in one suggestion that the five pairs of figure skaters in an 1878 competition at the Limerick Skating Rink should dress in the national costumes of the five great powers – politics seeping into the most unlikely of sporting enterprises and a marker that politics in sport was not the preserve of the late on the scene GAA.<sup>1259</sup>

The designation the ‘Great Game’ describing British and Russian competition for control of the North–West frontier of India demonstrated that sports games are but one subset of a much larger category of games as well as the potential for observers of both forms of contest to confuse the terms in which such wildly disparate activities were discussed. The owner and backers of a horse at the 1885 Tipperary steeplechases no doubt revelled in the success of the ‘Mahdi’ over the equine competition in a field in the Golden Vale, far from Khartoum and the late General Gordon’s grave.<sup>1260</sup> This form of bold sporting nomenclature preceded by many years the practice of other Tipperary folk labelling their Gaelic football and hurling teams after the Boer Republics’ generals, De Wet and Kruger, and decades before the signatories of the 1916 Rising offered a pantheon of local and national heroes to lend their names to GAA clubs.

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<sup>1258</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914*, (Abacus, London, 1989).

<sup>1259</sup> LC 12, 17 Sept 1878.

<sup>1260</sup> LC 11 June 1885.

As with Greek or Italian independence from Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian domination, respectively, Irish independence could only come about if Great Britain's imperial antagonists had willed it – in addition to the Irish public itself – a tough treble lock. Pressed between these realities and the romantic intensity of the Fenians, moderate nationalists sought to muddle along making discretion valorous.<sup>1261</sup> These strategic geo-political realities obviously impressed themselves upon the effusively loyalist sportswriter covering a Christmas holiday rugby union match in Limerick in 1884: commenting on the fine physiques of the young men, he noted that if the commander-in-chief saw them he would 'immediately' enrol them to 'checkmate Russia' or to 'overawe Bismarck', to 'relieve Gordon' or to 'drive back the Boers.'<sup>1262</sup>

Europe's crowded space represented another restriction for nationalists: Ireland was not the only geographical entity to which the phrase 'great hatred, little room' could apply or which provided headaches for nationalist cartographers.<sup>1263</sup> German nationalism was bound by the impossibility of drawing a map of *mittel*-Europe that would place all Germans satisfactorily inside a German border. In the period 1921–1925 the British and Irish Free State governments shared the frustration of mapping a border containing an abundance of rocks, bogs, lakes and competing networks of 'dreary steeples' – to which was later added the complicating cultural apparatus of divided sports infrastructures.<sup>1264</sup> Limerick's sporting divisions reflected many of the greater cultural and political cleavages in evidence, nationally, and within the United Kingdom as a whole. Shannon Rowing Club, Garryowen

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<sup>1261</sup> O'Day, Alan, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998). Jackson, Alvin, *Ireland, 1798-1998*, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1999). Hoppen, K. Theodore, *Ireland since 1800: Conflict and Conformity*, (Longman, London, 1989). Hoppen, K. Theodore, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984). Boyce, D. George, *Nationalism in Ireland*, (Routledge, London, 1982). Comerford, R.V., *The Fenians in context: Irish Politics and Society, 1848-82*, (Wolfhound, Dublin, 1998).

<sup>1262</sup> *LC* 23, 27 Dec 1884.

<sup>1263</sup> Cahalan, James, *Great hatred, little room: the Irish historical novel*, (Syracuse University Press, New York, 1983).

<sup>1264</sup> Sugden, John, & Bairner, Alan, *Sport, Sectarianism and Society in a Divided Ireland*, (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1993). Sugden, John, & Bairner, Alan, (eds.), *Sport in Divided Societies*, (Chelsea School Research Centre Edition; Vol. 4), (Meyer & Meyer Sport, Aachen, 1999). Bairner, Alan, (ed.), *Sport and the Irish: Histories, Identities, Issues*, University College Dublin Press, Dublin, 2005).

FC and Limerick GAA were mid – 1880s institutions consciously opposed to the cultural and political agendas of the community sponsoring the Limerick Boat Club, Limerick County FC and the Limerick Amateur Athletic and Bicycle Club.

Irish nationalism sought distance from a super-nation state just when so many regions, countries and provinces were absorbed into such super-nation states. Cavour, an avid admirer of the corrupt, yet efficient, Irish Act of Union, pulled off his own series of *coups d'états* through the 1860s, culminating in the unification of Italy, by plebiscites and battles (the ballot box and carbine), under Savoyard (or Piedmontese) leadership.<sup>1265</sup> Occitan, Alsatian, Corsican, Breton, Savoyard and Basque national and regional identities were also marginalised by the march of Frenchness.<sup>1266</sup> French regional identities were ‘nationalised’, but the growth of Norwegianness and Finnishness became increasingly troublesome to Swedish and Russian definitions of their nationalities.<sup>1267</sup> The loyalist imperative to make Ireland a West Britain, was similar to Swedish and Russian attempts to counter Norwegian and Finnish separatism, though loyalist rhetoric attempted to coat its motives in romance, as in descriptions of Ireland as the ‘Green Isle of the West’ and of Limerick, more prosaically, as the ‘City by the Shannon Shore’.<sup>1268</sup> The concept of the ‘west’ implied a centre, the metropolis of London, and Irish nationalism sought to re-calibrate Irish opinion away from such a political and Anglo-centric cartography. **The man who coined the term West Briton, the Chancellor of the Exchequer ... Limerick connection.**

<sup>1265</sup> Davis, John A., and Ginsborg, Paul, (eds.), *Society and Politics in the Age of the Risorgimento: Essays in Honour of Denis Mack Smith*, (Cambridge University Press, 2002). Smith, Denis Mack, *Modern Italy: A Political History*, (University of Michigan Press, 1997).

<sup>1266</sup> MG 17 June 2008, 21. Weber, Eugen, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*, (Stanford University Press, California, 1976).

<sup>1267</sup> Goksoyr, Matti, ‘Popular pastimes or patriotic virtues? The role of sport in the national celebrations of nineteenth-century Norway’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 5:2 (September 1988), 239-45. Goksoyr, Matti, ‘Phases and functions of Nationalism: Norway’s utilization of international sport in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12:2 (August 1995), 125-146. Windhausen, John D., and Tsyapkina, Irina V., ‘National identity and the emergence of the sports movement in late imperial Russia’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12:2 (August 1995), 164-82. Hansen, Jorn, ‘Politics and Gymnastics in a Frontier Area Post-1848’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 14:3 (December 1997), 25-46. Sörlin, Sverker, ‘Nature, Skiing and Swedish Nationalism,’ in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12:2 (August 1995), 147-63.

<sup>1268</sup> LC 5 Mar 1885.

Such micro and macro nationalisms throughout Europe were in almost permanent ferment.<sup>1269</sup> The nineteenth century saw the emergence of grand nation states such as Italy, Germany and the United States, while the twentieth century was more conducive to the emergence of *petit* or *boutique* nation states such as Ireland and Israel. Twentieth and twenty-first century stateless nations have advantages their nineteenth century equivalents did not enjoy, membership of the League of Nations, the United Nations, and other supra-national bodies like the E.U., A.U. and ASEAN collaborative, non-imperial bodies that are more conducive to and supportive of a framework of nation states than the nineteenth century imperial infrastructure.<sup>1270</sup> There was some hope among Irish nationalists of assistance in their aims coming from America, this potential was also recognised by the loyalist community. One *Chronicle* article sought to tackle Irish nationalism by utilising its own rationales against it. Noting that as Irish nationalists viewed landlords as the English garrison, then England ought to give help to landlords, just as the Fenian movement received American help.<sup>1271</sup>

This umbrella international system did not exist when Irish devolutionary politics was first forged under O'Connell with one result that, like Hamas surpassing the PLO, young 'braves' in the Young Ireland and Irish Republican Brotherhood movements sought to radicalise public opinion and utilise less than even tempered strategies to achieve their ends.<sup>1272</sup> For Limerick's loyalists the most notorious *bête verte* was local Fenian, John Daly, whose radical efforts were the subject of discussion in conservative and loyalist

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<sup>1269</sup> Hobsbawm, E.J., *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, (Abacus, London, 1999).

<sup>1270</sup> A large part of the prize for today's emerging nations, like Timor Leste, is a seat at the U.N. or an opportunity, like Slovenia enjoyed, to chair the E.U. during critical phases of that entity's development.

<sup>1271</sup> *LC* 26 Feb 1885.

<sup>1272</sup> Alter, Peter, 'Symbols of Irish Nationalism', in *Studia Hibernica*, 14 (1974), 104-23. Boyce, D. George, & O'Day, Alan, (eds.), *The Making of Modern Irish History*, (Routledge, London, 1996). Comerford, R.V., 'Patriotism as pastime: the appeal of fenianism in the mid-1860s', in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol.XXII, no.87, March 1981, 239-50. Garvin, Tom, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland: 1858-1928*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987).

circles at the time of the 1874 Limerick regatta.<sup>1273</sup> Daly demonstrated his appetite for the fight when with a small band he sought to prevent a Butt Home Rule meeting at the Crescent in Limerick City in April 1876. Despite being outnumbered by as much as twenty to one, the Fenians he led on the day only withdrew when they had all been completely beaten by their politically moderate, but clearly equally tough, fellow townsmen.<sup>1274</sup> In local loyalist memory this conflict became known as the ‘Battle of the Crescent’ and was presented by the *Chronicle* as revealing the true nature of the Parnellite ambition for Ireland.<sup>1275</sup> Violence and agitation satisfied some hot tempers, but could easily cause support to leak away from the movement. In 1882, a town councillor in Limerick declared that the Home Rule movement that he once supported had become unconstitutional and he would no longer call himself a Home Ruler.<sup>1276</sup>

The construction of grand nation states meant the marginalisation of minor nationalities within their territories, hence the difficulty of accommodating Irish national aspirations in the United Kingdom. The unanswered calls of many Limerick loyalists for the establishment in Ireland of a royal residence such as Balmoral or Osborne point to a loyalist awareness of the necessity for ongoing initiatives to integrate the two islands on a social and cultural level.<sup>1277</sup> Cultural projects around dates like the Fourth and Fourteenth of July were valuable contributors to the generation of more homogenous American and French identities.<sup>1278</sup> James Murphy’s analysis of the influence of the monarchy and other institutions such as the Primrose League in late nineteenth century Ireland describes their success in reducing some of the explosive potential of Irish nationalism to a more ‘abject’

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<sup>1273</sup> LC 9, 11, 14, 16 July 1874, 4 May 1875. McConville, Seán, *Irish Political Prisoners, 1848-1922: Theatres of War*, (Routledge, London, 2005).

<sup>1274</sup> LC 18, 20 Apr, 16 May 1876.

<sup>1275</sup> LC 2 Aug 1884.

<sup>1276</sup> LC 30 Nov 1882.

<sup>1277</sup> LC 21, 23 Apr, 21 May, 1 Aug 1885.

<sup>1278</sup> Travers, Len, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic*, (University of Massachusetts Press, 1997). Gildea, Robert, *Children of the Revolution: The French 1799-1914*, (Penguin, London, 2008).

form.<sup>1279</sup> Such efforts as British institutions utilised to promote British identity led to a number of rival cultural projects and it is interesting that the revival of the Gaelic ‘body’ (GAA) preceded the revival of the Gaelic ‘spirit’ (Abbey) in the late nineteenth century.<sup>1280</sup> At the same time the celebration of St Patrick’s Day grew in secular and political importance while maintaining its past associations with alcohol-associated leisure much bemoaned by Limerick commentators.<sup>1281</sup>

Despite the apparently clear polarisation between Tory blue and Nationalist green, assessing British and Irish nationalisms, as they interacted in Limerick, is like reading a Seurat painting. From a distance all seems clear, as clear to nationalists, unionists and the revisionists of both traditions. Up close, however, the picture becomes blurred to the point of incomprehensibility and in those vantage points the conclusions of grand narratives are overturned.<sup>1282</sup> In these nebulous spaces a 1960s village where the Roman Catholic musical band deployed a large drum celebrating St. Patrick’s day and where that same drum, now labelled a Lambeg drum, was utilised by their Protestant neighbours in their celebration of a famous military victory does not seem unusual – even though it defies a ‘common sense’

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<sup>1279</sup> The *Chronicle* promoted the Primrose League and in March 1886 sought to reassure Roman Catholics that it was open to them to join, *LC* 11 June 1885, 30 Mar 1886.

<sup>1280</sup> Hayes, Tom, ‘The Irish “Body” revival precedes that of the “Mind”’, paper to 2002 conference of Society for the Study of Nineteenth Century Ireland.

<sup>1281</sup> MacDonagh, Oliver, ‘Irish culture and nationalism translated: St. Patrick’s Day, 1888, in Australia’, in MacDonagh, O., Mandle, W.F., and Travers, P., (eds.), *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750-1950*, (St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1983), pp. 69-82. Moss, Kenneth, ‘St. Patrick’s Day Celebrations and the Formation of Irish-American Identity, 1845-1875’, in *Journal of Social History*, 29:1 (Fall 1995), 125-48. Cronin, Mike, and Adair, Daryl, *The Wearing of the Green: A History of St Patrick’s Day*, (Routledge, London, 2006). *LC* 17, 20 Mar 1866, 19 Mar 1870, 19 Mar 1872, 18 Mar 1873, 19 Mar 1874, 18 Mar 1886.

<sup>1282</sup> Georges Seurat, a French painter of the late nineteenth century, drew a famous scene of Parisians at recreation called *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1886). The technique utilised in this revolutionary image, now hanging in Chicago, though not new or solely his creation, was called pointillism or divisionism. Seurat did not use strokes or dashes of colour to build up an image; he painted tiny dots (pixels) side by side so that up close one’s impression was of the image was a meaningless, random collection of dabs of colour. From a more distant viewing stance, however, the dots would coalesce to suggest an alternative, bold image. The closer one was to the image the less sense it made to the observer while the further vantage point yielded a more complete and simple set of meanings; perspective and distance were all. The use of this technique unconsciously predicted the pattern of dots in a television tube; when electronic beams strike the primary coloured dots of the tube to illuminate them a single image is created, and then erased, twenty five times per second. Our eyes and brains cannot appreciate this speed of creation and destruction; we see twenty-five images as one and indivisible. The images are divisible, as the name of Seurat’s technique suggests, the units of division are mathematically clear; twenty five times a second six hundred and twenty five lines of blue, green and red dots are illuminated to generate temporary images that somehow, to our senses, make sense.

understanding of life in Northern Ireland. It took the tectonic shifting of tribal plates in 1969 for this arrangement to be suspended.<sup>1283</sup> Similar to this example, where the tenets of nationalism appear to break down, a Protestant, Tory and Orangeman, Isaac Butt, can become a hero of green nationalism; the archetypal Gaelic warrior, Cú Chulainn, becomes a hero of blue/red nationalism; and Parnell, a cricket playing, Protestant landowner became the champion of the land hungry, Roman Catholic and hurling class.<sup>1284</sup> In the aftermath of the defeat of the first Home Rule Bill and subsequent election, perhaps out of a sense of reaching out to nationalist Limerick, even the *Limerick Chronicle*, an avowedly Tory and Unionist paper, could find praise for Davis's 'A Nation Once Again' and offered a nuanced reading of the ballad in a discussion of the merits of St Patrick, nationalism and unionism.<sup>1285</sup> While the *Chronicle's* politics was avowedly Tory and Unionist, its contention, on the occasion of the granting of the freedom of the city to Michael Davitt, which it described as a 'sham', that orange and green were 'unblending', was more an aspiration than a reality.<sup>1286</sup> Many Protestants were Home Rulers or Nationalists and many Roman Catholics were Unionist and Loyalists. Some Unionists, like the fourth Earl of Dunraven and Mountearl, even came around to less doctrinaire positions and were willing to discuss devolutionary solutions to the question of how Ireland was best governed.

Given the political 'trade' between Ireland and Great Britain, viewing Irish nationalism in isolation is a pointless exercise; it is necessary to investigate the role of British nationalism and its gravitational pull on Irish society to fully appreciate the agendas and motivations of Irish nationalists.<sup>1287</sup> O'Connell's genius was to establish the House of Commons as a political cockpit where the tensions between these nationalisms could be worked out, while

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<sup>1283</sup> Gébler, Carlo, *The Glass Curtain: Inside an Ulster Community*, (Abacus, London, 1992), 34.

<sup>1284</sup> Mandel, W.F., 'Parnell and sport', in *Studia Hibernica*, no.28 (1994), 103-16.

<sup>1285</sup> *LC* 17 Mar 1887.

<sup>1286</sup> *LC* 15 Apr 1884.

