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‘The More Sport the Merrier, Say We’: Sport in Ireland during the Great Famine

In one of his columns that were devoted to local news and gossip, James McCarthy, the editor of the *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, informed his readers that Colonel Crofton Moore Vandeleur of Kilrush had arrived in Limerick on the previous day in his ‘splendid yacht’, and that it was believed that Vandeleur intended mooring his vessel at the quays ‘for the amusement and accommodation of his friends’ during the forthcoming cattle show that was to be held in the city. McCarthy also reported the rumour that the marquis of Conyngham and ‘several noblemen and gentlemen of nautical tastes’ had similar intentions to Vandeleur. Commenting on the fact that plans were being made for a boat race to take place in the city in the near future, he expressed his hope that the presence of Vandeleur and the other eminent nautical visitors would also lead to a revival ‘upon a grand scale’ of the regatta for which Limerick had once been famed. After briefly mentioning the rumour that horse races were also to be held at Newcastle, in County Limerick, McCarthy ended his article by declaring, ‘The more sport the merrier, say we’.¹ At first sight, this article does not appear to merit much attention from the historian: it would be of some interest, one might suppose, to historians of leisure in Limerick and, perhaps, to historians of the press, but most scholars’ initial response would probably be that even they would be hard-pressed to derive much of value from its contents. However, when one looks at the timing of the article’s publication – June 1846 – the historian is immediately aware that there is potentially more to this source than mere humdrum commenting on local sporting activity.

¹ *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 24 June 1846.

The article was published some ten months after potato blight had arrived in Ireland.² The blight's impact on the 1845 potato crop was uneven, but still serious: about one-sixth of the crop was harvested before the blight struck, but about one-third of the main crop, dug up in October and November, was destroyed by the disease. The 1846 crop was a total failure; in 1847 the blight was less virulent, but this was of little consolation to the rural poor, many of whom had either neglected to plant potatoes, in despair at the preceding year's failure, or had eaten their seed potatoes rather than sowing them. Around half of the 1848 crop was lost, while that of 1849 was mostly healthy, with only isolated instances of blight, although these were particularly heavy in the West.³ Although the worst of the Famine was over by 1849, people were still dying of its effects in 1850 and 1851 in some parts of the country.⁴ This succession of crop failures and partial failures had a catastrophic effect, leading to an enormous number of deaths from hunger, hunger-related disease and other contagious diseases such as typhus, dysentery and relapsing fever. Although it is impossible to be certain about the overall death toll, at least eight hundred thousand died,⁵ and most scholars estimate a Famine mortality figure of around one million.⁶ It is also estimated that at least one million Irish people emigrated during the Famine

² Reports of the blight's attacks on the potato crop first began to emerge in August 1845, but it was not until October that people began to realize the true extent of the damage that had been done to the crop: C. Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845-52* (Dublin, 1994), pp. 32-33.

³ *ibid.*, 265; G. Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine 1798-1848* (Dublin, 1984 edition), pp. 203-4; P. Gray, *The Irish Famine* (London, 1995), pp. 35, 82; C. Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory* (Princeton, 1999), p. 42.

⁴ Ó Gráda, *Black '47*, p. 42.

⁵ J. Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1989 edition), p. 1.

⁶ M. Daly, *The Famine in Ireland* (Dundalk, 1988), pp. 98-9; C. Ó Gráda, 'Mortality and the Great Famine', in J. Crowley, W. J. Smyth and M. Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (Cork, 2012), p. 170.

years.⁷ While people in all areas of the country died of hunger and hunger-related diseases in this period, the worst effects of the Famine were felt in the West and South-west of the country, particularly amongst the poorer inhabitants of rural areas.⁸

When James McCarthy expressed his hopes for a resurgence of sport in Limerick, then, the worst effects of the Famine still lay in the future. Nevertheless, it was clear to contemporaries that the partial failure of the 1845 potato crop would bring considerable suffering to the landless labourers and cottiers, those who relied most heavily on the potato for their food. As early as February 1846, McCarthy warned that ‘The gaunt spectre famine is already darkening the land with his hideous shadow. His pestilential breath is everywhere, and millions will become his victims, unless vigorous and comprehensive counteracting means be promptly applied’.⁹ McCarthy’s newspaper dwelt on the theme of impending famine both locally and nationally on a number of occasions in early 1846, as did its rival, the *Limerick Chronicle*,¹⁰ but, as we have seen, McCarthy also made room in the *Examiner* for an article in which he expressed pleasure at the prospect of future sporting events taking place in Limerick. The *Examiner* was far from being the only Irish newspaper that found it neither incongruous nor inappropriate to report on sports at this time;¹¹ indeed, the *Londonderry Journal* commented that during the Famine, ‘Some of the Irish newspapers, after regretting that their space is inadequate to individualize the deaths

⁷ D. H. Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer* (Toronto and Belfast, 1993), p.18; D. Fitzpatrick, ‘Flight from Famine’, in C. Póirtéir (ed.), *The Great Irish Famine* (Cork and Dublin, 1995), p. 175.

⁸ There is an extensive literature on the regional impact of the Famine. For just some of many examples, see the essays in C. Kinealy and T. Parkhill (eds), *The Famine in Ulster: The Regional Impact* (Belfast, 1997), and in Crowley, Smyth and Murphy (eds), *Atlas of Famine*, passim.

⁹ *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 25 February 1846.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11 February 1846, 18 March 1846, 28 March 1846; *Limerick Chronicle*, 21 March 1846, 25 March 1846, 11 April 1846, 27 June 1846.

¹¹ M. Foley, *Death in Every Paragraph: Journalism and the Great Irish Famine* (Hamden, CT., 2015), p. 31.

by destitution, chronicle the meetings of the fox hounds'.¹² Even a cursory examination of Irish newspapers – the main source material for this article – in this period reveals a high number of reports devoted to a wide range of sports, even in the counties that were most severely affected by death and disease. The newspaper evidence shows that large numbers of Irish people continued to participate in sport and to attend sports events during the Famine, and that newspaper readers wanted to read about these sports. Despite the extensive newspaper coverage of sports in Ireland during the Famine years, the topic of sport during the Famine has been almost entirely overlooked, even by what is an otherwise authoritative recent examination of Irish sports history from the medieval period to the recent past.¹³ There are very brief summaries of horse racing and hunting meets in parts of Leinster and Munster,¹⁴ but on the whole there has been no major scholarly examination of the subject. This article aims to provide the first sustained discussion of sport during the Great Famine. By documenting the widespread sports activities throughout Ireland during the Famine years and illustrating contemporary attitudes to these activities, this article will fill a major gap in the history of sport in Ireland. The implications of the research findings for the field of Irish Famine studies, especially the debates on Famine 'memory', will also be outlined.

I

The newspaper evidence shows that there was a considerable amount and variety of sports activity in Ireland during the Famine years. Some of the newspaper coverage focused on one-off novelty events, such as a Mr Perrott's successful wager in July

¹² *Londonderry Journal*, 7 April 1847.

¹³ There are four brief mentions of sports during the Famine in P. Rouse, *Sport and Ireland: A History* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 93, 107, 111, 122.

¹⁴ C. Reilly, *John Plunket Joly and the Great Famine in King's County* (Dublin, 2012), p. 35; D. J. Butler, 'The Landed Classes during the Great Famine', in Crowley, Smyth and Murphy (eds), *Atlas of Famine*, p. 273.

1846 that he could row his wherry from Waterford to Dunmore in less than two-and-a-half hours, a feat that caused ‘[m]uch sensation’ in Waterford when he accomplished it and led to many gamblers losing considerable sums of money as they had bet against what they considered an impossible task on Perrott’s part.¹⁵ Another unusual aquatic sports event occurred the next year at Dromoland, in County Clare, when Augustus Stafford O’Brien’s ‘beautiful gig’ raced against a stay-boat crewed by ‘the Cratloe men, far-famed in dexterity and skill’. According to one witness, ‘The numerous visitors at Dromoland Castle, and those from the neighbouring estates, the crowds of tenantry assembled, the romantic beauty of the surrounding scenery gave an enchantment to the occasion, which will not readily be effaced from the memory of the delighted observer’.¹⁶ Lord Worcester’s introduction of otter hunting with hounds in parts of Kilkenny and Queen’s County in September 1849 also caught the imagination of contemporaries, because of its novelty.¹⁷ The press also detailed novelty sports activity involving the military stationed in Ireland, such as the pigeon-shooting competition involving officers of the 75th Regiment and civilians at Oakley Park, the residence of Sandford Palmer, in King’s County, for bets ranging from £5 to £10 a side, in March 1846; the ‘curious amusements’ of the 72nd Highlanders in Nenagh, in June 1846, to celebrate Queen Victoria’s birthday, amusements that included sack races, a pig race, handball, cockfights, putting stone quoits and diving ‘into a bucket of flour’; the ‘steeplechase of a very novel nature’ between two officers who rode their horses in a dangerous two-mile moonlit race over the Galway countryside in December 1846, for a bet of 50 sovereigns; the 20-mile walking race from Kinsale to Cork that was undertaken for a wager of £100 by four officers of the

¹⁵ *Freeman’s Journal*, 18 July 1846.

¹⁶ *Freeman’s Journal*, 9 October 1847.

¹⁷ *Northern Standard*, 29 September 1849.