<sup>1287</sup> O'Day, Alan, *The English face of Irish nationalism: Parnellite involvement in British politics, 1880-86*, (Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1977).

simultaneously creating a huge popular coalition outside the house.<sup>1288</sup> Despite the higher per capita representation of Irish electors in the union parliament a view in Limerick that there was a great ‘English ignorance of Irish wants’ at the heart of the government was not uncommon, feeding the analyses of Fenians that unconstitutional means ought to be attempted.<sup>1289</sup> Protestant disenchantment at the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland added to the numbers seeking alternative governmental forms for Ireland.<sup>1290</sup>

Some Irish Protestant opinion sought Home Rule as a means to assume more national control over the direction of Irish politics. This approach was moderately successful, with the return of Isaac Butt as an M.P. for Limerick, for instance, but could not break through until Parnell’s New Departure strategy set Home Rule on a more popular course – which meant engaging that Catholic constituency. Chasing this newly-moulded democracy, and having sidelined Irish Toryism, the Home Rule, subsequently the Nationalist, movement became engaged in a deeper contest with Irish–British nationalism, or Unionism.<sup>1291</sup>

Parnell’s attempt to build a popular movement for Home Rule mirrored the moves in Great Britain by Randolph Churchill to capture the new democracy created by an expanded franchise.<sup>1292</sup> Parnell and Churchill sought, in their ways, to reconcile their natural constituencies to change while aiming to bring new electorates to their sides.<sup>1293</sup> Limerick’s

<sup>1288</sup> Owens, Gary, ‘Nationalism without words: Symbolism and Ritual Behaviour in the Repeal ‘Monster Meetings’ of 1843-5’, in Donnelly, James S. Jnr., and Miller, Kerby A., (eds.), *Irish Popular Culture 1650 - 1850*, (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1998), 242-69.

<sup>1289</sup> *LC* 24 Mar 1866. Joyce, Toby, ‘Ireland’s trained and marshalled manhood’: the Fenians in the mid-1860s’, in Kelleher, Margaret & Murphy, James H., (eds.), *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres*, (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1997). Comerford, R.V., ‘Comprehending the Fenians’, *Saothar*, 17 (1992), 52-6. Comerford, R.V., *The Fenians in context: Irish Politics and Society, 1848-82*, (Wolfhound, Dublin, 1998).

<sup>1290</sup> O’Day, Alan, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998). *LC* 19 Nov 1885. Boyce, D. George and O’Day, Alan, (eds.), *Ireland in Transition, 1867-1921*, (Routledge, London, 2004).

<sup>1291</sup> Boyce, D. George, & O’Day, Alan, *Defenders of the Union: British and Irish Unionism, 1800-1999*, (Routledge, London, 2000).

<sup>1292</sup> Foster, R.F., *Lord Randolph Churchill, a Political Life*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988).

<sup>1293</sup> Bew, Paul, *Charles Stewart Parnell*, (Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1980). Parnell and Churchill were nearly true realisations of the fictional Sicilian Prince of Salina, the hero of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s novel, *Il Gattopardo* (the leopard), which relates the tale of a type of pragmatic political actor who believes ‘for everything to stay the same, everything must change.’ Tomasi di Lampedusa, Giuseppe, *Il Gattopardo* (the



loyalists, led by figures like the Earl of Limerick, were unwilling to reach this new electorate and showed haughty condescension towards the possibility of a ‘mud cabin majority.’<sup>1294</sup>

Given the power differential between Great Britain and Ireland, Irish nationalists increasingly interpreted the union relationship as a colonial one, with Great Britain possessing not just a whip hand, but, if advanced nationalists were to be believed, an entire cat o’ nine tails hand. The turbulent Limerick priest Rev. Sheehy’s rhetoric describing the graves of Irishmen as the ‘footprints of landlords’ was one example of the passion aroused in the immediate post New Departure period.<sup>1295</sup> The influence of events such as the Sudanese and Boer campaigns where Britain was clearly in a colonising position were adduced to confirm the veracity of such nationalist narratives. Cheers for the Mahdi were common on the streets of Limerick in the 1880s and in exasperation the *Chronicle* observed that General Gordon would prefer Khartoum to Newry while some nationalists objecting to an 1885 royal train–stop visit to Limerick claimed that the Mahdi would be a more popular visitor than the Prince of Wales.<sup>1296</sup>

Irish nationalism was one outgrowth of the changing relationship of Great Britain to Ireland in the nineteenth century. Great Britain urbanised, became more populous and diverse, became richer and more bourgeois, amassed more soft and hard power, displayed the signs of cultural success and enjoyed the status of super–power in international relations.<sup>1297</sup> In the same period, Ireland experienced more negative outcomes; a drop in population,

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leopard), (Harvill Panther, London, 2005). The Prince only comes to accept this theory under the influence of a favoured nephew, Tancredi, whose intuition, that the popular movement behind Garibaldi need not be feared, and was capable of being tamed by him and his class, proved prescient.

<sup>1294</sup> *LC* 15 May, 8 July 1885. McCartney, Donal, *Democracy and its Nineteenth Century Irish Critics*, (National University of Ireland, Dublin, 1979).

<sup>1295</sup> Sheehy’s firebrand career was tracked assiduously by the *Chronicle* in the 1880s until he was established in Rockhill and Bruere in the south of the county between Kilmallock and Charleville. *LC* 2 Sept 1879, 1 May 1880, 17 Mar, 3, 21 May, 29 Oct, 12 Nov 1881, 23 May 1882, 29 May 1884, 27 Jan, 7 Nov 1885, 23 Feb 1886.

<sup>1296</sup> *LC* 7 June 1884, 26 Feb, 14 Apr 1885.

<sup>1297</sup> Hoppen, K. Theodore, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998). Best, Geoffrey, *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851-75*, (Fontana, London, 1985).

suffering a demographic shock in the process as vigorous ambitious youth left the country; economic stagnation and cultural rupture and loss.<sup>1298</sup> Quite simply, according to one correspondent to the *Limerick Chronicle* in 1871, the ‘hurling and football class had emigrated’ and there was, therefore, no need to provide facilities for these sports in the proposed People’s Park.<sup>1299</sup> The emigration views of the Earl of Dunraven, as expressed in this period, were seen as sensible by his supporters, but as tyrannical by his opponents.<sup>1300</sup> From the 1880s on he sought to turn emigration, a negative for Irish people, into a positive for the Empire. He hoped to channel more emigrants to Canada and the other colonies, but his argument, as expressed in 1907 in *The Outlook in Ireland, The Case for Devolution and Conciliation*, appear coldly analytical and inhumane. Arguing that the United States only purchased five shillings worth of goods per person from the British Empire while the Empire imported one pound, eighteen shillings and eight pence worth of goods per person from the U.S.A., he suggested that the Irish contribution to the United States economy represented a double loss to Britain’s imperial economy.<sup>1301</sup> Local writer Dorothea Conyers said it more directly, pithily and rustically in a memoir of her life in sport and society in the last decade of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century:

The sthates [sic] have drained Ireland of her young blood.<sup>1302</sup>

The plurality of forms of nation–state demonstrates the flexibility of nationalism and its adaptability to local, regional and geo–political forces.<sup>1303</sup> Great Britain’s extra–territorial

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<sup>1298</sup> Comerford, R.V., ‘Ireland 1850-70: post-famine and mid-Victorian’, in Vaughan, W.E., (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, V: Ireland Under the Union, I, 1801-70*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989), 372-95. Vaughan, W.E., (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, V: Ireland Under the Union, I, 1801-70*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989).

<sup>1299</sup> *LC* 22, 24 June 1871.

<sup>1300</sup> *LC* 2 Mar, 15 July 1880. Brosnan, T. J., *Family of Dunraven and Mountearl*, (Limerick City Library), 27. Dunraven, *The Outlook in Ireland, The Case for Devolution and Conciliation*, (Hodges Figgis, Dublin, 1907).

<sup>1301</sup> Dunraven, *The Outlook in Ireland*, (1907), 17-21.

<sup>1302</sup> Conyers, Dorothea, *Sporting Reminiscences*, (Methuen, London, 1920), 91.

<sup>1303</sup> Great Britain and Ireland in 1801 constituted a tri-national state; today, the U.S.A. constitutes a fifty state federated nation; Belgium and Israel are (largely) bi-national states and there are almost as many varieties of nation-state as there are of nations.

constitutional arrangements were not as durable as its domestic ones.<sup>1304</sup> The British constitution is an architecture of the accommodations, deals and compromises between the various forces in British society and has proved to be a flexible and agile collection of documents. The more spectacular failures of constitutional pragmatism and elasticity relate to questions of British nationalism and definitions of British national interests where they are, apparently, in conflict with rival national interests and nationalisms. The American independence movement, the growth of Home Rule and Irish separatist sentiment and the fractious early twenty-first century relationship with Europe illustrate over three centuries a certain lack of agility and manoeuvrability within the constraints of British nationalism when dealing with constitutional arrangements that stretch beyond Holyhead and Dover. Parnell's attempt to alter the British constitution to include a modest Grattan's parliament for slow learners was easily and repeatedly defeated, but at the cost of straining further Anglo-Irish relations.<sup>1305</sup> John Dundon, a shrewd Limerick nationalist identified the dilemma Limerick's loyalists faced and aligned the Nationalist movement with popular sentiment in the city. According to Dundon

In this city and in the adjoining counties a handful of people never lost an opportunity of airing their loyalty; and they all knew that the basis of that loyalty was the continuation of their own exclusive privileges and advantages which it was the aim of the National party to diminish and do away with.<sup>1306</sup>

Class and national politics were explicitly joined in Dundon's rhetoric; his opponents on the loyalist side had no *mobile vulgus* to mobilise and they demonstrated little inclination or ability to attract popular feeling to its side. Without an assertive leadership it is not surprising a form of closeted loyalism was adverted to in 1886 when some people (outside

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<sup>1304</sup> Ferguson, Niall, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons of Global Power*, (Basic books, New York, 1994). Brendon, Piers, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781-1997*, (Knopf, New York, 2008).

<sup>1305</sup> Bew, Paul, *A new life of Charles Stewart Parnell*, (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 2011). Hayes, Thomas, 'The Response of Loyalism in Limerick to the New Departure, 1880-86', undergraduate thesis, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, 1996.

<sup>1306</sup> LC 7 Apr 1885.

Limerick's comfortable elite) were, it was asserted, afraid to 'be openly loyal' – in these circumstances the chances of a wider popular acceptance of loyalism were slim.<sup>1307</sup>

Between green and orange Ireland there were many expressions of nationalism with varying emphases and objectives. Representing two poles of national feeling were two characters in a mid 1860s west Limerick street confrontation. Head constable Sullivan, who was shot at and wounded in 1866 in Newcastle West, boldly asserted during the incident, in response to his Fenian assailant's claims, that he "too [was] an Irishman".<sup>1308</sup> The half-century cold war of identity from 1866 to 1916 between the sides represented by the two antagonists in Newcastle West continued because neither side could, in pugilistic parlance, knock the other out. Reflecting the abundance of associations, not just the radical and violent, agitating for a variety of purposes in 1880s Limerick, the *Chronicle* noted that 'verily, it is an age of leagues.'<sup>1309</sup>

In the nineteenth century British nationalism/Unionism achieved a complete constitutional, military, judicial, linguistic and economic integration of the Irish and British states, while Irish nationalism sought a moderation of some of those ties and also insisted on independent cultural and religious action.<sup>1310</sup> The religious question is outside the scope of this thesis. The cultural battles that were waged in the second half of the nineteenth century thus assumed a huge importance in Irish nationalist history. A small detail from the 1876 'Battle of the Crescent' illustrates the vitality of cultural expressions such as music to the political life of the city. On the night before the planned Home Rule meeting the bandrooms in both the Mechanics' Institute and Foresters' Society were broken into. In both places the instruments were damaged, in order to prevent the bands' attendance at the

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<sup>1307</sup> *LC* 23 Jan 1886.

<sup>1308</sup> *LC* 24, 29 31 Mar 1866.

<sup>1309</sup> *LC* 31 Mar 1881.

<sup>1310</sup> Spillane, Michael V., 'The 4th Earl of Dunraven, 1841 -1926: a study of his contribution to the emerging Ireland at the beginning of the 20th century', Ph.D. thesis, (University of Limerick, 2006). Potter, Matthew, *William Monsell of Tervoe: 1812–1894*, (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 2009).

Home Rule gathering. In the end the Foresters borrowed the instruments of the recently formed Thomondgate band so they could play, but the understanding that their presence at the event and their music really mattered speaks of the importance of culture and politics.<sup>1311</sup>

Cultural supremacy was the last undecided bone of contention between Unionists and Nationalists in Irish life in the nineteenth century. Its importance lay in this contest. Sport, one of the most vital popular expressions of modern culture became, literally, an important arena in this battle of, and within, nationalisms. The sports boom preceded the Gaelic language and literary revivals, succeeded the ballad and popular music movements and was yet another popular cultural idiom that exerted a powerful political influence on definitions of Irishness and Britishness. This chapter is concerned with the contest, in the medium of sport, for Ireland, Irishness, Britishness and alloys of each in North Munster in the second half of the nineteenth century.

As Cronin has outlined in his 1999 book on nationalism and sport in Ireland, sport historiography, particularly GAA historiography, is unrevised.<sup>1312</sup> It is, however, in an even more parlous state than one of unrevision; it has yet to be written. What have been written are, largely, assessments of the GAA and nationalism, but to confuse that extensive library of works with a sophisticated history of all sports and all versions of nationalism in Ireland is folly indeed. The majority of these works till the same field over and over.<sup>1313</sup> The work of Tom Hunt on sport in Westmeath and this thesis on Limerick are not the first academic studies into sport, but they are the first to insist on a wider trawl among the sports, to

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<sup>1311</sup> *Cork Examiner*, 17, 18, 19, 20, 26 Apr 1876. *LC* 15, 18, 20 Apr 1876.

<sup>1312</sup> Cronin, Mike, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland - Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity Since 1884*, (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1999).

<sup>1313</sup> Bairner, De Burca, Fahy, Garnham, Hannigan, King, MacLua. Mahon, Mullan, Ó'Caithnia, O'Maolfabhail, Ó'Riain, Puirseál, Rouse and Sugden et al focus on field games, issues of identity and nationality, the post 1884 period and are marginally interested in women's sports experiences.

investigate as far as possible women's sports experiences, and to breach the 1884 barrier, up to now Irish sport's year zero.<sup>1314</sup>

Mandle was the first to investigate nationalist assumptions within GAA historiography and demonstrated in his studies that the GAA as a movement was very alike the sports movements from Britain which it set out to rival and to counter.<sup>1315</sup> A number of quality histories of the GAA, at the local level, have been produced.<sup>1316</sup> Local authority libraries throughout the country also hold large numbers of GAA club histories compiled by enthusiastic Gaels; while these are of variable quality and academic merit they rarely stray beyond stereotypical discussions of sport, identity and nationalism in Ireland.<sup>1317</sup>

Michael Mullan has taken the most lateral view of the growth of the Gaelic sports movement and highlighted the important structural economic factors that militated against a grass-roots acceptance of Anglo sports in the late nineteenth century. Mullan's thesis was the first to outline apolitical causes for the development of two opposing sports traditions in late nineteenth century Ireland. His thesis relied on an economic interpretation of the divisions in Irish society and economy out which opposing sports traditions grew.<sup>1318</sup>

Another historian who addressed sport, albeit tangentially, was Comerford, who investigated the early Fenian movement and highlighted the role of sports and leisure

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<sup>1314</sup> Hunt, Tom, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath*, (Cork University Press, Cork, 2007).

<sup>1315</sup> Mandle, W.F., 'Cricket and Australian nationalism in the nineteenth century', in *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 59:4 (September 1973). Mandle, W.F., 'The I.R.B. and the beginnings of the Gaelic Athletic Association', in *Irish Historical Studies*, 20, no. 80 (September 1977). Mandle, W.F., 'The Gaelic Athletic Association and Popular Culture', in MacDonagh, O., Mandle, W.F., and Travers, P., (eds.), *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750-1950*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1983). Mandle, W.F., *The Gaelic Athletic Association and Irish Nationalist Politics 1884-1924*, (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1987). Mandle, W.F., 'Parnell and sport', in *Studia Hibernica*, no.28 (1994).

<sup>1316</sup> Rouse, Paul, 'Offaly Tradition: The Gaelic Athletic Association', in Nolan, William P., & O'Neill, Timothy P., eds., *Offaly: History and Society*, (Geography, Dublin, 1998). Ó Ceallaigh, Séamus, *History of the Limerick G.A.A.*, part 1, (The Kerryman, Tralee, 1937). Hunt, Tom, ( , , ).

<sup>1317</sup> King, Seamus J.; Ó'Donnchú, Liam & Smyth, Jimmy, (eds.), *Tipperary's G.A.A. Ballads*, (County Tipperary Board G.A.A., Thurles, 2000).

<sup>1318</sup> Mullan, Michael, 'The devolution of the Irish economy in the nineteenth century and the bifurcation of Irish sport', in *IJHS*, 13:2 (August 1996).

activities in developing camaraderie among young men which would be indispensable to that nationalist political movement.<sup>1319</sup>

Cronin challenged the way in which historians have dealt with nationalism in Ireland based on the elite and high cultural outputs of society. He attempted to offer a criticism of the impacts of sport and nationalism upon each other that, he observed, notable historians such as Foster, Lee and Keogh eschewed. Cronin posited a positive, pluralist, outward looking and more open minded nationalism, heralded by the popularity of Jack Charlton's stewardship of the Irish soccer team in the 1980s and 1990s against a more conservative, insular and unyielding GAA style nationalism.<sup>1320</sup> Cronin is too sanguine about Irish soccer's relationship to nationalism and too melancholic about the GAA's brand of nationalism, but though his assessments are valuable contributions to the study of the interaction of sport and nationalism, they reinforce the idea that the GAA is the alpha and omega of Irish nationalism; the definition of nationalism as whatever the GAA embodies is a fault of Irish sports historiography. An interesting future study area lies in the similarity of the GAA to some British sports movements that also rejected the traditional agendas of sport in that country. Rugby league, workingmen's sports organisations and even socialist sporting endeavours may bear more similarities to the GAA than have been articulated or even imagined.<sup>1321</sup> Studies of the secession of rugby league from rugby in Britain, in particular, may provide useful comparisons with the GAA rejection of tory sports.<sup>1322</sup>

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<sup>1319</sup> Comerford, R.V., 'Patriotism as pastime: the appeal of fenianism in the mid-1860s', in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol.XXII, no.87, March 1981. Comerford, R.V., 'Ireland 1850-70: post-famine and mid-Victorian', in Vaughan, W.E., (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, V: Ireland Under the Union, I, 1801-70*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989). Comerford, R.V., 'Comprehending the Fenians', *Saothar*, 17 (1992). Comerford, R.V., *The Fenians in context: Irish Politics and Society, 1848-82*, (Wolfhound, Dublin, 1998).

<sup>1320</sup> Cronin, Mike, & Mayall, David, (eds.), *Sporting Nationalisms: Identity, Ethnicity, Immigration and Assimilation*, (Frank Cass, London, 1998). Cronin, Mike, 'Fighting for Ireland, Playing for England? The Nationalist History of the Gaelic Athletic Association and the English Influence on Irish Sport', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 15:3 (December 1998). Cronin, Mike, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland - Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity Since 1884*, (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1999).

<sup>1321</sup> Collins, T., *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, (Frank Cass, London, 1998). Steinberg, David A., 'The Workers' Sport Internationals, 1920-28', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13:2 (April 1978), 233-51. Metcalfe, Alan, 'Organized sport in the mining communities of South Northumberland, 1800-1889', in *Victorian Studies*, 25:4 (Summer 1982), 469-95. Lamoureux, Christophe, 'Factory, sport, and local life: tradition and evolution in working-class sport in a commune of the Basse Loire,

The general fascination with the GAA's explicitness ignores Irish rugby union and Irish association football's implicit and explicit politicisation, thankfully now receiving attention, particularly by Garnham and Cronin.<sup>1323</sup>

Many historians have investigated and criticised the politicisation of Irish sport, but few attempts have been made to place this in an international context where comparisons may be made with other sports movements that are equally political, but where this is unacknowledged or not explicitly stated. The GAA was upfront in declaring its politics in manifesto form, and in promulgating its mission statement it was quite modern; other sports bodies, the English FA, RFU LTA etc, did not do this, however, this makes them no less political.<sup>1324</sup> The most political aspects of sport, in Ireland and elsewhere, were bans. There is little qualitative difference between the GAA ban and other bans in Irish sports culture. The ban on sport on Sundays – was sectarian. Effective bans on Gaelic sport existed in rugby football dominated schools. The bans on women's participation in sport in the nineteenth century joined bans on working men from participating in gentleman amateur

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1877-1977', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 7:3 (December 1990), 414-31. Hill, Jeff, and Williams, Jack, *Sport and Identity in the North of England* (Keele University Press, Keele, Staffordshire, 1996). Daly, John A., *Elysian Fields: Sport, Class and Community in Colonial South Australia 1836-90*, (Available from author, Adelaide, South Australia, 1982).

<sup>1322</sup> The Tories' rock-solid control of rugby union led to a sporting schism in England not unlike the GAA's creation of an alternative football code. Critics of the GAA ban on 'foreign' games fail to take into account the similarly strict ban by rugby union authorities on its players going to rugby league, something 'foreign' in the sense of alien to Tory values. The banning of promising union players exploiting their earning potential by moving to rugby league and yet retaining membership of a rugby union club for social or other purposes was an economic restriction far more tangible than the social scope of the GAA's ban. Rugby playing schools in Ireland had their own, unenumerated, ban on Gaelic games and, sometimes, soccer too. Rugby League bedded down well in the U.K. (*sans* Ireland, north or south), Australia, South Africa and New Zealand i.e. those 'white' colonies that also adopted rugby union. Ireland was the only component of the empire not to experience a split in its rugby edifice into union and league camps – this is a pointer to the ultra-middle class credentials of rugby union in Ireland and a function of the limited economic potential of another code of football in a small economy already replete with footballing alternatives. Had the GAA not emerged the possibility of a rugby union/league split developing as it did in the north of England is an intriguing question, though it is more likely that Irish rugby football would have been more in line with the developments of rugby in England's west country and Cornwall.

<sup>1323</sup> Garnham, Neal, 'Rugby's imperial connections, domestic politics and colonial tours to Ireland before 1914', in Bairner, Alan, (ed.), *Sport and the Irish: Histories, Identities, Issues*, University College Dublin Press, Dublin, 2005), 44-52. Cronin, Mike, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland - Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity Since 1884*, (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1999).

<sup>1324</sup> Bailey, Peter, "'A mingled mass of perfectly legitimate pleasures": The Victorian middle class and the problem of leisure', in *Victorian Studies*, 21:1 (Autumn 1977), 7-28. Bailey, Peter, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885*, (Methuen, London, 1978).



sports and bans on men from earning a living from their prowess in some sports – to paraphrase the *Chronicle* writer; ‘verily it was an age of bans.’<sup>1325</sup> The proper context for a discussion of the GAA bans is a more comprehensive discussion of all the various exclusionary strategies in Irish sport and not simply within the confines of politics and nationalism.

In the absence of a more complete understanding of Irish sports history and its situation in a British and an international context we must endure the proliferation of studies of nationalism and the GAA and hope that occasional diversions from this key theme, like McDevitt’s and Joyce’s gender analyses of Gaelic games and nationalism, may emerge to offer opportunities to think anew on the subject.<sup>1326</sup> One obvious possibility for a future study is a comparison of the development of shinty in Scotland, hurling in Ireland and bandy, among other earlier forms of hockey, in England.<sup>1327</sup> The number of works on the GAA (at a national level, it must be said) and nationalism reminds one of a production of *Hamlet* containing only the Prince; the characters of Polonius, Gertrude and Ophelia matter too.

Irish sport history is yet poorly understood, but most inadequately researched or explained thus far is the organised sports infrastructure of the pre-Gaelic Athletic Association era. Without a sufficient understanding of this period the role of the G.A.A. has, perforce, been understood through the lens of subsequent and not preceding events and developments. This bias of understanding, exacerbated by later self-serving G.A.A. and nationalist propaganda has stressed and prioritised Irish nationalisms, but has concealed the very real

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<sup>1325</sup> *LC* 31 Mar 1881.

<sup>1326</sup> McDevitt, Patrick F., ‘Muscular Catholicism: Nationalism, Masculinity and Gaelic Team Sports, 1884-1916’, in *Gender and History*, 9:2 (Aug.1997). Joyce, Toby, ‘Ireland’s trained and marshalled manhood’: the Fenians in the mid-1860s’, in Kelleher, Margaret & Murphy, James H., (eds.), *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres*, (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1997).

<sup>1327</sup> MacLennan, Hugh Dan, *Shinty!*, (Balnain Books, Nairn, Scotland, 1993). MacLennan, Hugh Dan, *Not an Orchid ...*, (Kessock Communications, Inverness, Scotland, 1995). Miroy, N., *The History of Hockey*, (Chiltern books, Hemel Hempstead, 1989).

loyalist culture of organised sports up to 1884. This loyalist sports culture needs examination.

The early nineteenth century customary, informally organised sports infrastructure was a local affair; it was not apolitical in that its structure mirrored that of the communities sponsoring the sports events, but it enjoyed a pretty uncontroversial political existence. The bucolic Hardy-esque image of landlord, tenant and labourer sharing a sporting arena while being admired and appreciated by the children and women of the district was not entirely a cliché in the pre-Emancipation period.<sup>1328</sup> This sports infrastructure relied on the patronage of landlords for practical reasons; venue, prizes and sponsored refreshments were simple and relatively cheap testaments to the existence of some relics of *noblesse oblige*. The existence of such a sports model behind hurling and Gaelic football the post-Famine era was sporadic, but not unheard of, and even makes an occasional appearance in the GAA era post 1884.<sup>1329</sup> During the 1880s a contest between the institutions of landlordism and their New Departure competitors was augmented by the contributions of sporting bodies. The GAA's creation of a sporting front in the contest compelled the landlords to rely even more on their sporting institutions as a focus for community solidarity. In this new sports environment the landlord class turned their sports culture an even darker shade of tory blue.

Evidence for overt attachment of symbols of crown and Union to sports in the period before formal organisation of sport is as scant as the evidence for sport itself. Sport was at the time a local affair, but as the processes of rationalisation and organisation continued, sport came to signify something greater to political and popular definitions of the nation. In 1870 the *Irish Sportsman and Farmer* asserted confidently in its first editorial that 'there is a clear link between a country's history and its sports' and that those sports represented 'the

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<sup>1328</sup> Ó'Caithnia, Liam, *Scéal na hIomána*, (Clóchomhar, Baile Átha Cliath, 1980). Whelan, Kevin, 'The Geography of Hurling', *History Ireland*, 1:1 (Spring 1993), 27-31. O'Maolfabhail, A., *Camán: two thousand years of hurling in Ireland*, (Dundalk, 1973).

<sup>1329</sup> LC 23 July 1887.

sunniest aspects of its history'.<sup>1330</sup> This assertion, coming in the same year as the formation of the Home Government Association to pursue Home Rule for Ireland, immediately posed the questions, whose history? whose sports? and whose country?<sup>1331</sup>

Organised sport in Limerick in the third quarter of the nineteenth century was a pillar of the tory, Anglo–Irish conception of Irishness. Limerick Coursing Club, the Royal Western Yacht Club of Ireland, Limerick Boat Club and Limerick Cricket Club were absolutely tory institutions with missions to provide social and cultural networks for the ascendancy, gentry and their supporters in the commercial classes. The use of the term tory here is problematic; it may be confused with a strict definition of party political Toryism, this is not intended, but it is a good short-hand for the spirit of the culture of organised sport up to the end of the third quarter of the nineteenth century – Protestant or loyal Roman Catholic, obsessed with status and hierarchy, and culturally British. As sport became formalised it assumed all the traits of its chief promoters and exhibited the character of a bounded leisure pursuit. Its practice was bounded by social constraints such as class, religion, educational background and gender; by economic constraints, political considerations and practical barriers like geography and environment. Limerick's first organised sports, therefore, made use of its estuary and abundant agricultural canvas to establish yachting, foxhunting and coursing clubs for rich male Protestant landowners and merchants. When local aristocrat David Vandeleur Roche assumed the baronetcy upon his father's death in April 1865, the public acknowledgement of this transition came in spectacular fashion a few months later as he wagered £100 a side against another local man in a horse race at Newcastle outside Limerick City that was witnessed by an 'immense throng'.<sup>1332</sup>

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<sup>1330</sup> *ISF*, 19 Feb 1870.

<sup>1331</sup> O'Day, Alan, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998).

<sup>1332</sup> *LC* 8 Apr, 14, 23 Nov, 2 Dec 1865.

It is unsurprising that people who worked together and enjoyed the same economic, social and educational status, like Roche and Lyons, would seek to have leisure time with each other and within a few decades, for example, three separate aquatic sports infrastructures developed – aristocratic yachting, middle class rowing and sailing, and working class rowing clubs.<sup>1333</sup> The aristocrats of the yachting fraternity enjoyed tilts at their British and American counterparts in Cowes and in New York for titles like the America's Cup. Limerick's middle-class rowing representatives contested for silver plates of considerable value in regattas in Dublin, Cork and Galway. Meanwhile members of St. Mary's Workingmen's Rowing Club were obliged to go to law to get one of its members to relinquish a small cash prize given to him at a local regatta and which the plaintiffs claimed ought to belong, corporately, to the club.<sup>1334</sup> Each structure enjoyed the support of separate sponsoring interest communities and provided a focus for the values and aspirations of those communities. The necessity for three distinct sporting infrastructures in such a small geographical space, catering for a reasonably modest number of participants is an example of inefficient use of resources and personnel as well as the primacy of non-sporting concerns in the minds of organisers.

The GAA demonstrates the effects of the confluence of sport culture, non-sport culture, politics and nationalism, but it did not start the process. Tory programmes of events on rural summer swards that included, variously, sports, food, prayers, and a nod to the symbols of state were the unremarkable beginnings of a process of linking sports, the nation and the state.<sup>1335</sup> This entwining of sports and social rituals with overt political emphasis was part of a clear trend in mid-century sports organisation. Increasingly, sport, which had been a means to celebrating something tangible other than sport itself, now began to assume cultural value in and of itself, while at the same time expanding its role in

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<sup>1333</sup> Exclusively workingmen's rowing events, *LC* 16 June 1874, 18 July 1878, 5, 19 Aug 1879, 2 Nov 1882.

<sup>1334</sup> *LC* 2 Nov 1882.

<sup>1335</sup> *LC* 2 May, 5, 12 Sept 1868, 26 June, 6 July 1869, 16 Apr 1870, 15 June, 31 Aug 1871, 23, 25 Sept 1875, 2 Sept 1876, 4 Aug 1877, 18 June 1878, 9, 18 Sept 1879, 20, 23 Aug 1881.

representing values, identities and belonging (or separateness).<sup>1336</sup> The social aspect of these gatherings was important, but no less important was the development, in the young people attending, of a religious and civic spirit that was entirely in agreement with the demands of their parents and clergy. At these gatherings there were cheers for the Queen and for the host (usually a noble or gentry figure) in whose grounds the sports may have been held; the anthem ‘God Save the Queen’ was sung, and there were prayers and hymns at different times in the day. The practice of school outings in England involving ‘loyal songs’ and games was noted in, and encouraged by, the *Limerick Chronicle*.<sup>1337</sup> There were many similar local examples, however; Castletown House in Kilcornan hosted Sunday school outings in the mid-1860s that included ‘innocent’ sports and the national anthem.<sup>1338</sup>

Distinctions between sports as public assets, as valuable and respectable or as demoralising and barbaric were indicative of a process of categorisation of sports along lines that were parallel to the categorisation of sport by nationality, class and culture. Even Michael Cusack (before his sporting Damascene moment) was impressed by quintessentially English games like cricket, an impressive testament to the subtle, yet perceptible ‘culture creep’ of games originating in Great Britain on Irish sporting debate.<sup>1339</sup> Foxhunting was celebrated in Cusack’s home county, Clare, in 1866 as a pursuit ‘interwoven with national character and national renown’.<sup>1340</sup> Though the ‘nation’ was undefined it was, in the context of hunting and racing debates of the day, the British nation. During the hunt interference stage of the land war of the 1880s the battle lines were clearly drawn as indicated by calls for the government to ‘suppress those interfering with national

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<sup>1336</sup> Guttman, Allen, ‘Sport and Celebration’, in *Stadion*, 12:13, 1-7. Cheska, Alyce Taylor, ‘Sports Spectacular: The Social Ritual of Power’, in *Quest*, 30 (Summer 1978), 58-71.

<sup>1337</sup> *LC* 3 Aug 1867.

<sup>1338</sup> *LC* 9 July 1865, 6 Oct 1866.

<sup>1339</sup> Mandle, W.F., *The Gaelic Athletic Association and Irish Nationalist Politics 1884-1924*, (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1987).

<sup>1340</sup> *LC* 12 Apr 1866.

amusements [hunting].<sup>1341</sup> How intimately some sports were bound to the power elite may be seen in the *Chronicle*'s claim, following the Tipperary National League's campaign in 1886 against the local tennis club, that the League was out to 'destroy the aristocracy.'<sup>1342</sup>

The hunting and racing men's assumption that Ireland was their territory to define was unsurprising since they both embodied the state and held legal title to the lands constituting the country. The identification of such field sports as national sports established the initial connection between sport and British nationalism; the question of who put the nationalism in Irish sport, like the question of who put the gun in Irish politics, can be answered in favour of the red/blue/orange end of Irish politics.