54th Regiment, ‘fully accoutred in heavy marching order, each carrying sixty rounds of ball cartridge’ in May 1847; and the week of sport with which the 13th Light Dragoons diverted themselves in Ballinrobe, ‘much to the amusement of the inhabitants’, in August 1848. The soldiers’ sports included donkey, foot and sack races and a six-mile paper chase, in which Lieutenant Jennings played the ‘fox’ and six of his men were the ‘hounds’.¹⁸ In November of the following year another 13th Dragoons officer, Lieutenant Massingberd, was the hero of a ‘great walking match so much talked of’ in Blackrock, County Louth, a race in which the officer walked a distance of 50 miles in less than twelve hours. Heavy bets were placed on the outcome, with Massingberd being ‘loudly cheered by the multitude’ that gathered to watch his race against the clock, and the houses of Blackrock were illuminated in Massingberd’s honour after he completed the distance with some forty minutes to spare.¹⁹

Most newspaper sports content was devoted to sports that occurred on a more frequent basis than the novelty events described above. Horse racing was by far the most popular sport in this period, to judge by the amount of space dedicated to it in the press. In the pre-Famine decades, horse racing was considered Ireland’s ‘national sport’, due to its popularity with all classes of the population,²⁰ and, although there was a decline in the number of race meetings that were held after 1845, horse racing retained its pre-eminent position during the Famine years. The *King’s County*

¹⁸ *King’s County Chronicle*, 25 March 1846; *Tipperary Vindicator*, 10 June 1846; *Tuam Herald*, 5 December 1846; *Cork Examiner*, 14 May 1847; *Dublin Evening Packet*, 31 August 1848. These examples of military sports activity were part of what was by then a well-established feature of Irish life. The military played a prominent role in promoting sport in the pre-Famine period: P. Bracken, ‘Foreign and Fantastic Field Sports’: *Cricket in County Tipperary* (Thurles, 2004), pp. 11, 14-16; G. Siggins, *Green Days: Cricket in Ireland 1792-2005* (Dublin, 2005), pp. 12-13, 18-19.

¹⁹ *Newry Telegraph*, 15 November 1849.

²⁰ J. Kelly, *Sport in Ireland 1600-1840* (Dublin, 2014), pp. 101-23; Rouse, *Sport*, pp. 103-7.

Chronicle accounted for some of the reasons for this, in its description of the well-attended Ormond and King's County Hunt races in March 1846, when it stated that 'There is a sort of magic in the word *races*, which arouses the hopes, recollections, and anticipations of thousands'.²¹ Steeplechases were especially attractive to racegoers, as pointed out by the *Kerry Examiner* when anticipating the forthcoming races to be held at Tralee on 23 April 1846:

A steeple chase is a grand essay of human skill and courage – it is a break-neck attempt to ride over every barrier that comes in the way, without calculating difficulties, or pausing about danger. At a hare or fox hunt man and horse may sneak through a gap, or wheel round on a circuit to avoid all risk, and come up at a seasonable moment, as close on the tails of the hounds as if the rider had taken every leap as it came in his way, and cleared all before him in the most finished style of jumping. But not so with the steeple chase – all there must be right ahead – no flunking, no scheming out of the way, no jack-a-dandy riding – all is honest and above board. We would, however, advise every steeple-chaser to make his will, if he don't think proper to make his soul, before he takes the field.²²

Attendances at horse races were often sizeable.²³ Some twenty thousand racegoers 'at the lowest calculation' attended the races at Newcastle, County Limerick, in

²¹ *King's County Chronicle*, 25 March 1846. Italics in original.

²² *Kerry Examiner*, 14 April 1846.

²³ The authorities sometimes expressed their anxiety at the prospect of large numbers of peasantry attending race meetings, and the Irish Constabulary, frequently aided by military detachments, kept a close eye on proceedings at these events. For example, in

September 1846: according to the *Galway Vindicator*, ‘the peasantry seemed to enjoy the amusement very much, notwithstanding the distressed state of the times – a circumstance that affords a strong proof of the buoyancy and elasticity of the Irish character’.²⁴ An estimated fifteen thousand to twenty thousand people attended the Route Hunt steeplechases near Ballymoney on 3 December 1845, and a similar number of peasants, as well as ‘a large muster of the resident aristocracy of Wexford’ attended the steeplechases at Grandaniel, in the latter county, in May 1848; ‘upwards of 8,000 persons’ turned up for the steeplechases at Clashmore, County Waterford, in May 1846; while the crowd at the Tipperary steeplechases in March 1848 was at least eight thousand strong.²⁵ Even though one should treat newspaper calculations of

September 1846 the Limerick magistrates appealed to the stewards of the forthcoming Newcastle races to cancel them, referring to ‘the danger to be apprehended by bringing a multitude of persons together at a crisis when famine threatens the land’, and they also appealed to the lord lieutenant to prohibit the races from going ahead. The races were not banned, but the military authorities took the precaution of putting the Limerick garrison in readiness should their services be required at the races, and extra ordnance was provided for the war steamer, *Alba*, which was docked at Harvey’s Quay. As had been the case before the Famine, Ireland remained the most heavily policed part of the United Kingdom during the Famine years, as well as having the heaviest military presence. This partly reflected the authorities’ fears of a rebellion during the Repeal crisis, as well as their fears of agrarian disturbances. The military frequently found themselves deployed in support of the civil power in these years. There was rarely any disorder at race meetings, although occasionally they were the scene of outbreaks of violence or disorder, notwithstanding the presence of police or soldiers, such as the unchecked drunkenness of the spectators at the Kilcock steeplechases in August 1846, and the faction fight between the Barrys and the Cliffords at the Killarney races in July 1846 and between unnamed factions at the Ballymore race meeting in Westmeath in April 1847. These violent episodes were not typical, however; it was much more common for newspapers to comment on the peaceful behaviour of the crowds attending race meetings: *Cork Examiner*, 8 July 1846; *Saunders’s News-Letter*, 17 August 1846; *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 September 1846; *Westmeath Independent*, 29 April 1847; K. T. Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland 1832-1885* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 413-5; S. H. Palmer, *Police and Protest in Britain and Ireland 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 477, 480-81.

²⁴ *Galway Vindicator*, 30 September 1846.

²⁵ *Coleraine Chronicle*, 13 December 1845; *Cork Examiner*, 4 May 1846; *Nenagh Guardian*, 1 April 1848; *Bell’s Life in London*, 14 May 1848.

crowd sizes in this period with caution,²⁶ it is still clear that horse races were popular with a sizeable section of the public in many parts of the country. Newspapers sometimes refer simply to ‘thousands’ or ‘congregated thousands’ attending at race meetings, as was the case with the races at Kanturk in April 1846; the Hill of Loyd, near Kells, in April 1847; Johnstown, County Kilkenny, in September 1847; Cloghan, in King’s County, in April 1848; Lemonfield, near Limerick, in March 1849; Monkstown, County Cork, in July 1849; and at Cahirciveen in September 1849.²⁷ At Mallow in July 1846 a crowd ‘exceeding many thousands’ attended the local races, while in November ‘thousands of eager expectants, notwithstanding the national calamity’, congregated at Fox Hall, two miles from Macroom, to witness their favourite sport.²⁸ Other indications of horse racing’s enduring popularity during the Famine period come from Granard, County Longford, whose steeplechases in March 1847 were attended by ‘a vast number of the peasantry, and also a fair sprinkling of the aristocracy of the county’; from Ballymacdonafin steeplechase, in County Wexford, in December 1847, where ‘the attendance of the country people was immense’; from Lismacrory, in King’s County, in April 1848, where the races were attended ‘by a vast concourse’ of people; from Mullingar in May 1848, where the steeplechase was considered ‘perhaps the most successful meeting ever held in Westmeath’ and was attended by an ‘immense mass of peasantry’; from Ennis, for whose races in September 1848 ‘An immense assemblage of sporting characters

²⁶ A point made by G. Owens in his discussion of attendances at Repeal ‘monster meetings’, in his ‘Nationalism without Words: Symbolism and Ritual Behaviour in the Repeal “Monster Meetings” of 1843-5’, in J. S. Donnelly, Jr., and K. A. Miller (eds), *Irish Popular Culture 1650-1850* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 243-4.

²⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 17 April 1846; *Anglo-Celt*, 16 April 1847; *Freeman’s Journal*, 24 September 1847; *King’s County Chronicle*, 26 April 1848; *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 21 March 1849; *Cork Examiner*, 25 July 1849; *Tralee Chronicle*, 8 September 1849.

²⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 20 July 1846; 9 November 1846.

mustered, and the countless multitude of Clare lads and lasses exceeded anything before witnessed'; and Carrickmacross, where the attendance at the local races was 'very large' in November 1848.²⁹

In addition to races held on inland courses, some popular horse races were also organized on beaches. The most famous of these races was the long-established meeting at Ballyeigh in County Kerry, which had been suspended as a result of a faction fight on 24 June 1834 between the Cooleen and Lawlor-Black Mulvihill factions, in which at least twenty of the combatants were killed.³⁰ The Ballyeigh meeting was restored in 1843. The races of 1846 attracted the venue's largest recorded attendance, bringing large numbers of visitors to Ballybunion and Listowel in search of accommodation, who often paid exorbitant prices for the limited available accommodation.³¹ According to the *Kerry Examiner*, the 1847 races were held 'at the urgent solicitation of the poor people themselves', and it added the comment that 'Considering the melancholy character of the last eight or nine months, we cannot complain that the opportunity will be thus afforded the poor people of the country adjoining the beautiful course at Ballyeigh, of indulging in their favourite recreation once more'.³² The races that were held on Ballyhealy strand, County Wexford, in October 1847 attracted a large crowd of the 'bold peasantry' of Forth and Bargy. The entertainment included a foot race for a pair of brogues. The journalist who recorded the race wrote of the winner, 'a stout Hibernian', that 'we verily believe, from the horny substance of which his hoofs seemed to be composed, that these were the first

²⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 11 March 1847, 19 September 1848; *Dublin Evening Packet*, 11 January 1848; *Waterford Chronicle*, 8 April 1848; *Bell's Life in London*, 14 May 1848; *Southern Reporter*, 21 September 1848; *Anglo-Celt*, 10 November 1848.