Hunting was extolled as a means of keeping down vermin, represented as part of the country's heritage, kept up as part of the bloodstock industry and for the formation of adept cavalrymen.<sup>1343</sup> Some of these robust justifications for gentry practice of field sports had to be introduced in response to the movements in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that saw off the practices of cockfighting, bear baiting and other plebeian and legislatively labelled barbarous sports. Arguments against the hunt on moral or ethical grounds were rare, but not unknown, one such contribution in 1876 labelling the practice depraved.<sup>1344</sup>

Movements against lower class recreations had as much interest in suppressing upper-class field sports, but had to contend with a more powerful political block (the aristocracy) than cockpit owning publicans.

In espousing social, economic and utilitarian justifications in favour of the hunt, the gentry was wrapping the red/blue flag around them. The flimsy nature of one gentry claim for the

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<sup>1341</sup> LC 3 Jan 1882, 18 Nov 1884.

<sup>1342</sup> LC 1 July 1886.

<sup>1343</sup> LC 1 Apr 1869, 17 Feb, 14 May 1870, 7 Mar, 21 Dec 1872, 8 Jan, 21 Feb, 9, 14 Apr, 9, 28 May 1874, 11 Apr 1876, 6 Mar, 6 Nov 1879, 29 May 1880, 11 Oct 1881, 8 June, 7 Oct 1882, 4 Mar 1884, 29 July 1886.

<sup>1344</sup> 22 Jan 1876.

value of the hunt can be seen in the reasons offered for the 1885 concert held by the Limerick Hunt. It was held to compensate people for the existence of foxes; this was an implicit acknowledgement that hunt activity was, in contradiction of its own claims, artificially keeping the fox population higher than it might otherwise be.<sup>1345</sup>

Appeals celebrating the martial spirit and value of field sports and claims for the heritage and patriotic virtues inherent in their practice were a response to a perceived need to justify these sports as the nineteenth century progressed. As Limerick tenant farmers assumed more and more legal protections under the land acts of the late century a further series of appeals had to be made by the hunt clubs extolling the economic value of the sport to local communities and its role in providing spectacle and colour.<sup>1346</sup> Quite prosaically, the increasing use of barbed wire by farmers interfered with the sport of the gentry, fettering ancient hunting rights, though with a practical and not political purpose behind the use of wire. One disconsolate writer of couplets to the *Chronicle* in 1890 beseeched farmers “Oh! Can’t they build up their fences a foot or two higher, But, whatever they do, do away with wire.”<sup>1347</sup> The pro-hunting lobby sought to place its sport in the best possible light in a less deferential age and one lobbyist (named Tally-Ho) claimed it was even “the only means we have of bringing or circulating money in this poor little island of ours, and giving work and amusement to all classes.”<sup>1348</sup> Through the to-ing and fro-ing between landlords and farmers over half a century the image of hunting changed from a virtually apolitical, or uncontested, state to a totem of political toryism, a source of inter-class tension and a symbol of a contested nationhood requiring defence.

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<sup>1345</sup> LC 24 Nov 1885.

<sup>1346</sup> LC 12 Apr, 11 Oct 1879, 6 Dec 1881, 15, 22 July, 19 Aug, 5 Sept, 7, 28 Oct, 16 Dec 1882, 27 Jan, 20 Feb, 29 May 1883, 18 Nov 1884, 22 Dec 1885.

<sup>1347</sup> LC 13 Dec 1890.

<sup>1348</sup> LC 18 Sept 1890.

The politicisation of the hunt, which had begun before the New Departure, was even more marked in the 1880s. Growing links between the gentry and the tenant farmer class, a less cavalier approach to farmers discommoded by the hunt and the co-option of many of that class by the elite hunt clubs were just three of the ways the gentry responded, or were forced to respond, to what was described as the ‘complete lack of deference anywhere now.’<sup>1349</sup> In that decade calls for hunters to take more care over tilled and ploughed land appear and become numerous, indicating an acceptance that hunting etiquette needed to change.<sup>1350</sup> In 1882 the County Limerick Foxhounds even postponed a planned hunt of theirs to avoid a clash with a farmers’ drag hunt in Fedamore. The *Chronicle* seemed incredulous that some ‘of the upper ten’ were later reported in attendance.<sup>1351</sup>

This modest initial hunting rapprochement was the beginning of a new policy of conciliation with the tenant farmer class and was improved upon in later years. The Master of the County Limerick Foxhounds in 1882, gave six deer to the United Harriers, a new hunt club of farmers and their sons, and donated a Farmer’s plate for competition at the Banogue Races in 1883.<sup>1352</sup> The number of tenant farmers ‘well mounted’ for a hunt by the Tipperary Hunt in 1884 shows the co-option strategy employed in that county also had some success.<sup>1353</sup> Gubbins even donated £10 to the National League in September 1885, an act viewed as treacherous by the *Chronicle*, but it was a pragmatic act and an indication of his desire for some accommodation, but as it was also only one-fifth of the donation given by another foxhunting gentleman in Clare to the Home Rule League in 1874, its efficacy may be doubted.<sup>1354</sup> What the Master, John Gubbins, gave he could also take away: following yet another hound poisoning incident in 1883 he threatened not to act as a

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<sup>1349</sup> *LC* 2 June 1883.

<sup>1350</sup> These calls appeared in the paid advertisement hunt fixtures, for example, *LC* 23 Mar 1880.

<sup>1351</sup> *LC* 26, 31 Jan 1882.

<sup>1352</sup> *LC* 21 Nov, 28 Dec 1882, 22 May 1883.

<sup>1353</sup> *LC* 6 Nov 1884.

<sup>1354</sup> *LC* 24 Sept 1885. Philpin, C. H. E., (ed.), *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987). *LC* 10 Feb 1874.



steward at the Limerick Races and to get other stewards to withdraw their services also. Eventually, even his conciliatory policy had to give way to the overwhelming weight of the 'land league hunt' and 'stopping the hunt' strategies and Gubbins pulled out of the County Limerick Foxhounds in the beginning of 1886.<sup>1355</sup>

By 'stopping the hunt', unintentionally by using barbed wire, or intentionally for a political purpose, farmers and the National League brought great pressure to bear on the gentry and aristocracy, in Limerick as around Ireland.<sup>1356</sup> The purposes were, therefore, varied and could even be part of a strategy by some farmers to get the gentry to buy them off – holding the land hostage, as it were. Attempts were made by some in both camps to find accommodations that respected each side, but a tiny vignette in the reporting of an 1883 hunt gives some idea of the imaginings of the hunter class in those fraught times: finding a fox covert empty the report noted that it was 'tenant-less'. This slip of the pen may reveal a lot about the frame of mind of the hunters whose sports had been thwarted.<sup>1357</sup>

Tory conceptions of the state, culture, politics and nationalism were predominant in organised sporting culture in the first two thirds of the nineteenth century in Limerick and North Munster.<sup>1358</sup> The elements of tory sportism may be studied under a number of headings, iconography, nomenclature, membership, forms of organisation and rituals. The symbols and icons on elite club crests followed a British standard: lions rampant were on the crest of the Limerick Boat Club while the flag of the Royal Western Yacht Club of Ireland incorporated a white ensign with a red cross, union flag, the crown of the Prince of Wales and, in deference to Irish feeling, a wreath of shamrocks. In terms of club

<sup>1355</sup> LC 20 Feb 1883, 29 Nov, 2, 16 Dec 1884, 24 Jan, 18 Apr, 15, 17, 22 Dec 1885, 5, 7 Jan 1886.

<sup>1356</sup> Curtis, L.P., jun., 'On Class and Class Conflict in the Land War', (Review Article) in *Irish Economic and Social History*, VIII (1981), 86-94. Curtis, L.P., jun., 'Stopping the Hunt, 1881-2; An Aspect of the Irish Land War', in Philpin, C.H.E., (ed.), *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland*, (Cambridge, 1987), 349-402. Jordan, Donald, 'The Irish National League and the "Unwritten law": Rural Protest and Nation-Building in Ireland, 1882-1890', in *Past and Present*, 158 (Feb 1998), 146-71.

<sup>1357</sup> LC 24 Mar 1883.

<sup>1358</sup> Sport is a conservative force, see Veblen, Thorstein, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, (Penguin Books, London, 1994, 1st edition 1899).

nomenclature the accreditation of the Western Yacht Club as royal is self-explanatory; a local hope that the Limerick Boat Club might also achieve a royal warrant was dashed when the subject was once raised, but the resonance of this potential move in loyalist circles suggests it was a dear wish of many that it be realised.<sup>1359</sup> Local images and symbols were lacking in club iconography.

Membership of hunt or coursing clubs assumed an elite social status and the extensive, hierarchical, not to mention obsequious lists of attenders at hunts and coursing meetings leaves no doubt as to the cross-section of society that patronised these events.<sup>1360</sup> Elite sports clubs were governed by a system based on existing hierarchies in society with a president, usually the highest ranking noble to be found sympathetic to the club's aims; vice-presidents and patrons drawn from among lesser nobles and gentry; an executive branch or committee composed of the same, and a general membership of, at a minimum, 'strong' middle-class males. The practice of clubs requiring new members to submit to a ballot on their suitability allowed the black-balling of undesirables, while simultaneously allowing officers of the army and navy stationed in the region to enjoy full club privileges without going through the 'gate-keeping' process, was a contentious issue for many local aspirants to club membership.<sup>1361</sup> The Limerick Boat Club was the institution with the most visibly selective entrance policy, but the negative publicity this drew on the club may have been a consequence of local desire to break into its ranks; the equally rigid policies of the Limerick County Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club drew less popular opprobrium, perhaps an indicator of less demand to be allowed enter its hallowed sward.

The rituals of sports events supported the foregoing practices and emphasised the tory-ness of the early, elite, organised sports infrastructure. Utilisation of the Union flag, the playing

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<sup>1359</sup> *LC* 16 Apr 1870.

<sup>1360</sup> *LC* 7 Apr 1870, 7, 9 Nov 1872, 8 Apr, 2, 4 Nov 1876, 20, 29 Nov 1877, 23 Mar 1878, 8, 22 Feb, 25 Mar, 12 Apr, 27 Nov 1879.

<sup>1361</sup> *LC* 20, 25 May, 3 June 1882, 31 July, 20 Oct 1883, 17, 26 Apr 1884.

of the ‘God Save the Queen’, invitations to military bands to perform at sports events and toasts to the monarch and a myriad other personnel representing the state and entrenched power elites all marked the formally organised sports structure in the first three quarters of the nineteenth century as an elite, Tory, cultural bastion.<sup>1362</sup> The ‘usual loyal toast’ at public dinners was a sacrosanct ritual for loyalists and was guarded jealously; when, in 1875, one dinner toast to the Pope preceded the toast to the monarch a ‘loyal Roman Catholic’ (unnamed) was forced to communicate his outrage at this affront to loyalist principles to the local loyalist journal.<sup>1363</sup>

To Irish cultural nationalists these attempts at ‘Union Jackery and denationalisation’ died hard, and their response grew equally hard also.<sup>1364</sup> The endurance of such practices was remarkable. For example, the last association football club in Dublin to give up ‘God Save the Queen’ at matches was Bohemian F.C., a club formed by Roman Catholic medical students.<sup>1365</sup> Marianne Elliott has some interesting views on the Union flag in her book *Catholics of Ulster*. Her contention is that the problem for many Catholics was not the flag *per se*, but in how it was used by its more fervent proponents.<sup>1366</sup> Perhaps Irish nationalists were not antipathetic to British nationalism so much as to its espousal by those they considered not as British as they themselves thought i.e. their neighbours. The most powerful and significant relationships are those with people closest to us, the Britishness of those living close to Irish nationalists was a *casus belli* or *casus irritans*, sufficient to provoke outrage and occasional bouts of violence like that at the 1884 Glin annual regatta and athletic sports in West Limerick when a Union flag on display was taken down and

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<sup>1362</sup> LC 10 May 1851, 21 Sept, 2 Nov 1865, 24 Mar, 11-20 Sept 1866, 1 Apr 1869, 17 Feb 1870, 2 Sept 1871, 13 Jan, 8, 10 Aug 1872, 4 June 1885. Thackeray, William Makepeace, *The Irish Sketch Book, 1842*, (first published 1843, Blackstaff, Belfast 1985), 271-2. Murphy, James H., “‘We left our dear Osborne’”: Ireland and the creation of Queen Victoria’, Conference of Society for the Study of Nineteenth Century Ireland, Southampton, 20-22 April 2001.

<sup>1363</sup> LC 5 Aug 1875.

<sup>1364</sup> Bulfin, William, *Rambles in Eirinn*, (Dublin, 1907), 60-67.

<sup>1365</sup> Garnham, Neal, *The origins and development of football in Ireland; being a reprint of R.M. Peter’s Irish Football Annual of 1880*, (introduction by Garnham), (Ulster Historical Foundation, Belfast, 1999).

<sup>1366</sup> Elliott, Marianne, *Catholics of Ulster*, (Allen Lane, London, 2000).

ripped to shreds.<sup>1367</sup> Though some arrests were expected, the fact that none happened on a day when many witnesses were present indicates a discretion on the RIC's behalf that arrests on the day would have exacerbated matters. A union flag on a ship in Limerick docks marking the brief stop-off by the Prince and Princess of Wales in April 1885 also led to a dock strike by the workers there.<sup>1368</sup>

Organised sport became a powerful conduit of cultural Britishness in a process some sports historians label imperial diffusion, i.e. the means of transfer of cultural practices from the metropolis to the 'fringe'.<sup>1369</sup> The agencies of imperial diffusion were the army, the monarchy (and its local agents, the aristocracy and gentry), educational institutions and voluntary associations. Great British sporting bodies had a negligible influence on local sports developments, but for their roles in promulgating the standardised rules by which cricket and rugby union, in particular, were to be played.<sup>1370</sup>

This examination of the Limerick experience disproves a contemporary popular perception of the extent of the army's role in sports development, but does not deny its presence in the sports infrastructure of the period. Army events were invariably for the purposes of gambling, maintaining army morale and fitness or as promotional opportunities for the merits of the forces.<sup>1371</sup> Many officers attended a dogfight in the New Barracks in Limerick as late as 1870.<sup>1372</sup> Other officer sports challenges were strictly of a carnival and feck-making character that contrasted sharply with the earnestness of the nascent Tom Brownite

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<sup>1367</sup> LC 22 July 1884.

<sup>1368</sup> LC 23 Apr 1885.

<sup>1369</sup> Bale, John, 'International Sports History as Innovation Diffusion', in *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*, XV:1, (May 1984), 38-63. Brown, David W., 'Muscular Christianity in the Antipodes: some observations on the diffusion and emergence of a victorian ideal in Australian social theory', in *Sporting Traditions*, 3:2 (May 1987), 173-87. Guttman, Allen, 'Our Former Colonial Masters: The Diffusion of Sports and the Question of Cultural Imperialism', in *Stadion*, 14:10, 49-63.

<sup>1370</sup> Bradley, James, 'The MCC, society and Empire: a portrait of cricket's ruling body, 1860-1914', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 7:1 (May 1990), 3-22.

<sup>1371</sup> LC 20, 30 May 1882.

<sup>1372</sup> LC 22 Mar 1870.

sports world and engaged in such sports as the pigeon-shooting contest for the prize of a pig in 1866.<sup>1373</sup>

Most officers were also far more interested in the winter pursuit of deer and foxes than the summer rival cricket, yet, to follow the army–booster logic of many ‘garrison game’ observers the army must be credited with the growth of hunting in Ireland too.<sup>1374</sup> That the army is not seen as the sponsor of hunting in Ireland is because the indigenous organisers of the sport were seen as a capable, independently minded and resourced fraternity. In contrast, according to the logic of ‘garrisonry’, the organisers of mere football and athletics clubs must have gained their inspiration and model from the army – where else could such minds have sourced their inspiration?

Since most army involvement in the sports of the nineteenth century was in the fields of hunting, cricket and athletics the different fates of these sports does not prove that the connection to the army was an entirely propitious one. The army regiments stationed in Ireland came from many and all parts of Great Britain, and Irish soldiers joined many and all regiments of the army stationed throughout the empire. Since these men were exposed to an impressive number of football codes in Great Britain, the lack of any extensive army inspired rugby league and rugby union tradition in Ireland seems surprising. The army’s contribution to sports organisation in Limerick in this period was negligible in comparison to that of voluntary associations of various categories, educational institutions, local sporting traditions, older sports movements and celebratory and customary sports.

Some celebratory sports associated with schools, Sunday schools, tenant gatherings, landmark landlord occasions and calendar festivals catered for some of the athletics and amusement needs of, and were directed at the Protestant, aristocratic, and loyalist sections

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<sup>1373</sup> LC 18 Sept 1866.

<sup>1374</sup> Sassoon, Siegfried, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, (Faber & Gwyer, London, 1928, 7th impression).

of society.<sup>1375</sup> Through this social mechanism sport became linked to churches, the state and monarchy. In the latter half of the nineteenth century those institutions were subject to tremendous buffeting by Roman Catholicism, nationalism and republicanism respectively; the establishment of games and sport as a cultural battleground thus opened a new front in contemporary religious and political conflicts.<sup>1376</sup> One correspondent in 1864, noting landlord patronage towards tenants, objected to their ‘sham’ nature and denounced the behaviour of recipients of landlord largesse as the ‘mean crouching of a pack of slaves, under the lash of their master’.<sup>1377</sup>

At the apex of society’s pyramid was the monarch with the aristocracy and gentry below; their social and cultural leadership roles received considerable attention and deference – the ‘mean crouching’ charge serving to bolster Murphy’s ‘abject loyalty’ thesis.<sup>1378</sup> One 1865 suggestion that were the Prince of Wales to hunt in Ireland for a few weeks each year that it would contribute to the end of Fenianism seems far fetched, but it made the pages of the *Irish Times*.<sup>1379</sup> The anti-live pigeon shooting views of the Princess of Wales were of a piece with the anti-curling views of her mother in law – who at least had the tact to express more positive sporting opinions on regattas.<sup>1380</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century the monarch’s birthday was marked throughout the empire with public celebrations that included sport.<sup>1381</sup> In Limerick, however, the date was an irrelevance to most people – the royal birthday received no popular approbation, and the possibility of violence was ever

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<sup>1375</sup> LC 31 Mar 1852, 23 Aug 1861, 4 Aug 1863, 9 July 1864, 15 Aug 1865, 6 Oct 1866, 3 Aug 1867, 12 Dec 1882.

<sup>1376</sup> LC 9 Feb 1864, 17 Apr 1866. Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants*, 1994, 103-4.

<sup>1377</sup> LC 9 Feb 1864. Vaughan, W.E., *Landlords and Tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland*, (1994), 103-4. Condon, Janette, ‘The Patriotic Children’s Treat: Irish Nationalism and Children’s Culture at the Twilight of Empire’, in *Irish Studies Review*, 8:2 (Aug 2000), 167-78. Lowerson, John, & Myerscough, John, *Time to Spare in Victorian England*, (Harvester Press, London, 1978), 97-100.

<sup>1378</sup> Murphy, James H., *Abject Loyalty: Nationalism and Monarchy in Ireland during the Reign of Queen Victoria*, (Cork University Press, Cork, 2001). Kellet, Mark Alan, ‘The Power of Princely Patronage: Pigeon-Shooting in Victorian Britain’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 11:1, (Apr 1994), 63-85.

<sup>1379</sup> IT 5 Oct 1865.

<sup>1380</sup> LC 13 June 1865.

<sup>1381</sup> Bouchier, Nancy B., ‘The 24th of May is the Queen’s birthday’: Civic holidays and the rise of amateurism in nineteenth-century Canadian towns’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 10:2 (August 1993), 159-92. LC 25 May 1878.

present were loyalists of a mind to hold demonstrations in public venues. The weak response of the nominally titled Royal Munster Fusiliers to a call for cheers on the occasion of her golden jubilee in 1887 was complemented by civilian observers' calls for cheers for Parnell.<sup>1382</sup> This indifference, if not outright hostility, prompted one loyalist letter writer to bemoan the lack of any plans to celebrate the jubilee as was occurring 'in other cities.'<sup>1383</sup> Stephen O'Mara, the Mayor of Limerick said of the Queen in January 1886 that she treated Ireland 'with indifference'. He was a reasonably effective populist so this remark and the refusal of the Town Council to present an address to her son and daughter-in-law the year before indicates a pretty entrenched popular scepticism of loyalist claims for the value of the monarchy.<sup>1384</sup> Public tributes to the monarch, shorn of the spectacle, goodwill and diversion a grand sports event could provide, were a risky business in Limerick; even Limerick's few Orangemen could not risk a home town demonstration and often had to travel to Cork or Dublin to find a friendly atmosphere.<sup>1385</sup> One report in January 1886 suggested a form of 'closet' loyalism in Limerick, the politics that dare not speak its name.<sup>1386</sup>

The nineteenth century gentry and aristocracy embodied the state, at least until the 1860s. They formed a hub around which people could have been attracted to gather and express support for their definition of Irish identity with the possibility of reconciling the majority of people to the Union with Great Britain. The ascendancy, in some respects, formed a state without a nation and the decades between 1870 and 1900 coincided with the realisation by many in their number that the job was not worth the candle. Many gentry figures were more conspicuous by their sporting prowess than their political diligence in this period. An 1880s demonstration of the way in which sporting concerns grew like a vine around the withering

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<sup>1382</sup> *LC* 24 May 1887.

<sup>1383</sup> *LC* 7 June 1887.

<sup>1384</sup> *LC* April 1885, 23 Jan 1886.

<sup>1385</sup> *LC* 3 Apr 1886.

<sup>1386</sup> *LC* 23 Jan 1886.

trunk of the gentry's local authority control was that of planning meetings held by the County Tipperary hunt club: they were held in that county's Grand Jury room in Clonmel, illustrating the inter-connectedness of the county's political and sporting elite, but they were more assiduously attended than most regular Grand Jury business – even though the June date of the meetings placed them firmly out of the hunting season – so the business to be transacted was of a minor form of sporting urgency.<sup>1387</sup>

The progress of the nationalist project under Parnell contrasted with the difficulties experienced in conservative, loyalist and gentry circles. Coinciding with the suppressed admiration for the National League's vitality in 1883 were the exhortations to the League's various opponents to work harder in local government – implying a less than vigorous application by pro-Union forces.<sup>1388</sup> The sheer number of duties proper to the aristocracy and gentry left it stretched and exposed to the concentrated and vehement attacks of Home Rulers. Two of these occupations of the *hoi aristoi*, as designated by Veblen, religion and sport (the others were war and politics), both conspired to thwart their best efforts to ensure conservative representation on boards of guardians in 1880s Limerick. The coincidence of Punchestown races and the Church of Ireland Synod in Dublin acted to reduce the conservatives' canvass of electors to local Boards of Guardians, for instance.<sup>1389</sup> At the same time the attendance of those conservative guardians on the boards was deemed insufficient as may be inferred by a call for them to be more 'assiduous' in their attendance.<sup>1390</sup> The issue of attendance of *ex-officio* guardians (i.e. landlords etc) at meetings received even further attention of a localist kind with the observation that Clare *ex-officio* guardians were better at upholding this part of their duty than were their Limerick counterparts.<sup>1391</sup> A more pressing concern emerged when some nationalists hit on

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<sup>1387</sup> LC 8 June 1882, 9 June 1883.

<sup>1388</sup> LC 18, 23 Mar, 21 Oct, 30 Nov 1880, 14, 21 Aug 1883.

<sup>1389</sup> LC 3 Apr 1883.

<sup>1390</sup> LC 5 Apr 1883.

<sup>1391</sup> LC 7 Apr 1883.



the tactic of threatening to stop the gentry hunting if they persisted in their support for loyalist candidates for Boards of Guardians etc. One threat in 1885 posed a huge dilemma for embattled *ex-officio* guardians, i.e. to vote for their man or risk the possibility of not hunting County Limerick again – a threat the issuers were well capable of implementing.<sup>1392</sup>

The gentry was a conduit for imperial sporting values and the diffusion of imperial sports culture, but the emergence of organised sports coincided with a series of crises for the gentry that militated against its complete involvement in and control over sports organisation and development in Ireland. Sports became organised at the time the gentry began its long withdrawal from the key leadership role in Irish society. Roman Catholic Emancipation, the Famine, land law changes, disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, and the threat of Fenian violence were push factors distancing them from their traditional roles while sports, other leisure class occupations such as the church and army acted as pull factors drawing them away from those same roles.<sup>1393</sup>

The gentry did not, or were not allowed to, lead the process of sports organisation after 1884, but even before 1884 the middle class had begun to wrest the sporting infrastructure from aristocratic control. One indication of the gentry's abdication from their received role was the institution of the Red Coat Races in the last quarter of the century. The Red Coat Races, instituted in 1879, were the first point-to-point race meetings in the county and they marked another sporting secession by the gentry – a move away from the noisy, clamorous, unglamorous, undignified and more popular sporting events of the early and mid parts of the century and its replacement with a smaller, more exclusive, tidier set of races under

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<sup>1392</sup> LC 18 Apr 1885.

<sup>1393</sup> Hoppen, K. Theodore, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984). Vaughan, W.E., *Landlords and Tenants in Ireland, 1848-1904*, (Studies in Irish Economic and Social History, 2), (Dundalgon, Dundalk, 1994).

more strict gentry control than the town and city race meetings had become.<sup>1394</sup> The 1885 races' organisers even banned Aunt Sally stands to keep the tone right, while correspondence for the races had to be addressed to the Limerick Club.<sup>1395</sup> The reports of the Red Coat Races were of a much different character than the more rowdy Limerick Races and those reports invariably referred to the number of carriages present, that is to say, the extent to which the 'quality' patronised the events.<sup>1396</sup> In time even the Red Coat Races became a staple of the popular sporting diet: the 1885 edition was notable for the drop in the number of vehicles present i.e. wealthy patrons, but at their beginnings they were a gentry sporting redoubt.<sup>1397</sup> In 1880, illustrating the co-option thesis described earlier, the Red Coat Races were opened to farmers 'over whose land' the hunt club rode. By having the farmers inside their marquee, urinating out, they were guaranteed not to be outside the marquee and urinating in – a wise policy.<sup>1398</sup>

The traditionally solitary or elite group-specific sports of angling, shooting, hare coursing, sailing and the demesne and garden sports such as croquet, lawn tennis and cricket allowed the gentry to sate their sporting appetites within their own walls and checked a need to look further for sporting diversions. The gentry enjoyed a sporting 'comfort zone' in the last decades of the nineteenth century and it could, therefore, allow itself to cede control of and limit its involvement in the newer sporting thrills promised by the team, squad and crew sports most patronised by the middle class such as rugby union, rowing, hurling and Gaelic football.

Limerick's educational institutions played a great role in the promotion of organised sport with their efforts augmented by boys and young men at schools outside the region, at

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<sup>1394</sup> *LC* 12, 15, 17 Apr 1879

<sup>1395</sup> *LC* 7, 12, 21 Mar, 7 Apr 1885.

<sup>1396</sup> *LC* 26 Mar, 2, 7, 9, 16, 19, 30 Apr 1881.

<sup>1397</sup> *LC* 20 Apr 1882, 27 Mar 1883, 27 Mar, 15, 17 Apr 1884, 7, 12, 21 Mar, 7 Apr 1885.

<sup>1398</sup> *LC* 3, 10, 20 Apr 1880.

vacation time and in the summer, who brought home the sporting practices of their various schools and universities.<sup>1399</sup> Roman Catholic schools catering for the upper middle-class, particularly those run by orders like the Jesuits, were indistinguishable from their Protestant counterparts in developing a sports culture heavily weighted in favour of toryised sports.<sup>1400</sup> This tendency became exaggerated after the formation of the GAA when the clerical versus Fenian battle for domination of that body left a taint on the games inimical to the interests and aspirations of the increasingly confident, bourgeois middle class.<sup>1401</sup>

Local voluntary associations like the LPYMA were loyalist centres that supported a toryised sporting culture. When the LPYMA eventually incorporated sports clubs under the aegis of the society it chose cricket and lawn tennis as its first endeavour.<sup>1402</sup> Though the society was political, with a small p, it could not escape the partialities and sympathies of its sponsoring community, hence the success and popularity of an anti-Home Rule skit at one of its amateur theatrical shows in 1880.<sup>1403</sup> Protestant institutions catering for the highly networked minority denominations of the south of Ireland were especially important in the creation of a closely coordinated, cohesive sports infrastructure. Since most sports clubs were built upon the foundations of pre-existing voluntary associations, the extensive, inter-locking and extremely active set of Protestant voluntary associations was a fertile breeding ground for a great cohort of sports entrepreneurs, especially in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>1404</sup>

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<sup>1399</sup> *LC* 12, 16, 21, 26 May 1874, 4, 9 Sept 1880, 17, 26 May 1881.

<sup>1400</sup> *LC* 27 June 1871, 8 June 1872, 17 June, 23 Dec 1876, 6,8 Sept 1877, 11 May, 8, 15 Aug 1878, 14 June 1881, 16 May 1882. *Crescent College Review*, *Mungret Annual*.

<sup>1401</sup> Mandle, W.F., 'The I.R.B. and the beginnings of the Gaelic Athletic Association', in *Irish Historical Studies*, 20, no. 80 (September 1977), 418-38.

<sup>1402</sup> *LC* 18, 23, 28 June 1887.

<sup>1403</sup> *LC* 11 Mar 1880.

<sup>1404</sup> Maguire, Martin, 'The organisation and activism of Dublin's Protestant working class, 1883-1935', in *Irish Historical Studies*, XXIX:113 (May 1994), 65-87. Maguire, Martin, 'A Socio-Economic Analysis of the Dublin Protestant Working-Class, 1870-1926', in *Irish Economic and Social History*, XX, 1993, 35-61.

British sporting bodies had little role in the actual development of sports in Limerick, but their role in defining games, regulating and codifying rules and playing systems, and promulgating and modelling forms of best sporting practice was invaluable. Local clubs took as read the rules of the All-England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club (AELT&CC) and Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), and readily adopted the handicapping procedures for athletics devised in Great Britain. The Tenth South of Ireland Lawn Tennis tournament at the Limerick County Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club in 1886, it was announced, would be conducted under recently revised rules adopted by the AELT&CC and MCC.<sup>1405</sup> The early and wide issuing of the rules of rugby union in Ireland was particularly significant: by offering a codified version of a game that was popular in Munster, the rugby union rules became a pole around which footballing enthusiasts could coalesce. The Rathkeale Football Club, it was stated in late 1874, ‘subscribe to the Rugby Union Rules’ and looked forward to others adopting the code around the county. Had it been the competing association football variety the sporting history of the region might have been different. The Rathkeale club remained in existence long enough to inspire the formation of Limerick FC in late 1875.<sup>1406</sup> There was no consideration of the association football game. The decade ‘start’ that rugby union rules had on Gaelic football, for instance, was crucial; the game was bedded down quite securely, vitally, in the major towns of Limerick, Cork and Tipperary, before the GAA challenge emerged to challenge for footballing allegiances.

The conduits of British sporting culture to the region – the army, gentry, schools, voluntary bodies and British sporting institutions – acted with variable levels of success and effectiveness. The success of the overall effort relied not on one conduit alone, however, but on the actions of all and how each arm of sporting culture bolstered and supported the others. The impact of sporting imperial diffusion was enormous. Tipperary may have had a great hurling tradition, but in public debate and in terms of social value this was trumped by

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<sup>1405</sup> LC 26 June 1886.

<sup>1406</sup> LC 13 Oct, 28 Nov 1874, 5, 14, 19 Jan, 14 Oct, 13 Nov 1875, 25 Jan 1876.

the latest sporting fashions in Dublin and London. Combined with a neglect of local sporting traditions the selective ascription of moral, social and political worth to sports originating in England facilitated the process of ‘ludic diffusion’ by which sports and pastimes diffused from England to Ireland and other parts of the British Empire.<sup>1407</sup> County Tipperary developed a vibrant cricket culture in the third quarter of the nineteenth century in a notable success for this form of sports promotion, further exacerbating the neglect of local sporting traditions that was ongoing for half a century.<sup>1408</sup> Anglo–Irish sports culture expanded, not just in Tipperary, but countrywide, in the absence of an alternative sports culture or of a significant independent industrial working class, that meant toryised sport. As ‘microsoft’ is the early twenty–first century default computer software, ‘torysoft’ sports culture was the default organised sports culture of Limerick up to the 1880s.

The toryisation of Irish sport was not a unique phenomenon; in Scotland its existence has been termed Balmoralisation.<sup>1409</sup> Scottish rural sports in the nineteenth century were Balmoralised while Scottish urban sports, forced to adapt to the needs of an industrial working class, followed different paths and were commercialised and, in tory terms, vulgarised.<sup>1410</sup> The process of Balmoralisation is most evident in the progress and development of the Highland and Caledonian games movement, which, because they offered an assimilationist or integrationist sports model, may be contrasted with the

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<sup>1407</sup> Guttman, Allen, *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1994).

<sup>1408</sup> Siggins, Gerald, *Green Days: Cricket In Ireland 1792-2005*, (History Press, 2005).

<sup>1409</sup> Jarvie, Grant, ‘Highland gatherings, historical sociology and sport’, in Mangan, J.A., & Small, R.B., (eds.), *Sport, Culture, Society, International Historical and Sociological Perspectives; Proceedings of the VIII Commonwealth and International Conference on Sport, Physical Education, Dance, Recreation and Health*, (University Press, Cambridge, 1986), 68-75. Jarvie, Grant, ‘Highland Gatherings, Sport, and Social Class’, in *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 3:4 (Dec 1986), 344-55. Jarvie, Grant, ‘Balmorality, cultural production and the Highland Gatherings’, in *Scottish Journal of Physical Education*, vol.17, no.1 (April 1989), 9-11. Jarvie, Grant, ‘Culture, Social Development and the Scottish Highland Gatherings’, in McCrone, David; Kendrick, Stephen, and Straw, Pat, (eds.), *The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture and Social Change*, (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1989).