³⁰ P. D. O'Donnell, *The Faction Fighters of the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin, 1975), pp. 133-74.

³¹ *Kerry Examiner*, 4 August 1846.

³² *Ibid.*, 24 August 1847.

brogues he ever soiled'.³³ At the other end of the country, the race between a local rider and another from Derry that was held on Cloughey beach on St Stephen's Day in 1847 created intense excitement in the local area. According to the *Downpatrick Recorder*, 'For upwards of a month before it took place nothing was to be heard of but it; children quarrelled about it, young men fought about it, old men bet upon it, and even the female portion of the community shared in the general excitement'. Heavy bets were placed on the race, mostly in favour of the defeated local contestant: two sisters reputedly lost all of their £20 savings after backing the defeated horse and rider.³⁴ The Iveragh beach races, held near Cahirciveen in September 1849, were greatly enjoyed by the local peasantry, 'who flocked to the scene of enjoyment in thousands'.³⁵

As the foregoing accounts show, contemporaries derived great entertainment from attending, and betting on the outcome of, horse races. Roulette and thimblerrigging, tents in which alcohol was sold, and musicians were also often part of the attraction at these meetings.³⁶ A journalist at the Mallow races in November 1845 described how 'booths appeared on several parts of the course, upon which, in fantastic and grotesque costumes, Harlequins, Columbines, *et hoc genus omne*, performed various athletic feats, and cracked stale jokes, to the evident amusement of the delighted crowds by which they were surrounded'. The area near the stand-house and the starting post was 'covered with tents, where in the most inviting and attractive manner good cheer of every description was displayed, and the cupidity of the crowd was excited by the proprietors of gaming tables, which in great variety were observable in

³³ *Wexford Independent*, 2 October 1847.

³⁴ *Downpatrick Recorder*, 1 January 1848.

³⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 12 September 1849.

³⁶ For a description of similar entertainments that kept racegoers amused in the pre-Famine period, see Rouse, *Sport*, pp. 104-6.

every part of the ground'.³⁷ Similar general scenes of entertainment, with variations of detail, occurred at race meetings throughout the Famine.

People from all sections of society enjoyed themselves at horse races, not just the well-to-do, as illustrated by the *Limerick and Clare Examiner's* description of the crowd at the Banogue, County Limerick, steeplechases in April 1848:

At an early hour of the morning, the lovers of the turf congregated in numbers to the focus of general attention, and at the hour of twelve o'clock the race course presented a scene of great beauty. The beauty, the fashion, and the elite of Limerick, as well as the 'bold peasantry' of the surrounding country, sought the pleasure of the day with equal avidity and interest, and though the contrast was strong between the classes, the moustachioed 'gent' playing off his talents amid the glittering galaxy of a favoured coterie, the humble peasant with high spirits and aspiring heart with the village maiden of his affections, 'tripping it on the light fantastic toe' to the music of some itinerant Irish piper, or neglected minstrel, both were aspiring for fame in their own way. It was delightful to witness those bursts of joy – the warm greetings between friends, whom absence pained but could not alter – the soft accents of the Gaelic spoken in the language of nature – the expression of the 'cead mille fultha' incidental to the true born Irishman, and the honest frieze coat of the Galtee mountains grasping the hand of the distant neighbour in token of good will and fraternity.³⁸

³⁷ *Southern Reporter*, 8 November 1845.

³⁸ *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 29 April 1848.

Even in ‘Black ‘47’, many people who could probably ill afford to attend horse races did so. A correspondent to the *King’s County Chronicle* questioned the wisdom of holding the Ormond and King’s County Hunt’s annual Lismacrorry steeplechase races in that year, arguing that holding them as usual ‘would probably have the effect of taking away from their usual employment on the public works hundreds of those people to whom the loss of even one day’s wages would be felt as a severe infliction’.³⁹ The fact that he voiced this concern suggests that even some of the very poorest in that area of the Midlands attended horse races during the Famine.

Although Queen’s County was not as badly hit by the Famine as some parts of the South and West, those on the lower end of the social scale in that county did not escape entirely unscathed.⁴⁰ This did not stop large numbers from attending at the Heath races in July 1847, even if their attendance was reduced from previous years: according to the *Leinster Express*, ‘The assemblage of the humbler classes, though large, was by no means as numerous as on former occasions; and taking into consideration the distressed condition of the people, it was a matter of astonishment that so many were present’.⁴¹ Mendicants also attended horse races, although in their case they probably went to beg rather than to enjoy the races. The most famous beggar who frequented horse races in this period was Jack Kelly, nicknamed ‘Sporting Jack’, who regularly attended every race in Waterford, Wicklow, Kildare and Carlow. Kelly, who ‘could sing a sporting song, make a radical speech, or laugh a “gent” out of a shilling or half-crown’, was waylaid by an assailant at Kilmeague in January 1849 and robbed of £14, ‘the gathering of many years’.⁴² Upsetting as his predicament was, it was not as poignant as that of the unknown ‘itinerant pauper’,

³⁹ *King’s County Chronicle*, 17 February 1847.

⁴⁰ Kinealy, *Great Calamity*, pp. 110, 170.

⁴¹ *Leinster Express*, 10 July 1847.

⁴² *Westmeath Independent*, 21 January 1849.

whose dead body was found on the Lismacrory racecourse on 8 May 1849. We will never know if he went to the racecourse to seek alms from the racegoers or – an unlikely possibility, admittedly – in search of entertainment. Either way, the races went ahead, before ‘a large and fashionable attendance’.⁴³

Beggars, thimblerriggers and on-course beersellers were not the only people for whom horse races represented an opportunity to make money. Hoteliers and innkeepers, for example, profited when races were held in their local areas. Many used the newspaper columns to advertise for trade from racegoers. For instance, in September 1846 Michael Butler, owner of the Victoria Hotel in Cashel, claimed in an advertisement that

Travellers and visitors to the Cashel races, will find the stock of wines, spirits, bottled ales, groceries, &c., of superior quality, whilst care shall be taken that the viands shall be choice, and that in comfort combined with moderate charges and general accommodation, the Victoria Hotel shall not be excelled.⁴⁴

Ordinaries – celebratory dinners at the end of each day’s races, usually for the wealthiest or most socially prominent racegoers⁴⁵ – added to racing enthusiasts’ enjoyment, and contributed significantly to hoteliers’ profits. These could be large-scale affairs, such as the dinner served at Daly’s Hotel, Tuam, to the diners – nearly 250 of the ‘rank, beauty and fashion’ of Galway and the neighbouring counties – who

⁴³ *King’s County Chronicle*, 9 May, 16 May 1849.

⁴⁴ *Tipperary Free Press*, 16 September 1846.

⁴⁵ For an evocative fictional depiction of an ordinary set in Carrick-on-Shannon in the immediate pre-Famine period, see A. Trollope, *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* (London, 1866), pp. 175-86.

attended the ordinary after the second day of the Tuam steeplechases in October 1846.⁴⁶ Some hoteliers, such as Richard Dobbyn, proprietor of Dobbyn's Hotel in Tipperary, and Thomas Dooly, owner of the Royal Arms Hotel in Birr, were also clerks of their local racecourses, and benefitted financially by hosting ordinaries in their establishments when races were held on the Tipperary and Lismacrory courses, respectively.⁴⁷ Municipal bodies and politicians were aware of the local economic benefits that accrued from hosting horse race meetings and the large crowds that they attracted, which helps to explain why public and private funds continued to be made available to support race meetings during the Famine. For example, in September 1846 the town commissioners of Tuam and Cashel were regarded as exemplars by some Limerick corporation members for the financial support that they gave to their local races. In addition to the municipal funding that was made available, Nicholas Maher, MP for Tipperary, and Timothy O'Brien, MP for Cashel, who were both race stewards, contributed £50 for a prize plate at the Cashel races.⁴⁸ Amongst the prizes at the Kells steeplechases in April 1847 was the Kells Borough Cup, valued at 100 sovereigns, to which the borough commissioners added a money prize of 25 sovereigns.⁴⁹

Railway companies also provided financial support to horse races, hoping to benefit financially from conveying passengers to and from the race meetings.⁵⁰ At the

⁴⁶ *Connaught Telegraph*, 7 October 1846.

⁴⁷ *Tipperary Free Press*, 1 March 1848; *King's County Chronicle*, 1 March 1848.

⁴⁸ *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 30 September 1846.

⁴⁹ *Anglo-Celt*, 16 April 1847.

⁵⁰ This was a development that assumed even greater importance after the Famine, as Irish railway companies further facilitated the expansion of horse racing through such means as providing free passage to horses to and from racetracks, as well as free travel to the journalists who reported on the race meetings. As in Britain, proximity to a railway became vital for the success of Irish racecourses: Rouse, *Sport*, pp. 107-8; N. Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 33-4.

onset of the Famine there were a mere sixty-five miles of railway in Ireland,⁵¹ but the Famine years saw a significant increase in the railway network which, by 1850, had expanded to some 500 miles.⁵² The fledgling Irish railway companies supported horse racing either by subscribing to race funds, contributing prize money – such as the fifty sovereigns given by the Drogheda Railway Company to the prize fund of the Lusk races in September 1846, and the two donations of £30 given by the Ulster Railway Company to the organizers of the Down Corporation steeplechases in March 1847 and the Maze races in July 1847, respectively⁵³ – or by setting reduced fares to and from race meetings.⁵⁴ In an early example of the mutually beneficial relationship between railway companies and organizers of horse races, the Carlow steeplechases, originally scheduled for July 1846, were postponed until the following month, to coincide with the arrival of the first train at the local Dublin and Carlow Railway Company station: the railway company gave fifty sovereigns to the race organizers.⁵⁵ The Great Southern and Western Railway (GSWR) started a special train service to the Curragh races in September 1846, when two trains ‘freighted with the lovers of the Turf’, many of whom had never set foot on the Curragh before, travelled to there

⁵¹ C. Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History 1780-1939* (Oxford, 1994), p. 137.

⁵² L. J. Proudfoot, ‘Spatial Transformation and Social Agency: Property, Society and Improvement, c.1700-c.1900’, in B. J. Graham and L. J. Proudfoot (eds), *An Historical Geography of Ireland* (London, 1993), p. 243.

⁵³ *Dublin Evening Post*, 26 September 1846; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, 27 March 1847; *Belfast News-Letter*, 23 July 1847.

⁵⁴ F. D’Arcy, *Horses, Lords and Racing Men: The Turf Club 1790-1990* (The Curragh, 1991), pp. 145-46; Rouse, *Sport*, p. 107. Sailing regattas were amongst other sports events that benefitted from railways’ largesse: for instance, the Royal Kingstown Yacht Club’s regatta received a solid silver candelabra, valued at £100, from the Kingstown Railway Company for the first yacht race that was held at its regatta on 3 August 1846, and the same railway company donated a prize of £50 for the Kingstown regatta races in August 1849: *Freeman’s Journal*, 3 July 1846, 2 August 1849.

⁵⁵ *Wexford Independent*, 8 August 1846; D’Arcy, *Turf Club*, p. 146.

from Dublin.⁵⁶ The company began investing in the Curragh's infrastructure in October 1846,⁵⁷ and was rewarded with an increase in passenger numbers. It was praised in April 1847 for 'its admirable arrangements' that rendered 'what was a day's wearisome journey, a trip of pleasure without fatigue, occupying but a few hours'.⁵⁸ Its trains – some of them dubbed 'special monster trains' – often conveyed from five hundred to one thousand passengers at a time to and from the Curragh in 1847.⁵⁹ These numbers were surpassed by the 1,500 GSWR passengers who travelled from Carlow to attend the Lucan steeplechases in May 1847,⁶⁰ and equalled by the Midland Great Railway's special train that carried about one thousand passengers to the 'Irish Grand National' military steeplechase held at Laraghbrien, near Maynooth, in April 1848.⁶¹ The Waterford and Limerick Railway Company used the opening day of the Tipperary steeplechases in March 1848 to publicize their railway, by providing complimentary tickets to some four hundred racegoers from Limerick. The recipients included 'the rank, fashion, and beauty of this city and neighbourhood, among whom were large numbers of the fair sex and officers of the garrison'. The train set off 'amidst the exclamations of assembled thousands', and the travellers were greeted on their arrival at the course by the Tipperary temperance band playing 'Garryowen'. The excursionists were also 'loudly cheered' by hundreds of people on their return to Limerick.⁶² The company conveyed some seven hundred passengers to the races on the next day.⁶³

⁵⁶ *King's County Chronicle*, 16 September 1846.

⁵⁷ *Saunders's News-Letter*, 30 October 1846.

⁵⁸ *King's County Chronicle*, 28 April 1847.

⁵⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 25 June 1847, 8 September 1847; Rouse, *Sport*, p. 107.

⁶⁰ *Tipperary Free Press*, 15 May 1847.

⁶¹ *Bell's Life in London*, 16 April 1848.

⁶² *Limerick Reporter*, 28 March 1848; *Tipperary Vindicator*, 1 April 1848.

⁶³ *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 29 March 1848.

In general, during the Famine the railways provided important support for horse racing organizers, the number of whose meetings underwent a decline in this period. Many meetings were suspended due to the crisis, especially in the South and West, as the landed elite, who were usually the principal subscribers to race meetings, saw a marked decline in their incomes, due to a combination of falling rents and massively increased poor rates: an estimated ten per cent of landlords were bankrupted during the Famine.⁶⁴ There is no consistent pattern to the decline in the number of races: some major meetings, such as the Roscommon steeplechases, were not held until 1849;⁶⁵ others, such as the Tuam races, were held in 1846 and then not held again until 1849.⁶⁶ The Ennis races were held in 1846 and suspended in 1847; their resumption in the following year took place against a backdrop of evictions nearby, as explained by the *Limerick and Clare Examiner*:

At an early hour in the morning, carriages and omnibuses rolled on to the race course at Ballycoree, where the young and the old were assembled to participate in the sports of the day. But while they were engaged in that enjoyment, the house-levellers of Thomas Crow, Colonel Wyndham's agent, were, in an opposite and not remote direction, happy in the pursuit of another species of pleasure; they were tumbling houses, and pointing out to evicted tenants the road to beggary and ruin.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Lee, *Modernisation*, p. 36; F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (London, 1971), p. 26.

⁶⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 17 August 1849.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 September 1849.

⁶⁷ *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 23 September 1848.

The Irish *Racing Calendar* recorded some 323 races as having taken place in Ireland in 1845; the numbers for 1846, 1847, 1848 and 1849 were 252, 170, 231 and 210, respectively. The amount of prize money at these races was £17,851 in 1845, £17,557 in 1846, £12,594 in 1847, £15,893 in 1848 and £13,170 in 1849.⁶⁸ Although most races continued to be run during the Famine years, there was a noticeable decline in their number, especially in 1847: it is likely that there would have been an even greater number of suspended races in this period had it not been for railway companies' support for horse racing.

II

Not all enthusiasts for equine sports appreciated the railways, notwithstanding their role in helping to keep horse race meetings viable during the Famine. In November 1845, a correspondent of the *Dublin Evening Packet* recorded his horror at the prospect of the Baltinglass Junction Railway cutting through 'the finest hunting country in the world', and attacked the railway's promoters in strong terms:

I can scarcely hold my pen with indignation at the absurd thoughts of these unsportsmanlike projectors. Do they suppose we are to go hunting on our tea kettles, and substitute steam for horse flesh? which assuredly will be the case shortly, if landed proprietors will not put their heads together, and oppose all railway lines in sporting countries.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ D'Arcy, *Turf Club*, p. 153. One should bear in mind that although the *Racing Calendar* did not record all of the race meetings that were held in Ireland, they are undoubtedly correct in indicating a general overall decline in Irish race meetings in this period.

⁶⁹ Letter from 'An Old Fox-Hunter', in *Dublin Evening Packet*, 18 November 1845.

No recorded instances of hunters riding steam kettles during the Famine have come to light yet, but there are countless examples in the newspapers of their riding horses in pursuit of foxes and deer. The horsemen (hunting was almost entirely a male domain at this time, with just a few women recorded as hunt participants, in Louth and Kilkenny, for example)⁷⁰ were often accompanied by subscription packs of hunting dogs. One source listed some fifty foxhound packs, forty-nine harrier packs, two beagle packs, two staghound packs and five combined harrier and foxhound packs, respectively, in twenty-three Irish counties in 1837,⁷¹ and most of these, along with others not recorded in 1837, appear to have been active during the Famine years. Hunting was particularly popular with the gentry of Leinster and Munster, but members of the landed elite also hunted in Ulster⁷² as well as in Connacht – even in Galway and Mayo,⁷³ two of the counties where the Famine's impact was at its most devastating. Hunting's attraction was a combination of the thrill of the chase and the socializing (which often included convivial dinners)⁷⁴ that was an integral part to a hunt's activities. Many hunt participants wrote enthusiastic descriptions of their chases after foxes or deer, including overblown accounts of runs with the Wexford

⁷⁰ *Newry Examiner*, 7 February 1846; Anonymous, *Memoir of the Kilkenny Hunt* (Dublin, 1897), p. 153.

⁷¹ Statistics compiled from data published in *Bell's Life in London*, 15 January 1837. There were undoubtedly more packs of hunting hounds in the country, as the *Bell's* data did not cover Wicklow, Longford, Waterford, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Down, Fermanagh or Cavan.

⁷² For some accounts of fox hunts and stag hunts in Ulster, see *Northern Standard*, 31 January 1846, 15 January 1848, 1 April 1848, 14 October 1848.

⁷³ *Tuam Herald*, 24 January 1846, 11 April 1846; *Bell's Life in London*, 24 January 1847; A. Somerville, *Letters from Ireland during the Famine of 1847* (Dublin, 1994) (ed. K. D. M. Snell), pp. 183-86; *Dublin Evening Mail*, 28 September 1849. The 'hunting appointments' sections of Irish newspapers show that the Galway Hunt remained active throughout the Famine years.