<sup>1410</sup> Bradley, Joseph M., ‘Football in Scotland: A history of political and ethnic identity’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12:1 (April 1995), 81-98. Finn, G.P.T., ‘Racism, religion and social prejudice: Irish Catholic clubs, soccer and Scottish society - I. The historical roots of prejudice’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 8:1 (May 1991), 72-95. Finn, G.P.T., ‘Racism, religion and social prejudice: Irish Catholic clubs, soccer and Scottish society – II. Social identities and conspiracy theories’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 8:3 (December 1991), 370-97.

secessionist or separatist models of sport embodied in the GAA or rugby league.

Caledonian games were even held in Lansdowne Road in 1884, illustrating the closeness of that model to the Irish tory sports movement; special clearance was even secured for the swords required by dancers.<sup>1411</sup> In Wales rugby union was co-opted to Great British national narratives and was almost instantaneously woven into the national myth of Wales by the middle class; this cultural coup allowed rugby union to develop and expand imperial sentiment and the ideal of Britishness, on the back of Welsh local and national feeling.<sup>1412</sup>

The tories, in Scotland, Wales and Ireland utilised sport and its rituals as a space to celebrate and promote Protestantism, the British connection and the monarch. In Limerick this was of considerable importance to the tory and loyalist sections of society because there were few political, social and cultural opportunities to do it outside a sporting context. Sport was, to tory cultural entrepreneurs, the only opportunity to reach, unmediated, a grand audience outside the narrow tory circles the organisers inhabited. The tory sports organisers had a mixed approach to the overt use of Unionist, monarchist and tory symbols. Archery did not seem to attract the full panoply of symbols to its events while they were largely absent from coursing. It is likely the homogeneity of the participants and spectators at those events made their utilisation superfluous, but the use of such iconography at larger, religiously and politically mixed sports events like the Limerick races or the hugely popular Limerick regatta, assumes a heightened significance.<sup>1413</sup> The Tory sports infrastructure was promoting the Union to a wider audience where it felt it could while assuming its relevance to its own community. If anything, with a timid, often closeted local loyalist party at the political level, the exploitation of loyalist iconography at sports and cultural events assumed an even greater importance to local loyalism than in other parts of the country where their symbols and traditions could be validated and respected at the public level.

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<sup>1411</sup> LC 3 June 1884.

<sup>1412</sup> Andrews, David L. 'Welsh indigenous! and British imperial? - Welsh rugby, culture and society 1890-1914', in *Journal of Sport History*, 18:3 (Winter 1991), 335-49.

<sup>1413</sup> LC 31 Aug 1871, 22 July 1884.

Some tory–sports efforts to reach out to the new sporting public included modest nods to Irish cultural distinctiveness. *Na Shuler* Cricket Club was the name of one elite Dublin cricket club that played games in Limerick and whose title made at least one concession to national feeling, but the designation, being a particularly inept bastardisation of Wanderers or Rovers, leaves open the possibility that its players merely liked the exoticism it bestowed upon them in the manner in which one English touring cricket squad was called *I Zingari* (like a troop of warriors from the high veldt).<sup>1414</sup> Debates on the possible role of cricket in the national life of Ireland were not uncommon and indicated a sense of the possibility of the game reaching out to a wider audience.<sup>1415</sup>

Organised sport in Limerick began in the ‘big house’ or under the patronage, administration and supervision of partisans of the ‘big house’. This left a remarkable tory character to the sports infrastructure of the period. Hunting, for instance, in its pre–organised format was a simple affair with landlords hosting friends and neighbours to hunts out on their estates.<sup>1416</sup> When this practice became too expensive the sport moved into its organised format with subscription packs taking ownership and leadership of the sport from single landlord control, but the cultural, social and political character of the sport remained untouched. The old and developing forms of hunt organisation and other tory–sports infrastructures were reliant on a section of society that was too small in numbers. In social and socio–economic terms this sporting class was unrepresentative of society at large. Politically, this group was out of sympathy with the concerns of the majority. The tory sports movement was, therefore, constrained and would, without enlarging its base, eventually hit a limit to its development.

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<sup>1414</sup> *I Zingari* – LC 29 Aug 1874, 7 Sept 1875, *Na Shulers* – LC 9, 14 Aug 1877, 6 Aug 1878, 30 July, 2, 4, 6 Aug 1881.

<sup>1415</sup> *ISF* 14 May 1870.

<sup>1416</sup> LC 15 Feb, 25 Aug, 5 Sept 1868, 22 July 1871, 7, 9 Nov 1872, 9, 14 Apr, 19, 24 Dec 1874, 26 Aug 1875, 21 Dec 1876, 9 Jan 1877.

Tory Limerick was not big enough on its own to sustain a vibrant sporting infrastructure capable of an independent existence, bearing comparison to, or capable of competing with similar size districts and cities in Ireland. Tory sports entrepreneurs had a choice to make. They could rationalise or go for growth. Rationalising tory sport meant limiting or even reducing the range and number of sporting options under distinct tory control and the growth option, placing sport ahead of social, class, political or religious concerns, was to involve a wider stratum of the Limerick public in its sports affairs, with the inevitable weakening, over time, of its tory blue to a modest shade of aquamarine. The social ‘soil’ in which sports develops imparts a colour to the resultant sports infrastructure, much as acidic or alkaline soils impart shades of red or blue to any hydrangea growing from it. Sporting toryism needed frequent cohorts of new recruits to renew the infrastructure over which the tories dominated. As the 1870s progressed, however, the opposite occurred and sportspeople and administrators chose a more liberal sporting identity – exposing the social, cultural and political limits of the tory sports infrastructure in Limerick.

The *Limerick Chronicle* was a vital institution that supported tory conceptions of a proper sports infrastructure while in the political realm nationalism exercised that newspaper as few other political questions did. The paper defended landlord interests throughout the early 1880s agitations and orchestrated a counter–campaign outlining, in particular, instances of landlord magnanimity. It held a hard–line in the debates on political violence and extolled local nobles’ political efforts as much as it excoriated Parnell, whom it labelled a demagogue who unleashed a Frankenstein (nationalism) on the country.<sup>1417</sup> Its most biting, most cutting, edge was preserved for local nationalists. The proximity of the paper to local actors in the national drama became heated and almost vicious, though there was humour and some attempts to ridicule nationalists. A Limerick delegation to London in

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<sup>1417</sup> Author’s undergraduate thesis, *The Response of Loyalism in Limerick to the New Departure: 1880-86*, Mary Immaculate College at University of Limerick, 1996. Tyranny of self–imposed democracy, LC 8 July 1885.



1884, led by nationalists, was compared to a party of Maori (betraying a colonial superiority complex), while it more pointedly caricatured Stephen O'Mara as a Munchausen figure.<sup>1418</sup>

While the question of the nation and its definition was hotly disputed in the political columns of the paper the same could not be said of sports.<sup>1419</sup> In the entire decade of the 1870s there were only three references in the *Limerick Chronicle* to hurling, and of these three none linked hurling with national sentiment or any conception of Irish identity – sport of British origins mattered and indigenous sports did not.<sup>1420</sup>

The tories' sports predicament, to hold on and consolidate the sports they developed, held the danger of stagnation and ossification, while the path to growth would lead to a dilution of true tory sport principles. In the middle, trying to triangulate between these two positions was a group of young men with feet in both the tory sport camp and in the popular culture realm of the Limerick region. Many of these men were, like W.L. Stokes and C.H. Gubbins, Irish Protestant Home Rule Association men who embodied a British cultural sensibility combined with Home Rule ambitions.<sup>1421</sup> In the blue-versus-green sporting and general political conflicts of the late century these men may be categorised as various shades of turquoise. Their increasing importance in and contribution to local sports development cannot be underestimated. They oversaw a realignment of local sports organisations and administered a change in direction of sports policies as well as

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<sup>1418</sup> LC 19 July 1884, 18 May, 1 June 1886.

<sup>1419</sup> The significance of sport to Irish-Irish national identity remained unstated until the 1880s, but the significances of sport were not scrutinised by contemporary British commentators or intellectuals either. Allison describes as one of history's great jokes that the great sages of late nineteenth century Britain virtually ignored "the most widespread, and almost certainly the most lasting, creation of Victorian England" i.e. organised sport and its wider cultural significances. Allison, Lincoln, 'Batsman and Bowler: The Key Relation of Victorian England', in *JSH*, vol.7, no.2 (Summer 1980), 5-20.

<sup>1420</sup> LC 22, 24 June 1871, 27 Dec 1877.

<sup>1421</sup> LC 16, 21 Apr, 7 May 1887. Loughlin, James, 'The Irish Protestant Home Rule Association and nationalist politics, 1886-93', in *Irish Historical Studies*, XXIV:95 (May 1985), 341-60.

reconciling both tory Limerick to an influx of non-tory elements and non-tory Limerick to the toryness of many of the sports on offer at the time.

Finally and paradoxically, the tory sports infrastructure was responsible for giving an impetus, through elite sports contacts with Great Britain and North America, to a sporting form of light-touch nationalism. The Barrington brothers of Glenstal Castle, Co. Limerick were local aquatic heroes and their exploits were supplemented before the century was out by two equally aristocratic sailors, Lt. Henn of Kildysart and the fourth Earl of Dunraven, both of whom competed in the premier, pre-modern Olympic, international sporting event, the America's Cup, in 1886, 1893 and 1895.<sup>1422</sup> The shooting matches between Ireland and the United States in the 1870s, in particular, fostered a notion of the cultural separateness of Britain and Ireland. In the same decade a Great British shooting team was unable to attract any Scottish gunmen, proving that sportsmen in that country preferred cleaving to a national team and flag rather than the supra-national Great British standard.<sup>1423</sup> Master McGrath was a dog, whose owner could not be said to possess any separatist tendencies, but the dog had another existence in song and as symbol of those same distinctive tendencies.<sup>1424</sup> Again, in the 1870s, the creation of national rugby union teams within the supposedly singular Great British state was also a cultural hostage to fortune.

As the century progressed, however, the tory sports infrastructure of the first three quarters of the nineteenth century became less satisfactory to a growing number of sports enthusiasts. Bourgeois codes of respectability and decorum clashed, if only slightly, with the excessive brutality of field sports while the exclusivity and narrow social base of the

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<sup>1422</sup> *LC* 8 June, 1, 8 Aug, 19 Sept, 7, 10 Oct 1876, 6, 9 Jan 1877, 26 June 1886. Bricknell, Louise G., 'Fickle winds and treacherous feelings: Anglo-American relations and the early challenges for the America's Cup', in *Sporting Traditions*, 9:2 (May 1993), 16-30. Dunraven, 4th Earl of, *Past Times and Pastimes*, (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1922).

<sup>1423</sup> *LC* 29 Sept, 28 Nov 1874, 1, 3 July 1875, 12 Feb, 15 Apr, 10 Aug 1876, 29 June 1878, 1 July 1880.

<sup>1424</sup> *LC* 19 Jan 1882. Magee, J., 'The Legacy of Master McGrath: Coursing and Sporting Heroes in Ireland', *Sport in History*, 25:1 (2005), 77-97.

organised sports infrastructure created a self-imposed set of limits on sport. The grand political struggles of the late 1870s and early 1880s added external political spice to this self-contained sporting creation and some inter-generational tensions also give evidence of a growing dissatisfaction with contemporary sporting fare.

Bourgeois incursions into the sports-world became more pronounced as the 1870s wore on. The sports practices of the elite few were increasingly leavened by middle-class infiltration and as the practices of the masses were accorded respectability by the patronage of the same emboldened middle-class. This process of *embourgeoisement* was not without its obstacles, however. The advent of the Gaelic Athletic Association was the signal for a serious conflict over stewardship of this new engine of Ireland's sports culture that was finally resolved not in favour of the more extreme of Fenian elements but in favour of middle-class Roman Catholic and Home Rule Ireland.<sup>1425</sup> The inter-generational struggles hinted at in the 1870s also became a feature of the 1880s sports infrastructures.<sup>1426</sup> The Fenian attempt to gain control of the levers of GAA power were countered and essentially defeated, but their attempts to insinuate themselves into the administrative superstructure of the organisation was only one aspect of a general attempt by a new generation to assume control of sport in Ireland.

The newer generation was not offering a radical departure from the practice of its predecessor, but it was more conscious of developing sports to match the circumstances the younger generation faced. In political and cultural terms the late 1870s and early 1880s was not a period to match the mid-century decades leading to a change in the acidity/alkalinity of the sports 'soil'. Limerick sports' 1874-1884 generation had a brace of groups seeking

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<sup>1425</sup> Mandle, W.F., *The Gaelic Athletic Association and Irish Nationalist Politics 1884-1924*, (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1987).

<sup>1426</sup> LC 16 Oct 1886.

to create a sports infrastructure in a shiny new colour and livery.<sup>1427</sup> The tory sports model developed in a pre–Land League, pre–Home Rule and pre–Fenian age and had not the capacity to accommodate the changes these movements wrought in the culture and politics of the city and country. A newer cadre of loyalist sports entrepreneurs was emerging with the aim of triangulating between an elite, organised sports structure and a popular, informal sports tradition. The second group – of a deeper green nationalist hue and what may be called the *ochtóceatharnaigh* – sought to push this liberalisation policy still further and this group gathered around the banner of the GAA in 1884.

In the 1870s some sporting tories remained happier with the narrow, simple, old system and even began to expand this infrastructure. The institution of Red Coat Races in 1879 was an elite secession from the hurly burly of the popular town and country races framework.<sup>1428</sup> Though these were smaller affairs than the Limerick races, for instance, they were more exclusive, easier to organise, less expensive, far less chaotic and they provided a setting much more conducive to the cultural, political and social needs of the organisers, participants and spectators than the bigger, brasher Donnybrooks many grand sports events had become: the 1881 edition of the races had no bookmakers and was a grand social affair to contrast with the unruly Limerick Races.<sup>1429</sup>

Events like the Limerick races and the Limerick regatta became victims of their success, but in drawing such immense crowds they were forced to accommodate the demands of those crowds – that meant a more neutral atmosphere than tory sports practices allowed for.

In the mid-1870s the Limerick Boat Club’s stranglehold on the Limerick regatta was

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<sup>1427</sup> 1874 was the year in which the first rugby union football club was formed in Limerick. This component of Limerick’s sports infrastructure became the most liberally organised of local sports. 1884 was the year of the formation of the GAA, a body which gave a home to those with a more Irish nationalist and Irish cultural conception of sports organisation and practice.

<sup>1428</sup> LC 12, 15, 17 Apr 1879, 20 Apr 1880, 14, 17 Apr 1883.

<sup>1429</sup> LC 26 Mar, 2, 7, 9, 16, 19, 30 Apr 1881.

broken by a combination of the Shannon Rowing Club and the Town Council and together those agencies altered the political and cultural complexion of the event.<sup>1430</sup>

In the 1870s a less doctrinaire, more flexible and ambitious nucleus of sports entrepreneurs in the loyalist community possessed a clear perspective on the lie of political land. Their response was to adapt to the circumstances and to aim to influence the direction and character of the new additions to the sports infrastructure, just as the Home Rule movement sought to do in the political realm. Many of these young Protestant men were, if not liberal, less conservative than their older co-religionists. They had education, energy, income and a set of political grievances not dissimilar to those of their Roman Catholic contemporaries: they were, in some respects, outside the power loop. Most would not make it into the serious reaches of political influence in an unreformed Irish political system, yet many would be also excluded from making a great contribution to a completely reformed Union i.e a Home Rule Ireland with its Roman Catholic majority population. Many young Protestant men of energy and ability in Limerick chose a less party political, but equally significant culturally political role, that of sports entrepreneurs and agents of a shared Protestant and Roman Catholic culture. Men like W.L. Stokes, Charles H. Gubbins and Alexander Shaw were young (or youthful), Protestant, Home Rulers. They were sporting, urban (it is not known how urbane), successful in business and culture and clearly identifiable as local patriots.<sup>1431</sup> The *Chronicle* even noted the enthusiastic welcome shown by this group to Michael Davitt when he visited Limerick in 1887.<sup>1432</sup>

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<sup>1430</sup> *LC* 24, 26, 28 Mar, 2, 4, 9, 30 Apr, 21 May, 30 June, 9, 11, 14, 16, 18, 25 July, 4 Aug 1874, 4, 9, 20 June 1885. Hayes, Thomas, ‘‘God Save the Green, God Save the Queen, and the usual loyal toasts’’: sporting and dining for Ireland and/or the queen’ in Gray, Peter, (ed.), *Victoria’s Ireland? Irishness and Britishness, 1837 – 1901*, (Four Courts, Dublin, 2004), 81–87.