⁷⁴ *King's County Chronicle*, 22 April 1846; *Tipperary Vindicator*, 2 December 1846; *Waterford News*, 11 May 1849.

and Island Hunts in Wexford,⁷⁵ the Monaghan Harriers,⁷⁶ the Ward Union staghounds in Meath⁷⁷ and the Emo Hunt in Queen's County.⁷⁸ Some budding poets composed verses to give voice to their enthusiasm for hunting, such as the anonymously-penned 'A Day with Foxhounds in Monaghan', to commemorate a run by the Tynan Hounds in March 1848,⁷⁹ and 'A Pink Jacket' wrote a similar effort, 'Michaelmas Day, 1847', to celebrate the joys of fox hunting in the Mayo barony of Tirawley:

Hurra! hurra! for the season that's here again,
 Men, horses, hounds are all in prime order.
 Hurra! hurra! welcome the cheer again,
 When pink jackets sport o'er Tyrawly's gay borders.
 Oh! What are life's pleasures
 Her joys, or her treasures,
 Like sunbeams they pass in worthless disorder –
 Not so with fond tally,
 That cheers though each valley,
 When pink jackets sport o'er Tyrawly's gay borders.
 Come, see, mark, all those jovial boys,
 Rushing like tempests, in sportmanslike order,
 And say then – where are life's cares, alloys! –
 When pink jackets sport o'er Tyrawly's gay borders.

⁷⁵ *Wexford Independent*, 14 January 1846, 2 February 1848, 25 March 1848, 13 December 1848, 30 December 1848; *Bell's Life in London*, 24 January 1847.

⁷⁶ *Northern Standard*, 31 January 1846.

⁷⁷ *Bell's Life in London*, 8 November 1846.

⁷⁸ *Dublin Evening Packet*, 7 December 1847.

⁷⁹ *Northern Standard*, 1 April 1848.

Then bless me this hunting day,
 Jovious and ever gay:
 Our men, horses, hounds turned out in prime order.
 Long may they merry be
 Happy, and ever free,
 And long may pink jackets sport o'er our borders.⁸⁰

Stag hunting was less common than fox hunting during the Famine. One landlord, Richard Chute of Blennerville, in Kerry, was a particularly enthusiastic hunter of stags and does on the Dingle peninsula, with accounts of hunts that he organized featuring several times in the press.⁸¹ A small number of stag hunts in honour of distinguished visitors also took place in the region of the Lakes of Killarney: these included a hunt organized by 'the teetotallers of Killarney' in honour of Fr Theobald Mathew, the temperance campaigner, in August 1845, which prompted an enthusiastic scribe to compose a poem titled 'The Staghunt'; another stag hunt was held in the following month to honour the visit of Dwarkanauth Tagore, zamindar of Calcutta, to Kerry.⁸² The lord lieutenant of Ireland, the earl of Clarendon, was also treated to a stag hunt in his honour when he and his entourage visited the Lakes of Killarney in September 1849. Around seventy boatloads of tourists turned up to enjoy the spectacle, but it turned out to be a relative flop, as the distinguished visitors caught only a momentary glimpse of the fugitive stag. However, the proceedings were enlivened by the unusual holding of an impromptu race between a rowing boat coxed

⁸⁰ *Westmeath Independent*, 9 October 1847.

⁸¹ *Kerry Evening Post*, 25 October 1845, 24 December 1845, 16 December 1846, 6 November 1847, 20 November 1847, 1 January 1848; *Cork Examiner*, 1 March 1848.

⁸² *Kerry Evening Post*, 23 August 1845; *Tralee Chronicle*, 23 August 1845, 13 September 1845.

by an Irish woman, Mrs Roche, owner of the Muckcross Hotel, and another coxed by an Englishman, George Thornton from Skipton, Yorkshire, with Mrs Roche's victory being met with 'the admiration of all assembled'.⁸³

Maintaining horses and dogs for hunting was a complex affair, one that brought employment to rural areas (although critics pointed out that much of this was unproductive employment, in the shape of servants, grooms, stable hands and lodgekeepers)⁸⁴ but also caused landed proprietors considerable expense. The *Times* commissioner spelt out hunting's benefits and drawbacks to rural communities in his account of his visit to Kilkenny, 'the Melton Mowbray of Ireland', in December 1845:

I am informed that from 200 to 500 hunters, belonging to strangers, are stabled in Kilkenny, their owners regularly turning out in the very best hunting style. A great many of them are extremely fine-looking fellows. The effect of this spirit is to diffuse money among the farmers and in the neighbourhood; and by keeping gentlemen in the country, and inducing them to spend their incomes at home, it, no doubt, does much good. There are, however, mischiefs accompanying it; for many of them live 'faster' than their pockets can afford: this leads to embarrassments, and disables them from improving their estates; it also makes some of them needy men, and needy men cannot be liberal landlords.⁸⁵

⁸³ *Freeman's Journal*, 25 September 1849; *The Lady's Newspaper*, 29 September 1849.

⁸⁴ Somerville, *Letters*, pp. 161-62, 183-85; A. Nicolson, *Annals of the Famine in Ireland* (Dublin, 1998), (ed. M. Murphy), pp. 121-22.

⁸⁵ *Times*, 13 December 1845.

The Famine increased many landowners' 'embarrassments', as did the costs of staying on the hunting field. Although the Famine's impact was much less severe in Kildare than in many other parts of the country, the Leinster county did not escape completely unscathed,⁸⁶ and the decline in landlords' incomes in Kildare was reflected in the financial problems of the Kildare Hunt, whose subscriptions and field money in 1847 produced a revenue of £1,083, but, with expenses amounting to £1,559, the hunt was left with a deficit of £475.⁸⁷ Unsurprisingly, some prominent hunters in other parts of the country that were more severely affected by the Famine cut their expenses by offloading their hunting horses or hounds. For example, in November 1846 Lord Clonbrock sold his hunters for £956 and his hounds for £56.⁸⁸ In 1847 the earl of Shannon ceased hunting, selling his one hundred hunting dogs – the Castlemartyr Hounds – for £1,000 in April, and shipping his twenty-five 'superior hunters' for auction in England in the same month. When Asenath Nicholson visited Shannon's estate in 1848, she considered that his horses had been 'stabled here in apartments much better than the dwellings of the labouring class', and found that 'the richly tipped harness, with their bright stirrups and saddles, were still hanging as mementoes of former greatness and ready for use, should the absentee find it for his benefit to return to his pleasure grounds'.⁸⁹ In October 1847 the Glynwood foxhounds

⁸⁶ Kildare County Council (ed.), *Lest We Forget: Kildare and the Great Famine* (Naas, 1996); K. Kiely, 'Poverty and Famine in County Kildare, 1820-1850', in W. Nolan and T. McGrath (eds), *Kildare History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 2006), pp. 502-26.

⁸⁷ D. Bourke and W. B. Boulton, *A History of the Kildare Hunt* (London, 1913), p. 168.

⁸⁸ *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 November 1846.

⁸⁹ *Tipperary Vindicator*, 3 April 1847; *Limerick Reporter*, 6 April 1847; Nicholson, *Annals*, p. 152.

were auctioned off at Ballinasloe, with the purchasers, the officers of the Scots Greys, garrisoned at Athlone, paying three guineas for each pair of hounds.⁹⁰

Another field sport – coursing – appealed to similar strata of society as fox and deer hunting did, but it was mainly confined to a small number of clubs in a few areas of the country. The most prominent and active clubs throughout the Famine years were the County Cork Coursing Club and the Southern Coursing Club in Cork, the Spiddal Coursing Club and Mountainstown Coursing Club in Meath, and the combined Waterford, Tipperary and Kilkenny Coursing Club, with a few other smaller clubs also occasionally holding coursing matches. As was the case with deer hunting and fox hunting, coursing offered the thrill of the chase, with an additional aim of coursing being to see whose greyhound could turn a hare first in a contest involving two greyhounds. The pleasures that arose from convivial gatherings with like-minded enthusiasts was another similarity that coursing shared with fox and deer hunting. Indeed, such was the feeling of bonhomie at the Skea Coursing Club’s dinner to mark its final meeting of the 1845-1846 season, that, after the toasts and speeches, which were ‘replete with humour’, the Fermanagh outfit’s members agreed to change its name to the Skea Coursing Harmonic Club.⁹¹ After the Bailieborough Coursing Club held a coursing match on 21 November 1848, mainly on the demesne of Sir John Young, MP, the participants went on to Bailieborough:

where they partook of a good and substantial dinner which had been prepared by them at Mr Walsh’s hotel. The viands were of the most *recherché* kinds, the wines and other drinkables were of the choicest description, and the entire arrangements reflected great credit on the taste

⁹⁰ *Westmeath Independent*, 9 October 1847.

⁹¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 20 March 1846.

and *savoir faire* of Mr Walsh, *dans l'art de la cuisine*. Nothing, in fact, was omitted which could contribute to the comfort and satisfaction of the guests, who were evidently well pleased, as they had good reason to be, with everything set before them.⁹²

After the Southern Coursing Club enjoyed a pleasant day's coursing at Killady Hill on 25 April 1848, the members and their guests ate 'a really good substantial dinner... which proved a most agreeable finale to the pleasures of the day', prompting those present to subscribe £25 for a challenge cup to be competed for in the 1848-1849 season.⁹³ While companionable dinners were undoubtedly an important attraction of coursing clubs, their main attraction was the opportunity that they afforded for testing members' greyhounds and for gambling at coursing matches. At the County Cork Coursing Club's meeting in April 1848, one match was held to determine whether potatoes and buttermilk or beef, mutton chops, oaten cake, buckthorn and sherry were 'condiments more suited to the speed and wind of a greyhound', with the results suggesting the superiority of the potatoes and buttermilk diet,⁹⁴ but there is no evidence that coursers elsewhere chanced their money on the supposed superiority of the contents of their hounds' meals. Substantial amounts of money were hazarded at coursing meets, with no shortage of aristocratic and other greyhound owners prepared to gamble at these events: during the 1846-1847 season, at the first meeting of the Spiddal Coursing Club, whose stewards included the marquis of Drogheda and the earl of Bective, there were some eleven, eighteen, twenty and twenty-six entries, respectively, for the various challenge cups, and the meet attracted 'a large attendance

⁹² *Anglo-Celt*, 1 December 1848.

⁹³ *Cork Examiner*, 5 May 1848.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24 April 1848.

of sportsmen from every part of the United Kingdom, and beds were not to be had in Nobber at any price'.⁹⁵ Coursers' enthusiasm for their sport can possibly be understood by considering some of the stakes that were involved: at the first meeting of the Spiddal club for the 1847-1848 season, for instance, the individual stake for each of the sixteen dogs that were entered for the Spiddal Cup was £3 5s., with the winning dog earning £36 for its owner and the second-placed dog winning £12; for the Gormanstown Stakes, a competition for puppies, the individual stake was £2 5s, with £24 going to the winning owner and £8 to the runner-up.⁹⁶ At the well-attended coursing meet that was held at Ballyvourney in County Cork in May 1849, an event that had been 'so anxiously looked for by the sporting public of the south', the individual stakes were £2 5s for each greyhound, and the winner also received a silver salver worth fifty guineas.⁹⁷ Unsurprisingly, successful greyhounds were extremely valuable, as can be seen by the prices that were realized by keen courser Fr Tom Maguire, the controversialist parish priest of Ballinamore, County Leitrim, when he sold his greyhounds in March 1847, 'having given up coursing in consequence of the famine times'. Maguire, who used to boast that he was 'the best shot, the best courser, the best quoit-player, the best breeder of greyhounds, pointers, and spaniels, and the best brewer of "scaltheen" in the whole county of Leitrim', received £4 for Beeswing, £15 for True Blue, £21 for Young Frisky and £25 for Lady Harkaway when he put them up for auction.⁹⁸

When one considers the expense involved in feeding greyhounds and also in entering dogs for coursing competition, it is perhaps surprising that the Famine years

⁹⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 3 December 1846; *Dublin Evening Packet*, 3 December 1846.

⁹⁶ *Dublin Evening Mail*, 8 November 1847.

⁹⁷ *Southern Reporter*, 12 May 1849.

⁹⁸ *Tipperary Vindicator*, 20 March 1847; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, 20 March 1847; *Gloucestershire Chronicle*, 11 December 1847.

also saw the establishment of a number of coursing clubs.⁹⁹ The earliest such club to be formed was the Alasty Coursing Club, in County Kildare, established in January 1847 ‘by a number of gentlemen, lovers of the leash’. Its first meet, for which a special train was hired to bring members and their friends from Dublin, was held at W. D. Ferguson’s residence at Alasty, between Hazlehatch and Sallins. The entertainment consisted of a competition between twenty-four dogs, for which the individual stake was £1 5s each, and the winning owner also received a prize of a tea service, ‘consisting of teapot, sugar box and cream ewer’, worth £30.¹⁰⁰ In March 1848 the newly established Rathregan Coursing Club’s first meet was watched by ‘a numerous crowd of spectators’, on the three-thousand-acre estate of its founder, Matthew Corbally, the Liberal MP for Meath.¹⁰¹ A coursing club was formed in the same year in Fermanagh, with membership open to ‘the noblemen and gentlemen’ of Fermanagh and the surrounding counties. The *Enniskillen Chronicle* welcomed this development, explaining rather verbosely that ‘such societies tend materially to promote the spread of that convivial harmony, and mutual good feeling which rivets [sic] the bonds of society in one combined phalanx of unanimity and concord’, by which ‘civilisation flourishes and produces the sweet fruits, which elevate society in this county to such a preeminent position above the less favoured districts of the globe’.¹⁰² In the neighbouring county of Cavan, the recently formed Bailieborough Coursing Club held its first meet on 17 January 1849 at Drumbannon Gate, the seat of Sir John Young MP.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ One possible explanation is that coursing represented a cheaper sporting alternative to fox hunting or stag hunting for landlords during the Famine. I am indebted to one of the anonymous referees for this suggestion.

¹⁰⁰ *Freeman’s Journal*, 1 February 1847.

¹⁰¹ *Dublin Evening Packet*, 23 March 1848; *Freeman’s Journal*, 25 March 1848.

¹⁰² *Enniskillen Chronicle*, 4 May 1848.

¹⁰³ *Newry Examiner*, 24 January 1849.

Cavan also hosted a number of sailing and rowing regattas during the Famine years, the largest of which were held at Virginia.¹⁰⁴ Following the 1846 regatta on Lough Ramor, ‘its romantic shores fringed by thousands of the peasantry, standing, in their anxiety to cheer their favorites in the different aquatic contests, up to their knees in water’, a banquet and ball was held at the Headfort Arms in Kells. The marquis of Headfort astonished the revellers by stating that, while they feasted, the starving labourers of the local area were on his mind, and he called on his audience to remember that it was on their shoulders, ‘far more than upon the Government, the appalling responsibility rests of carrying this part of the country safe through the social revolution that inevitably awaits it’.¹⁰⁵ At the following year’s regatta the attendance of the nobility and gentry was not so large as usual, ‘owing partly to the calls on their time from relief committees, fever hospitals, and other melancholy circumstances arising out of the late distressing famine’, but there was still ‘a large concourse of the respectable farmers and yeomanry’ of Cavan and Meath present, thronging the quay ‘where the itinerant victuallers erected their tents and drove throughout the day a brisk trade in pop, green apples, and gingerbread’.¹⁰⁶ Regattas evidently had a strong appeal for many Cavan people, as suggested by the *Anglo-Celt*’s description of the attendance at a Belturbet regatta in July 1849:

Belturbet disgorged its hundreds, while the surrounding towns furnished no stinted quota. The Cavan folk, particularly, mustered in great force and in excellent trim. It was a cheering sight to see so many Cavanaughs together in Belturbet. From the J.P. to little Bobby Mills, we did not miss

¹⁰⁴ *Anglo-Celt*, 11 September 1846, 27 August 1847, 1 September 1848, 7 August 1849.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 11 September 1846.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 27 August 1847.

one who could drive, ride, or scramble there in any way.... The blushing maid in her teens, and her staler sister – the whiskered man and the sallow-faced shop-boy, who puffed away with might and main at a twisted piece of brown cabbage, which he facetiously termed a cigar – the would-be ‘rowdie’, mimicking the careless *abandonne* of the gentleman, and the merry little street-runner – all were there.¹⁰⁷

Other important inland aquatic sporting meets included the Lough Derg regatta on the Shannon, a fashionable affair which attracted thousands to witness the sailing contests;¹⁰⁸ the Athlone regatta, held on the Shannon or on Lee Ree, which attracted large attendances of spectators from all classes;¹⁰⁹ and the Lough Erne regatta, another annual event that drew considerable numbers of spectators during the Famine years from all over Ireland, providing a significant boost to Enniskillen traders.¹¹⁰ Large crowds of people from all classes attended the Lough Muck regatta in Tyrone in September 1847, ‘aquatics on such an extensive scale being rather a novel species of amusement in this inland and unmaritime district’, and ‘the utmost feeling of sociability and cheerful good humour appeared to prevail universally’.¹¹¹ Amongst the maritime regattas that were held in this period were large-scale meetings at Kingstown and Dalkey,¹¹² and at Belfast Lough,¹¹³ all of which included races for local fishermen’s boats and gentlemen’s rowing boats and yachts. The Belfast Lough

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 6 July 1849.

¹⁰⁸ *Limerick Chronicle*, 29 July 1846; *Nenagh Guardian*, 7 August 1847; *Southern Reporter*, 2 September 1848; *Dublin Evening Mail*, 6 September 1848, 19 September 1849.

¹⁰⁹ *Athlone Sentinel*, 7 August 1846, 18 August 1848.

¹¹⁰ *Enniskillen Chronicle*, 6 August 1846, 2 September 1847, 21 August 1848, 6 September 1849; *Saunders’s News-Letter*, 8 August 1846.

¹¹¹ *Tyrone Constitution*, 10 September 1847.

¹¹² *Freeman’s Journal*, 3 July 1846, 13 September 1847, 5 July 1848, 3 August 1849.

¹¹³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 4 August 1848, 17 August 1849.

regatta in August 1849 included one particular race which ‘excited a considerable degree of interest’ from the crowd: this was a three-boat race for a winning prize of £1 10s., between female crews, who ‘rowed away with regular Amazonian energy, ludicrously taunting each other throughout the whole race’.¹¹⁴

Regattas were not only a source of amusement, but they also provided employment to considerable numbers of boatmen and others who helped in the running of these events. In Cork, the Famine’s impact forced many of the gentry to sell their yachts, and the Royal Cork Yacht Club held no regattas between 1846 and 1849.¹¹⁵ Some regattas were held with the main purpose of aiding local boatmen and fishermen during the Famine. A regatta was held with this charitable aim at Blackrock, County Cork, in August 1846, with the proceedings being considerably enlivened by the accidental explosion of the store of fireworks that were meant to terminate the day’s entertainment.¹¹⁶ In September 1846 Mr Humphreys, ‘the indefatigable and enterprising proprietor of the Carlingford Hotel’, organised a regatta on Carlingford Lough in aid of the ‘poor fishermen’ of the locality, an event that was attended by at least three thousand people.¹¹⁷ In September 1847 a combined regatta and stag hunt was held at the lakes of Killarney to raise funds for the local boatmen, who were described by the *Tralee Chronicle* as ‘a very meritorious body, who have suffered much by the visitation of the last year, and the absence of visitors during the spring and summer months’. The claim that the boatmen had ‘given to the cause of Total Abstinence some of its most steadfast and meritorious adherents’ undoubtedly made

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18 August 1849.