<sup>1431</sup> Vice-president LPYMA, presentation for contribution to rugby union, formed a cross-country club, *LC* 19 Sept 1882, 25 Feb 1886, 18 Oct 1887.

<sup>1432</sup> *LC* 17 Nov 1887. The tone suggests the *Chronicle* almost viewed them as nationalist ‘wannabes’ akin to early twenty-first century popular scepticism of white-skinned rap artists.

Their position in the world of local business was crucial: so much of Limerick's economy was based on food processing that a considerable class of businessman existed between the food companies and the farming class. Stokes was a butter-merchant with numerous contacts among that class of businessman, including among the pig-buyers, an important cadre of local dealers that was attracted by Stokes to associate in rugby union. Stokes thus occupied a key position between two economic, two social and two political worlds.<sup>1433</sup> His colleague in the LPYMA, and an equally dedicated athletics supremo, C. H. Gubbins was another man whose 'wonderful organising powers' propelled the LAABC and LPYMA to greater sporting participation and achievement, while also finding time to act as honorary secretary to the Limerick Boat Club's Christy's Minstrels group.<sup>1434</sup> Stokes's and Gubbins's colleague and active sports administrator in the 1880s was Alexander Shaw an important local bacon-merchant. Together all three held the key sporting administration posts in Limerick city in 1884. Stokes acted as honorary treasurer to the Limerick Amateur Athletic Club, while Gubbins acted as honorary secretary, Shaw was a vice-president. Stokes combined his duties with the secretary-ship of the Masonic Club in the Crescent and an office in Lodge number seventy-three of that institution. Shaw acted as president to Limerick FC, with Stokes as both Captain and secretary.<sup>1435</sup> Oh secretary, my secretary has not the Whitmanesque appeal of captain, my captain, but the interest in and energies expended by these men was a significant contribution to Limerick's sporting and political life.

Outside Limerick the new cricket entrepreneurs of the 1870s and 1880s eschewed the narrow definition of the game of their sporting forebears and began to conduct a form of sporting proselytism. This activity by sporting missionaries was a sign of their confidence in their abilities and faith in the appeal of the game to a wider audience. John Lawrence, a

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<sup>1433</sup> LC 19, 21 Apr 1910 – Stokes's death and funeral reports.

<sup>1434</sup> LC 14 Aug 1883, 22 July 1884, 13 June 1885, 22 Jan, 9 Aug 1887.

<sup>1435</sup> *Bassett's Directory of County Limerick*, 1884.

Dublin sports outfitter, promoter and sports literature publisher believed in ‘the class blind’ nature of the game and extolled the pacification possibilities of widespread cricket practice during the Land War. Such characters, enthused and excited by their games and pastimes and shorn of the distinction-bound practices of their predecessors, were making a big pitch for a new audience and aimed to create a social neutral-zone which would promote inter-class, cross-party understanding and harmony. Tom Hunt’s study of Westmeath cricket demonstrates the success of this drive in that county, but in Limerick cricketing missionary activity was not even attempted. There the most successful sporting mission was in rugby union.<sup>1436</sup>

Rugby union in Limerick is the clearest example of the success of the sporting liberalisation policy followed by a new generation of sports entrepreneur. There was little sense at the start of rugby union that it was purely an import, rather there was a sense that it was a continuation or development of native football codes marshalled under the banner of a metropolitan-defined set of laws and values. The first club in Limerick, excepting the ephemeral Rathkeale FC, was Limerick FC (1875) and this club exhibited the character of a toryised sports institution for a number of years after its formation.<sup>1437</sup> The small supply of opponents within easy reach of the city and a certain lack of vigour were instrumental in shunting the club into a liberalisation policy: instead of reaching out geographically to similar status clubs in Munster and further afield the club reached out locally and down the social scale, but not too far, to mine a wide vein of Limerick’s business and strong farmer class.<sup>1438</sup>

Men like Stokes were social, cultural, economic and political entrepreneurs. As agents negotiating a sporting Anglo-Irish agreement, they were fortunate to have confederates on

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<sup>1436</sup> Hunt, Tom, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath*, (Cork University Press, Cork, 2007).

<sup>1437</sup> LC 14 Oct, 13 Nov 1875, 25 Jan, 29 Feb, 7, 30 Mar, 23 Sept, 31 Oct, 25 Nov, 5, 9, 12 Dec 1876.

<sup>1438</sup> LC 9 Sept 1882, 20 Feb, 2, 4, 6, 11, 13, 20, 23 Oct 1883.

the Roman Catholic Home Rule side of Limerick politics. Their Roman Catholic fellows designed rival clubs like Garryowen FC and Shannon RC that conformed in every respect to the tenets of clubbability redolent of the sporting revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century. The formation of a second athletics club in Limerick city in October 1887 reveals Stokes abilities to move where he wanted in Limerick sport. Just as he assisted the formation of Garryowen FC while a member of Limerick FC, he now joined a group of Garryowen regulars to form an athletics club to cater to the Roman Catholic, Home Rule part of Limerick – he was joined by, among others, W. Prendergast and J. Macaulay, stalwarts of Garryowen FC.<sup>1439</sup>

The sponsoring communities and institutions of Limerick's first Home Rule Roman Catholic sports clubs could not countenance the lack of deference and the radicalism of some of the later GAA movement. They selected politically neutral names, Shannon, Kincora, Star, Emerald, Garryowen and Limerick – geographically based names uncontroversial even to local Tories.<sup>1440</sup> When news reached the city of the deaths of local men in 'the trenches' of Egypt during General Gordon's campaigns there the *Chronicle* labelled the dead 'Garryowen boys' – using the locale as a synonym for the entire city.<sup>1441</sup> The gentle nationalism – what Murphy labels 'abject loyalty' – that this represented pointed to a tendency to accommodate the other local clubs that took their model from metropolitan and Great British models.<sup>1442</sup>

Because it was also a political project, the liberalisation of sports organisation led by more pragmatic loyalists, committed Home Rulers and their confederates in Roman Catholic Home Rule Limerick, led to a more serious and earnest sports infrastructure, the doom of

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<sup>1439</sup> Limerick Harriers, *LC* 18 Oct 1887.

<sup>1440</sup> *LC* 22 May 1877, 23 Sept 1884, 22 Dec 1885, 5, 19, 24, 29 Mar 1887, 25 Mar, 3, 5, 8 Apr 1890.

<sup>1441</sup> *LC* 16 Sept 1882. This also makes James Joyce's caricature in *Ulysses* of the Citizen's dog, whom he named Garryowen, a little inaccurate, given his intention to mock the Citizen's nationalism.

<sup>1442</sup> Murphy, James H., *Abject Loyalty: Nationalism and Monarchy in Ireland during the Reign of Queen Victoria*, (Cork University Press, Cork, 2001).



any serious bourgeois enterprise. Whereas it could be said that most tory sport evinced a Corinthian ideal, this new liberal sport enterprise appeared more Spartan. Limerick's new sporting idealists jettisoned much of the fun of earlier realists and replaced humour with earnest endeavour – a tonal change in the sports infrastructure of the period that was much more conducive to the political needs of the times.

Many tory sports such as hunting, cricket and shooting had ambiguous outcomes and results were not especially important. Now, these were superseded by middle class sports like rugby union, athletics, rowing, tennis and cycling that offered more definitive sporting outcomes, competitions, trophies and other tangible honours.<sup>1443</sup> The Limerick Boat Club, for instance, got involved in a controversy with the Dublin University Boat Club in late 1883 when the Limerick rowers refused to return a challenge cup arguing that as it had not been raced for in that year they ought to keep it until the 1884 regatta as they won it in 1882.<sup>1444</sup> Such seriousness of purpose fitted the nationalist zeitgeist just as well as it suited the gentry's rowing representatives.

Two tendencies existed in Limerick's organised sport infrastructure in the early 1880s; the tories still held sway over a large part of sport culture while a growing liberal element sought a sporting accommodation with the majority or popular tradition parallel to the political movement towards home rule. The choices for those outside official organised sport were to integrate with the existing structure followed by a process of negotiation between the tory and liberal options available or to secede and form an entirely new sporting project. Continuity with the existing structures, both the change resistant tory variety and the liberalising model offered by Stokes and others, was the option taken by

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<sup>1443</sup> *LC* 24 Aug, 5 Sept 1872, 16 June 1874, 19, 26 Aug, 2, 14 Sept 1876, 2, 8 Aug 1877.

<sup>1444</sup> *LC* 30 Oct 1883.

most new sportsmen and sports bodies. Most people simply accepted an accommodation with the *status quo*.<sup>1445</sup>

The secession approach, however, became more visible in the early 1880s.<sup>1446</sup> An 1884 community sports meeting *sans* gentry input was organised in Rathkeale by the local branch of the National League sports and to emphasise the political nature of the event it was held in a boycotted field.<sup>1447</sup> The stewards of a horse race meeting in the same town and in the same month wore green rosettes in sympathy with John Daly then detained, tried and subsequently convicted on dynamite charges in London.<sup>1448</sup>

The expression of nationalist political views and allegiances through the medium of sport has an early provenance in the region. A boat crewed by the Strand watermen was beaten in a regatta in Limerick in 1865. The watermen's participation was unexceptional, but for the fact that the boat was named 'Fenian' and the *Chronicle* took particular relish in their defeat.<sup>1449</sup> The fishermen of the Abbey and Shannon rivers appear to have had some IRB sympathies, another workingmen's boat labelled 'Fenian Girl' participated in the Clarecastle sports a decade later, in 1876.<sup>1450</sup>

The modest deviation in sporting organisation, rituals and political attachments that emerged in the late 1870s and early 1880s opened the gap between tory, liberal and

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<sup>1445</sup> Nenagh Cricket Club members didn't see themselves as lacking Irishness (in part because definitions of nationality had not yet fully incorporated a sporting element), but instead emphasised the respectability of their body, the value of the services they provided and the representative function they provided to the town, *NG passim*.

<sup>1446</sup> The reaction to the attachment of overt tory significance to sports events came earlier; in one instance Fenians in Cork encouraged race-goers not to attend a gentry sponsored race meeting with the exhortation 'God Save the Green!' This cultural call to nationalist arms was enlivened by a Marxist-lite exhortation to the people of Cork not to accept the leadership of 'those fat gutted fellows', *LC* 17 Apr 1866.

<sup>1447</sup> *LC* 30 Oct 1884.

<sup>1448</sup> *LC* 31 May, 2 Aug, 4, 7 Oct 1884.

<sup>1449</sup> *LC* 24, 26 Aug 1865.

<sup>1450</sup> *IT* 16 Sept 1876.

secessionist structures and later organisations would emphasise the differences until a distinct set of competing projects, Anglo versus Gaelic, was clear.<sup>1451</sup>

The commonalities between the tory, liberal and nascent Gaelic sports infrastructures were greater than the secessionists conceded. The Irish sports movements took nominally British sports and played them at that game while adapting it to local needs e.g. Shannon Rugby Football Club's adoption of a motto in Irish and of a decidedly Catholic hue – *Fé coimirce Muire*.<sup>1452</sup> Though the GAA was a rival to the tory and liberal models it could not escape the template laid down in Great Britain for the proper practice of sport. As Mandle points out, even this movement imitated the values and methods of those British customs they wished to rival and to replace.<sup>1453</sup> This was a process akin to the rivalry between left totalitarian regimes such as communism which developed in a like pattern to the right totalitarian regimes of fascism despite the claims of each to be different and/or superior.

The GAA was, in responding to and opposing the diffusion of British sports practices and codes, recognising the power of those Great British cultural imports. The Irish gentry was, however, withdrawing from and being expelled from its traditional leadership role so the likelihood of a gentry-led Balmoralised sports structure emerging was more remote than was the case in Scotland. It seems more likely that young men with leisure time simply sought out the existing organised sports codes and without an organised Gaelic sports alternative adopted the sports with a British character and provenance. Facing Hamlet's dilemma, the GAA opted to take arms against a sea of sporting invasions with the hope that 'by opposing' it could 'end them.'<sup>1454</sup>

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<sup>1451</sup> LC 8 Nov 1884, 24 Feb 1885.

<sup>1452</sup> Cronin, Mike, 'Fighting for Ireland, Playing for England? The Nationalist History of the Gaelic Athletic Association and the English Influence on Irish Sport', in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 15:3 (December 1998), 36-56.

<sup>1453</sup> Mandle, W.F., 'The Gaelic Athletic Association and Popular Culture', in MacDonagh, O., Mandle, W.F., and Travers, P., (eds.), *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750-1950*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1983), pp. 104-121.

<sup>1454</sup> Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, Act 3 Scene 1, lines 59-60.

The GAA was an organisation like no other sporting body in Ireland or Great Britain. It provided an umbrella for the development of many sports whereas British bodies catered for one sport only.<sup>1455</sup> In the GAA system culture and politics were explicitly linked and national patrons from the Roman Catholic Church and political and radical separatist movements had counterparts in parish clubs that provided for the local representatives of these bodies to assume similar positions. The GAA's aims were not purely sporting, but cultural, social, political and linguistic. This plethora of objectives led to a lack of focus and an excessively large agenda to satisfy, but it fits the pattern of voluntary associations emerging to satisfy various social needs.

The decision to limit the number of GAA clubs to one per parish is interesting, while it seems to elevate local feeling to primacy in the sport, it also, intentionally or not, settled the ownership of the game in favour of the middle class and its politics, by marginalising Fenians within the management of the sport while retaining their participation in the game. This was further evidence of the *embourgeoisement* of the games it sought to govern in Ireland.

In an eighteenth century context, Elliott's views on United Irishmen camaraderie shows how an attachment to a political ideal can be encouraged through the sense of companionship and brotherhood engendered in earnest political movements.<sup>1456</sup> Comerford also places great significance on the appeal of Fenianism through the vehicles of pastime, sports, recreation and drinking.<sup>1457</sup> For Elliott and Comerford camaraderie and 'knocking

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<sup>1455</sup> Hayes, Thomas, entries in *The Encyclopedia of Traditional British Rural Sports*, Collins, Tony, Martin, John, and Vamplew, Wray, (eds.), (Routledge, London, 2005).

<sup>1456</sup> Elliott Marianne, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence*, (Yale University Press, London, 1989).

<sup>1457</sup> Comerford, R.V., 'Patriotism as pastime: the appeal of fenianism in the mid-1860s', in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol.XXII, no.87, March 1981, 239-50. Comerford, R.V., 'Comprehending the Fenians', *Saothar*, 17 (1992), 52-6. Comerford, R.V., *The Fenians in context: Irish Politics and Society, 1848-82*, (Wolfhound, Dublin, 1998).

about' were important sidelines to the central political activities of these groups. Most historical discussion of the meaning of the initials Irish Republican Brotherhood, however, focuses on the letter R – arguing the relative value of republicanism or revolutionary tendencies among the membership. The focus on the letter B has been less forensically treated and a start has been made on addressing it in the work of McDevitt and Joyce.<sup>1458</sup>

In a post-script to the sport history of Limerick in this period an architectural expression of the rivalry between tory sport and Irish sport may be observed in the construction, in 1903, of the SRC clubhouse on the Shannon River. Located directly across the bridge from the Limerick Boat Club, the SRC rowing palace was a conscious and conspicuous reminder to the LBC across the way that a new faction now held sway in the city. It was equally a reminder that the County Club (for the gentry of Limerick) was not the only bastion of power, respectability and prestige in the city. In a sense, the dependable, strong, Roman Catholic, Home Rule and prosperous section of Limerick announced itself in the ascendant.

The tory sport infrastructure experienced the liberalisation of much of its set-up and the opposition of a Gaelic sports movement, but it was not immediately dealt knockout blows by either challenger. It is interesting how well tory sports, particularly hunting, adapted to the new economic and political conditions in Ireland after the transfer, first, of land by the land acts, and second, of political power after the Government of Ireland Act (1920) and the Articles Of Agreement (1921). The case of coursing from the turn of the twentieth century is intriguing: did the gentry co-opt the plebeians or, as seems more likely, was it a *vice versa* process?<sup>1459</sup> Meanwhile, the tory athletics community only organised on a national basis following the formation of the GAA. The tory response, in organising the

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<sup>1458</sup> Joyce, Toby, 'Ireland's trained and marshalled manhood': the Fenians in the mid-1860s', in Kelleher, Margaret & Murphy, James H., (eds.), *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres*, (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1997). McDevitt, Patrick F., 'Muscular Catholicism: Nationalism, Masculinity and Gaelic Team Sports, 1884-1916', in *Gender and History*, 9:2 (Aug.1997), 262-84.

<sup>1459</sup> Daniel, Laurent, 'Hare Coursing: An Irish National (British) Sport', paper given at 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of British Society of Sports History, St. Martin's College, Lancaster, April 2001.