¹¹⁵ *Kerry Evening Post*, 12 June 1847; A. St Leger, *A History of the Royal Cork Yacht Club* (Crosshaven, 2005), pp. 91, 108.

¹¹⁶ Several people were injured in the incident: *Kerry Evening Post*, 29 August 1846.

¹¹⁷ *Armagh Guardian*, 6 October 1846.

them appear even worthier objects of charity.¹¹⁸ In the following month a well-attended regatta was organised at Tralee by ‘half a dozen benevolent gentlemen’ to aid the local fishermen ‘who are suffering the greatest distress – thus combining the most seasonable benevolence with innocent recreation’, according to the *Kerry Evening Post*.¹¹⁹ Some regattas were even conceived as diversions from the suffering that was taking place during the Famine, such as the Glandore regatta in August 1846, which, according to the *Cork Constitution*, was ‘calculated to effect much good, and confer a benefit to the poorer classes, whose drooping spirits require in a season of such deep distress some recreation’,¹²⁰ and the aquatic sports organised in September 1849 by ‘[t]he gentlemen’ of Dungarvan ‘for the amusement of the inhabitants generally, to cheer up the drooping and desponding spirits of a people surrounded by every sort of epidemic disease, and most particularly by the ravages which cholera has made’.¹²¹ The supposed therapeutic qualities of aquatic sport were highlighted by the *Banner of Ulster*’s coverage of the Belfast Lough regatta in August 1848, when it claimed that ‘boat racing is, of all out-door recreations or amusements, the most innocent and enlivening, as well as the most healthful’.¹²²

Cricket was perhaps the only other sport that contemporaries would have viewed in a similar light, as suggested by the *Coleraine Chronicle*’s wish to see the ‘manly’ sport of cricket ‘become universal’, and that, whilst playing cricket, ‘we shall bowl out intoxication, stump profligacy, block lying and swearing, put a long stop to gambling, and catch out swindling and dishonesty’.¹²³ The *Cork Examiner* was probably being equally as unrealistic about cricket’s power to change behaviour for

¹¹⁸ *Tralee Chronicle*, 4 September 1847.

¹¹⁹ *Kerry Evening Post*, 11 September 1847, 22 September 1847.

¹²⁰ Undated extract from *Cork Constitution*, in *Cork Examiner*, 7 September 1846.

¹²¹ *Waterford News*, 7 September 1849.

¹²² *Banner of Ulster*, 4 August 1848.

¹²³ *Coleraine Chronicle*, 14 August 1848.

the better when, in its report on the Bandon Cricket Club's annual dinner in May 1846, it expressed the hope that Ireland's political and sectarian divisions would be overcome as a result of young gentlemen of different creeds and political persuasions playing cricket against one another.¹²⁴ During the Famine years, cricket was far from being the enormously popular sport in Ireland that it became in the mid- and late Victorian periods,¹²⁵ but there were some signs of a modest growth in its popularity, with new clubs being formed in Lahinch and Lurgan in 1846,¹²⁶ Kingstown in 1848,¹²⁷ and Omagh, Castlebellingham, Downpatrick, Castlecomer, Clonmel and Nenagh in 1849.¹²⁸ Most cricketers were civilians, but, as was the case before the Famine, teams from army garrisons played a central role in sustaining the sport and they frequently played matches against civilian teams. The keenest rivalry between civilian and army teams was that between Lord Clancarty's Ballinasloe side and the officers stationed at Athlone: in July 1849, the deciding match of a series of games between the two teams was watched by a crowd of no fewer than five thousand to six thousand spectators, with victory going to the military cricketers.¹²⁹

III

Although it is not comprehensive, the preceding overview goes some way towards illustrating the popularity of sport events with Irish people of all classes during the Famine. Were there no negative voices raised against people's enjoyment of sport during the crisis? There were certainly critics of aspects of Famine-era sport, but these

¹²⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 20 May 1846.

¹²⁵ Bracken, *Cricket in Tipperary*, pp. 20-80; Tom Hunt, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath* (Cork, 2007), pp. 113-139; Rouse, *Sport*, pp. 118-23.

¹²⁶ *Limerick Reporter*, 25 August 1846; *Northern Whig*, 1 September 1846.

¹²⁷ Rouse, *Sport*, p. 122.

¹²⁸ *Tyrone Constitution*, 6 April 1849; *Newry Examiner*, 2 June 1849; *Downpatrick Recorder*, 22 September 1849; Siggins, *Green Days*, p. 20.

¹²⁹ *Athlone Sentinel*, 1 August 1849; Kelly, *Sport*, p. 329.

commentators were not usually exercised by moral outrage at sports events being held for enjoyment while large numbers of people died or endured miserable existences as a result of the Famine. It is striking how little the Famine features as a catalyst for most of these critics' concerns, although it was not an entirely absent factor for some detractors, as we shall see. One searches almost in vain for evidence of providentialists linking people's enjoying themselves at sports with the Famine as an instrument of God's wrath, with Reverend James Silcock of Kilmood's denunciation of the organisers' decision to hold the Bellewstown races in 1847 providing a rare example.¹³⁰ Even the *Nation* newspaper mostly refrained from attacks on the enjoyment of sports during the Famine. It published several accounts of sports events, especially horse races at the Curragh, without negative comment, or published advertisements about them.¹³¹ The closest it came to a condemnatory view of Famine-era sport came in April 1847, when, after highlighting the fact that Dublin's theatres and Lucan racecourse remained popular venues 'while hundreds are dying daily in the south', it stated that:

We do not say that those who can enjoy themselves in Ireland should not do so, even in this awful season. It would be vain to give such advice. But

¹³⁰ *Downpatrick Recorder*, 3 July 1847. On 8 October 1849, the *Armagh Guardian* suggested that there was a direct link between the holding of horse races by 'some sporting gents' at Senabane racecourse, in Roscommon, in September 1849, and the subsequent outbreak of cholera in the district, which claimed the lives of some sixty-nine people. The newspaper noted that 'These races had been abandoned for some years, and, as if to show the Divine displeasure, on that day [the day on which the races were held] we had the first cases of cholera, all of which proved fatal'. For a full discussion of providentialism and the Famine, see P. Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society 1843-1850* (Dublin, 1999).

¹³¹ For some examples, see *Nation*, 26 June 1847, 4 September 1847, 16 October 1847, 24 June 1848.

we do say, if there is so much money for tinsel and feathers in Dublin, there ought to be more for the starving and dying.¹³²

This was hardly a withering observation on the fact that sports continued while large numbers of people were dying.

There were other negative comments on aspects of Irish sport during the Famine. Daniel O’Connell, a keen hunter of hares with his beagle pack,¹³³ often assisted by a large retinue of friends and tenants – an English observer of one such hunt at Derrynane in October 1845 was ‘irresistibly reminded of some graphic sketch in the novels of Walter Scott¹³⁴ – was denounced viciously for continuing to keep his beagles while his tenants allegedly starved.¹³⁵ These were not general attacks on hunting with beagles or other dogs, however, but should be seen as highly personalised and political attacks on O’Connell only, of a piece with similar attacks in the anti-Connellite press.¹³⁶ A rather different view was taken in this period of the sport of hurling, which was generally viewed by the moral arbiters of Irish society with undisguised hostility as an occasion of violence and disorder. This had nothing specifically to do with its being played during a period of famine, but was simply a continuation of a campaign of denunciation and suppression by magistrates, clergy and police in the pre-Famine period.¹³⁷ Their hostile views of the sport would

¹³² *Ibid.*, 10 April 1847.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 20 September 1845; *Freeman’s Journal*, 19 January 1846.

¹³⁴ W. Howitt, ‘Visit to Mr O’Connell at Derrynane’, *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 13 (1846), p. 8.

¹³⁵ *Newry Telegraph*, 10 October 1846; *Dublin Evening Mail*, 12 October 1846.

¹³⁶ Leslie A. Williams, *Daniel O’Connell, the British Press and the Irish Famine: Killing Remarks* (Aldershot, 2003).

¹³⁷ Kelly, *Sport*, pp. 266-68. Hurling featured in the press only when players were killed or seriously injured whilst playing the game (*Limerick Chronicle*, 31 December 1845, 18 March 1846, *Tipperary Free Press*, 31 January 1846, *Clare Journal*, 2 March 1846, *Limerick Reporter*, 3 March 1846, *Galway Vindicator*, 29 August 1846,

probably have been reinforced by such episodes as the faction fight at Banagher in October 1847 between the Steel Maddens of Clonfert and men from Lusmagh, which arose partly from an attempt to attack the Lusmagh men at a hurling match in Clonfert,¹³⁸ and the vicious fight that ensued in February 1849 between a crowd of young men playing hurling near the railway in Limerick and the local constabulary, after the latter tried to prevent the hurlers from playing their game.¹³⁹ Cockfighting, like hurling in the pre-Famine period, had undergone a trajectory from being a sport that was patronised by many members of the rural landed elite, to an activity that by the 1840s was considered beyond the pale of respectability.¹⁴⁰ Declared an illegal activity under the 1835 Cruelty to Animals Act, cockfighting did not disappear immediately: during the Famine, mains that attracted large crowds of enthusiasts and led to betting on a large scale, as well as to scenes of dissipation, were held in several locations, mainly in Ulster and Munster, and were roundly condemned in the press.¹⁴¹ That these mains were held during a time of famine was not a principal factor in the condemnation that they attracted. Cockfighting's cruelty was a much more pressing concern for the moralists that condemned that particular sport; the perceived cruelty involved in horse racing was also a main factor behind the unsuccessful attempts of

King's County Chronicle, 4 April 1849), when players were fined for playing such a dangerous game in towns and cities (*Freeman's Journal*, 3 December 1845, 20 October 1847) or when urban authorities urged its suppression (*Galway Vindicator*, 9 October 1847). The true picture regarding the extent to which hurling was played during the Famine years will never be known, therefore, as neither the press nor those charged with keeping law and order commented on hurling matches that passed off peacefully. The Famine did not kill off the game: it continued to be played into the 1850s and 1860s, despite increased opposition to it on the part of the press, the Catholic clergy and the police: L. P. Ó Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomána* (Dublin, 1980), pp. 586-7; Rouse, *Sport*, pp. 93-7.