IAAA, transformed an ad hoc system into a formalised national body and was a tacit recognition that Ireland was the polity in which their efforts and programme made sense and could succeed.<sup>1460</sup> This was a sporting counter-insurgency campaign against the GAA, a movement that had achieved a great purchase on the athletics community in a short space of time.

The process of informal negotiation between the hunting and land league fraternities in the 1880s points to a kind of choreographed ritualised conflict between them and illustrates a pragmatic approach to developments in the background of sports organisation and development. Whether John Gubbins gave £10 to the National League in 1885 as a sign of good faith or to buy the League off is not clear, but whatever the true reason the recognition of the League as a player in the game of land politics alloyed pragmatism with respect for one's opponents.<sup>1461</sup> In bargaining, the hunters and the League were showing goodwill and accepting that the conflict would not be to the death. Both organisations; one sporting and one political found it easier to 'muddle through' and maintain some sense of civility and face. Buying-off and co-opting opposition requires an opposition willing to be bought; sporting conflicts afforded both sides in the land war a space to achieve negotiated deals short of total victory for either side, but sufficient to satisfy the honour of both positions. This use of sport to acknowledge and validate the honour of both positions, rather than inflaming tensions, helped to defuse those tensions and is evidence at least of the politically palliative effects of sport in dramatic times. Sport could unite as well as divide, even in the 1880s.

The issues that dominated local politics in Limerick in the second half of the nineteenth century were those of the economy, infrastructure, governance, security, health and education. It is not possible to find a western liberal democracy where these are not the

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<sup>1460</sup> LC 24 Feb, 26 Nov, 10 Dec 1885, 17 June 1886, 21 Apr 1887.

<sup>1461</sup> LC 24 Sept 1885.

eternal issues of contemplation and contestation by the political classes. Limerick's economy was built on the trading of agricultural outputs; the questions of the city's water supply, roads, bridges, ports and railways remained under constant scrutiny; the inefficiency of the borough councils, boards of guardians and other local authorities as well as the lack of a national parliament were hotly disputed issues and part of increasingly fractious debates about Ireland ought to be governed. A Christy's Minstrels show in Limerick in 1883 gave a true indication of the topics in current affairs that resonated in the minds of the patrons of the Limerick Boat Club. A review of the show, that ran for two nights and raised the greatest amount for Barrington's hospital for many years noted that; 'The local hits at the corporation, the Limerick gas, the Limerick water question, and the 'stump speech' by 'Bones' kept the audience in complete good humour and created the most side-splitting laughter.'<sup>1462</sup> For all the power of national and international issues, local affairs possessed the highest recognition factors and generated most heat in the politics of the street and the politics of the debating chamber.

Limerick's nationalists were those partisans most capable of most often bringing the new democracy to their viewpoint. Limerick Town Council politics in this era was dominated by local nationalist ambitions to pare away the powers of the Tories, their supporters and their institutions. One aggrieved loyalist objected to an 1876 corporation grant of £130 to a Roman Catholic school while nothing was offered to a similar Protestant industrial school.<sup>1463</sup> As the nationalists assumed more control over local affairs and as they grew more bold they sought more input into local non-statutory institutions such as Barrington's hospital, which became a particular focus of nationalist ire and loyalist defensiveness.<sup>1464</sup>

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<sup>1462</sup> *LC* 22, 24, 31 Mar, 3 Apr 1883.

<sup>1463</sup> *LC* 22 June 1876.

<sup>1464</sup> *LC* 6 June 1874, 1, 6, 8 Feb, 1, 11, 13 Mar 1879, 3 Feb 1883

The Council claimed that as the hospital received local tax money they were guarding the interests of taxpayers and the public generally.<sup>1465</sup>

Protestant Limerick saw the hospital as a creation of their philanthropy and diligence over half a century and also felt that the tax money expended supporting the hospital was in fact created by many Protestant businesses. Loyalists felt the Council was taxing them and siphoning the money off to other projects. Up to the 1870s Loyalist Limerick was of sufficient force on the Council to ensure that its key projects were guarded, but the boldness of this new approach by nationalists threatened a key institution of loyalist Limerick. In a test of strength in 1885 the Council pulled a £300 grant to the hospital and the response of its supporters was an interesting mix of politics, sport, militarism, localism and cash.<sup>1466</sup> An athletics tournament was planned to raise money to cover the hospital's new shortfall. The driving force behind this tournament was the local military garrison and though £225 was raised to partly offset the loss of Council money the pro-loyalist case was undermined in three ways. First, the army was not a local institution and its intrusion on a local matter was seen as interfering in local affairs, an unwise move in a town where the army was extremely unpopular. Secondly, by raising three quarters of the deficit from a sporting and social event the message sent out was that this section of society could be bled further. Thirdly and most importantly, the anti-Council faction driving this event and fighting such a nakedly political rear-guard action against the Council was presented as being bloody-minded about ostensibly minor interference from the Council.

In simple terms, Barrington's supporters paid for and ran the hospital for fifty years relatively unimpeded, but their independence was threatened following a complete nationalist takeover of the Council and its annual grant to the hospital now became a local

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<sup>1465</sup> There is a lot of merit to their claims, the council withdrew a \$400 to the hospital in the early 1870s, before the re-formation of the council as an advanced home rule and nationalist vehicle, *LC* 10 Dec 1872.

<sup>1466</sup> *LC* 13 Jan 1884, 3 Feb, 2 May, 2 June, 2, 18, 21 July, 4 Aug 1885.



political football. On the occasion of a grant from a charity event by the Limerick Boat Club to Barrington's, accusations of sectarianism by the Council were aired.<sup>1467</sup>

Sectarianism was not the preserve of the Council; the *Chronicle* demonstrated a remarkable lack of grace towards Limerick Protestant Nationalist M.P. William Abraham – after whom the Rathkeale Gaelic Football team was called, and sneered at his denomination.<sup>1468</sup>

The use of sport as a fundraising mechanism by the hospital's partisans was a significant instance of sport being co-opted to the political demands of Tory, Liberal and loyalist Limerick. The sports tournament did not come out of the blue; in 1883 a charity rugby union match raised £21 for the hospital, while the Limerick Boat Club managed £100 for the same cause.<sup>1469</sup> In Limerick the notion that sport and politics ought not to be mixed could have been argued up to the point at which sport became formally organised. After formal organisation, however, sport and politics proved to be passionate, if unwise bedfellows, while after 1884 sport in Limerick became calcified, bound on all sides by the politics of nation, religion, class and gender.

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<sup>1467</sup> *LC* 2 June 1885.

<sup>1468</sup> *LC* 20 May 1886. Seurat's mixed up colours again.

<sup>1469</sup> *LC* 20 Feb, 1 Mar, 7 June 1883.

# Conclusion

Modern organised sport in Limerick began in the early decades of the nineteenth century when aristocratic patrons and participants developed a set of practices and clubs to enjoy their leisure. The activities they chose, among them hunting to hounds, horse racing, angling, shooting, sailing, coursing, required an expensive material culture. Thus, in this period the concept of sportsman meant someone with the requisite social, economic and cultural qualifications to practice those field sports and other resource-intensive challenges like yachting.

This 'tory' sports infrastructure was just one element of a significant social whirl; breakfasts, lunches, dinners and banquets were important social elements of the chase and the regatta, while band music, dancing and fireworks were often attached to these sporting carnivals. The culture of these gatherings was understood and, therefore, unstated, but it was a Great British cultural institution.

In the third quarter of the nineteenth century new sporting practices emerged, initially patronised and run by the same 'big house' tory sports administration of the first half-century. These new organised sports included the rough team sports with the smooth garden pursuits – athletics, rowing, rugby union, cricket, lawn tennis, archery and croquet – and also defined a less materially demanding sports culture. The middle classes could gain access to these sports societies and the forms of sports management began to change. The role of patron was diminished in favour of the honorary secretary of a club and personality-run sport gave way to a corporate idea of sport. A patchwork of non-sporting voluntary associations adapted sports recreation as one element of their services and found, to varying degrees, the sports output of the society was the most popular, accessible and entertaining aspect of their work.

Sports were locked down in the seventh and eighth decades of the century, defined, disciplined, codified and regulated; results, outcomes, victories and defeats, of minor interest in the tory age, now became vital to the club; the elements of fun and frivolity were diluted and sport adopted a more Spartan guise. In this period too, the values and politics of the dominant middle class were reflected in the rituals and iconography of sports events and sports politicisation was expressed overtly.

In this middle age of sporting development an attempt was made to keep the Great British cultural brand on the sports infrastructure, but sport could not escape the political, social, economic, cultural and religious upheavals and as a hydrangea assumes the colour dictated by the acidity of its host soil, sports clubs assumed the political colour of their sponsoring communities. In 1860 the committee of the Limerick regatta, a cross-section of ascendancy and gentry Limerick published, in no uncertain terms, their political allegiance in a telling newspaper advertisement – see over.<sup>1470</sup> By 1886 this event had become the property of the Nationalist and middle-class Town Council and though it was acting in a tri-partite basis with the Limerick Boat Club and Shannon Rowing Club, it was, like the gentry in 1860, the moneybags, and therefore able to call the organisational tunes. The Limerick Races in the same period replaced the anthem ‘God Save the Queen’ with ‘God Save Ireland’ offering Limerick new, nationalist rituals to rally around.

Sport in the third quarter of the nineteenth century was a middle-class affair, but as the fourth quarter of the century began new movements in workingmen’s sport were in evidence. It is tempting to place the emergence of the Gaelic Athletic Association in this movement also until the clerical victory over Fenian elements for control of that body re-established a firm middle class culture in Gaelic games. Though the GAA may have been ‘saved’ for the middle class sports infrastructure it did mark a final

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<sup>1470</sup> LC 1 Aug 1860.

breakdown in the pragmatic sports arrangements between Loyalist and Home Rule Limerick and marked the emergence of a third force in local sports. The blue tory and turquoise liberal/home rule hydrangeas were joined by an all–new green variety of that many–headed flower in the many splendoured cultural and political garden that was Limerick in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

In Limerick, however, a neat split between the Protestant, loyalist and culturally Great British strand of society and its Roman Catholic, Home Rule, later nationalist, and more British–sceptic wing of local society was avoided. Though the Limerick Boat Club and Limerick Football Club were institutions of the former and the Shannon Rowing Club and Garryowen institutions of the latter, between these two blocs was a cadre of sports entrepreneurs capable of negotiating a cultural, sporting British–Irish agreement – and though it might be confined to the pitch, track or rowing lane it marked a common social space where local patriotism could flourish while more serious national disagreements could be respected.

Three of these sports entrepreneurs on the Protestant side, W.L. Stokes, C.H. Gubbins and Sir Alexander Shaw, were active in athletics, rugby union and cycling – some of those sports with the biggest political crossover potential, while their very public membership of the Irish Protestant Home Rule Association secured them against accusations of sports sectarianism (sportarianism?). Their chameleon–like qualities were rewarded in a surprising, yet perhaps, not so surprising, political development at the end of the twentieth century. When the scourge of Limerick loyalism, John Daly, led a ‘Labour’ and Fenian takeover of the mayoralty and Limerick Municipal Council in 1899, Daly’s party was obliged to put a panel of three men forward for the Shrievalty of the city. Two of the three were Alexander Shaw and W. L. Stokes. He also had kind words for Shaw, who failed to be elected to the council, while Stokes

did.<sup>1471</sup> These two men navigated with many others a complex political and sporting environment to establish some of the most important local cultural institutions and traditions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries while facilitating communication between blue and green Limerick, thereby reducing the political tension between those conflicting sections.

Stokes and Shaw were sporting and political Atlases. Such individuals and the sports clubs and traditions they served made a significant contribution to civic endeavour in Limerick in the second half of the nineteenth century and assisted the cultivation of a vibrant civic culture of which people could be proud. Sport, fuelled by localism and civic pride, allowed people to reach between communities and, paradoxically, was part of a process of weakening barriers between those communities while simultaneously ritualising the contests enjoining them. Most clubs in those early decades relied heavily on the efforts of a few willing and capable organisers and given their other social, cultural, political, religious and familial duties they prove the adage ‘if you want something done give it to a busy person.’

This thesis explodes many of the commonly held creation–myths of Limerick’s sporting infrastructure; presents a complex and nuanced picture of the socio–economic, political, cultural, denominational and gender environments in which sports branched out from other leisure pursuits, yet was indebted to; charts the process by which sport was re–formed into a durable, exciting, many–layered infrastructure drawing the applause of a wide cross–section of society, and finally it relates the almost byzantine layers of political allegiances that found expression in local sport.

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<sup>1471</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 23 Jan 1899.

Filters of social inclusion and exclusion acted with considerable effect in nineteenth century Limerick, but they were not monolithically fixed and insurmountable barriers to people of energy and ambition. The narratives of sports in the second half of the nineteenth century describe original ways in which cross-class, cross-political, cross-denominational and cross-gender bargains were struck in the sporting realm in ways that were much more difficult to achieve in other public arenas. The willingness of sports entrepreneurs to create a space for these transactions, however, helped to ameliorate some of the worst effects of such divisions in Limerick society and helped to create a more egalitarian sports infrastructure than emerged in other parts of Ireland or Great Britain at the same time.

The nature of the political orientation and the significance of the social contributions of men of business has been exposed through this research and stands more to their credit than may have been supposed by popular and less sympathetic political assessments of their merits. Middle and upper-management Limerick built one of the most enduring pillars of local cultural life, yet has failed to gain the kudos – which have fallen, erroneously, into the lap of the ‘working man’ who, it is popularly imagined, created sport in his image in the late nineteenth century. The ‘yuppies’ of 1870s and 1880s Limerick deserve their accolade now.

This thesis stands well in comparison to sports history works in Ireland, Great Britain and worldwide because it deals with the totality of sporting narratives in a defined locale over a specific period and places those sporting developments in a real-time political and cultural context. It represents an advance on other sports history texts by acknowledging the debt owed by sport to non-sporting voluntary associational culture and emphasises the many enduring links and similarities between sporting and non-sporting associations.

In charting the pre-1884 sporting landscape this thesis, most importantly, sets a context for understanding the emergence of the next ‘evolutionary demon’ in Irish sport, politics and history, the Gaelic Athletic Association. It is not possible to understand the GAA without studies such as this to map the environment in which it emerged possessing a de-anglicising fervour and ‘like a porcupine with protective nationalist quills’ ‘bristling’ ready for a real contest for the hearts and minds of sportspeople and citizens alike.<sup>1472</sup>

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<sup>1472</sup> Whelan, Kevin, ‘The Geography of Hurling’, *History Ireland*, vol. 1, no. 1, (Spring 1993), 29.



# Epilogue

In twenty-five years time I fully expect to be driving through Kerry on my way to a country house hotel, my wife by my side, and to encounter a legion of formerly youthful, now middle-aged, balding perhaps, less energetic and undoubtedly more experienced 'boy racers'. This category of leisure driver has caused a moral panic in late twentieth and early twenty-first century Ireland, but when some among their number accept the leadership of their group and push for a more codified and formal leisure experience, as they assuredly will, the transition from informal, vaguely legal, transgressive and exciting pastime will be made.

Commercial interests have them already in a tight grip; machismo and hyper-masculinity are mixed with engine oil and fuel to power this quite vital, bottom-up run, leisure world.

The captains who will engineer this transformation are there now, it will be interesting to watch them emerge from their chrysalises.

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- Daniel, Laurent, 'Hare Coursing: An Irish National (British) Sport', paper given at 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of British Society of Sports History, St. Martin's College, Lancaster, April 2001.
- Griffin, Brian, 'Cycling and gender in Victorian Ireland', paper given at Annual Conference of Society for the Study of Nineteenth Century Ireland, University of Southampton, April 2001.
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- Jarvie, Grant, and Jackson, Lorna, 'Sport, National Identity and Cultural Independence', working paper: for the Centre for the Research in Sport and Society - University of Leicester, October 1994.
- Jarvie, Grant, 'Nationalism, Sporting Estates and Celtic Radicalism', paper for annual conference of British Sociological Association, Reading, April 1996).
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- Little, Charles, 'Rethinking the relationship between sport and 'community identity': gender, sport and identity in an Australian suburb', paper given at the 21<sup>st</sup> British Society of Sports History Conference, University of Southampton, April 2003.
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## Post-thesis additions

Re. meaning of word sport, see Shakespeare file.

See also, from *The adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Chapter 31,  
 Quote: "and hunted around there for the king, and by and by we found him in the back room of a little low doggery, very tight, and a lot of loafers bullyragging him for sport, and he a-cussing and a-threatening with all his might, and so tight he couldn't walk, and couldn't do nothing to them. The duke he begun to abuse him for an old fool, and the

king begun to sass back, and the minute they was fairly at it I lit out and shook the reefs out of my hind legs, and spun down the river road like a deer, for I see our chance; and I made up my mind that it would be a long day before they ever see me and Jim again. I got down there all out of breath but loaded up with joy, and sung out:

"Set her loose, Jim! we're all right now!"

[The two scoundrels, however, sold Jim out for \$40.]