¹³⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 29 October 1847.

¹³⁹ *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 21 February 1849.

¹⁴⁰ Kelly, *Sport*, pp. 192-206.

¹⁴¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 May 1846; *Cork Examiner*, 27 May 1846, 13 July 1846, 18 April 1849; *Saunders's News-Letter*, 12 August 1846; *Waterford News*, 1 June 1849; *Coleraine Chronicle*, 9 June 1849.

the Belfast Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to stop the lord lieutenant's household budget from funding plate prizes for Irish steeplechases.¹⁴² The sport of shooting at tethered ducks, geese and other domestic fowl on Christmas Day, which was popular in parts of Ulster, was also condemned by the *Londonderry Sentinel* 'on account of its cruelty, its debasing and brutalizing tendency, and the intemperance and dissipation which usually accompany it'.¹⁴³

One of the few Irish critics who pointed to the immorality of sport continuing whilst people suffered during the Famine was the Catholic curate of Mallow, Fr Justin McCarthy. His first protest was made in a letter – which was published in the press – to Prime Minister Robert Peel in May 1846, in which he claimed that a number of local landlords made niggardly contributions to the Mallow relief committee, but nevertheless fed their greyhounds and hunting dogs on large daily amounts of oatmeal, milk and fresh beef or mutton.¹⁴⁴ In the following year he claimed in a letter to Sir Benjamin Hall, the Liberal MP for Marylebone, that a Rahan landlord named Courtenay contributed nothing to the local relief committee, but still fed his hunting dogs with meal and milk so luxuriously that they were envied by the local poor. McCarthy's claims were raised in parliament and were partly the catalyst for shocked commentary in British newspapers that Irish landlords should continue to hunt while the rural poor starved.¹⁴⁵ Although some observers challenged the accuracy of some of the details in McCarthy's allegations, there is no doubting the substance of his claims, that many Irish landlords continued to spend large sums of money on hunting and coursing despite the prevailing famine conditions, although, as

¹⁴² *Belfast News-Letter*, 30 March 1847, 8 March 1848, 27 April 1849.

¹⁴³ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 2 January 1847.

¹⁴⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 13 May 1846.

¹⁴⁵ *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, third series, vol. 90, 12 March 1847, col. 1314, and 15 March 1847, col. 1379; *Morning Register*, 13 March 1847.

we have seen, they were far from being the only Irish enthusiasts for sport during the Famine. Their continued indulgence in field sports not only seemed heartless but possibly also helped to increase British political and popular antipathy towards the apparently irresponsible Irish landlord class, who were increasingly blamed for the disastrous situation in Ireland as the Famine wore on.¹⁴⁶ This antipathy manifested itself partly in British ‘donor fatigue’,¹⁴⁷ and was also a factor in Prime Minister Russell’s decision to shift the main burden of famine relief onto the Irish ratepayer, especially the landlords.¹⁴⁸ The stock figure of the Irish landlord – or, more accurately, the Southern and Western Irish landlord – who continued to engage in field sports rather than provide for his famine-stricken tenants, also featured in Ulster Protestants’ failed campaign against the rate-in-aid scheme of 1849, with opponents arguing against the unfairness of Ulster ratepayers having to subsidise more impoverished poor law unions elsewhere, whose landlords allegedly preferred hunting foxes to improving conditions for their tenants.¹⁴⁹

IV

While Irish criticism of Irish sports activity during the Famine was muted during the Famine years themselves, it disappeared entirely in the post-Famine period. The silence on this subject extends to folk or popular memory of the Famine, which includes no stories of people engaging in sports or enjoying themselves at sports events, although these would appear to ‘belong’ in the narrative of people dying in the midst of plenty, one of the many strands in the complex weave of Famine folk

¹⁴⁶ J. S. Donnelly, Jr., *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (Stroud, 2001), pp. 92-7.

¹⁴⁷ C. Ó Gráda, *The Great Irish Famine* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 50; C. Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology and Rebellion* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 85-8.

¹⁴⁸ P. Gray, ‘Ideology and the Famine’ in Póirtéir (ed.), *Famine*, pp. 97, 99-100; E. Delaney, *The Curse of Reason: The Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 2012), pp. 171-2.

¹⁴⁹ *Dublin Evening Mail*, 5 March 1849.

memory.¹⁵⁰ The heartless landlord, especially the heartless evicting landlord, features frequently in Famine folklore,¹⁵¹ and during the Land War the leaders of the land agitation promoted a simplistic propaganda image of the ‘exterminating’ Famine landlord,¹⁵² but it is noteworthy that in neither set of depictions does the landlord’s villainous activity include hunting foxes or feeding his hounds on oatmeal or fresh meat whilst ignoring his starving tenants.¹⁵³ It is not clear why this should be the case, but one possibility is that highlighting landlords’ sports activities, such as hunting foxes, would have drawn unwelcome attention to the sports activities of a large proportion of the general population.¹⁵⁴ If the Famine may be viewed as a grim contest involving winners and losers in Irish society,¹⁵⁵ those who survived it and who helped to shape the post-Famine narrative of the crisis were undoubtedly the contest’s ‘winners’; many of these had enjoyed themselves at horse races, regattas and other sports meetings while hundreds of thousands of their fellows died or emigrated in

¹⁵⁰ For the multilayered complexity of folk memory of the Famine, see Ó Gráda, *Black '47*, pp. 194-225; N. Ó Ciosáin, ‘Famine Memory and the Popular Representation of Scarcity’, in I. McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 95-117.

¹⁵¹ C. Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes* (Dublin, 1995), pp. 199-202, 230-43.

¹⁵² J. Lee, ‘The Famine as History’, in C. Ó Gráda (ed.), *Famine 150: Commemorative Lecture Series* (Dublin, 1997), p. 173; L. P. Curtis, Jr., ‘Demonising the Irish Landlords since the Famine’, in B. King (ed.), *Defying the Law of the Land: Agrarian Radicals in Irish History* (Dublin, 2013), pp. 22-6.

¹⁵³ Participants in the Land League’s campaign against fox hunting during the Land War of the early 1880s made no mention of the fox hunts that took place during the Famine years: L. P. Curtis, Jr., ‘Stopping the Hunt, 1881-1882: An Aspect of the Irish Land War’, in C. H. E. Philbin (ed.), *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 349-402; J. W. H. Carter, *The Land War and Its Leaders in Queen’s County, 1879-82* (Portlaoise, 1994), pp. 226-33.

¹⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that Canon John O’Rourke, writing some thirty years after the Great Famine started, gave a scathing account of how the ‘gentlemen’ of County Galway did not suspend their race meeting during the famine of 1741 but merely relocated it from near Galway town to Terlogh Gurranes, near Tuam. The clergyman did not include any negative comment on landlords’ sports activity during the more recent catastrophe of the 1840s: J. O’Rourke, *The History of the Great Irish Famine of 1847, with Notes of Earlier Irish Famines* (Dublin, 1902, third edition), pp. 22-3.

¹⁵⁵ Ó Gráda frames part of his discussion of the Famine’s impact in these terms: Ó Gráda, *Black '47*, pp. 194-225.

miserable circumstances. While there is scant evidence that they felt either guilt or shame whilst attending these sports events when they were taking place, it is possible that such feelings emerged when they reflected on the Famine period after it was over,¹⁵⁶ and that these feelings contributed towards collective amnesia or collective silence on the subject. Whatever the reasons for these developments may be, the subject of sport during the Famine has remained a hidden one, until now. It is hoped that in future a more complete understanding of Irish life during the Famine will emerge, one that takes into account more fully the sports and recreational activities of the era's 'winners', as well as the suffering of those at the bottom of the social ladder. While the Famine was indeed a national disaster, insofar as all regions of the country were detrimentally affected by it to varying degrees, it has long been established that the Famine's worst effects were experienced most by those on the bottom of the social ladder, especially the poor who lived to the west of an imaginary line drawn roughly from the cities of Derry to Cork. While many Irish people who were not in immediate danger of succumbing to death or disease or of having to enter the workhouse or seek other forms of relief, responded to the Famine by undertaking humanitarian relief work,¹⁵⁷ many others, from all classes, enjoyed themselves at horse races, regattas, cricket matches and other sports events. An examination of the sports history of the Famine period shows how, for many Irish people, 'normal' life continued undisturbed, in spite of the catastrophe that overwhelmed a large proportion of the population.

¹⁵⁶ R. V. Comerford, 'Grievance, Scourge or Shame? The Complexity of Attitudes to Ireland's Great Famine', in R. V. Comerford, L. Janssen and C. Noack (eds), *Holodomor and Gorta Mór: Histories, Memories and Representations of Famine in Ukraine and Ireland* (London, 2014), p. 51.

¹⁵⁷ H. E. Hatton, *The Largest Amount of Good: Quaker relief in Ireland 1654-1921* (Kingston, Ontario), pp. 86-107, 117-222.