CHAPTER 20

'Every Interest Being Catered For': Clubs, Societies and Associational Life in Kerry, 1880–1914

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By the nineteenth century, clubs, societies and other forms of associational culture had become a vital part of the social and political life of Britain and Ireland.[1] In Britain, the emergence of this culture was a response to the issues posed by the rapid changes occurring in British life as it moved from being a predominately agricultural to a mass industrial society.[2] However, it was also dependent on a number of key developments, such as the extraordinary growth of urbanisation, improving living standards, increased social and physical mobility and the arrival of mass communication aided by the expansion of the railways and the rise of a national and provincial press.[3] At a more human level, the advent of associational culture was facilitated by the desire for sociability and the need for like-minded individuals to converse and interact around topics and activities of mutual interest. In the process they often cultivated some form of social exclusivity.[4] Although the defining characteristics of such organisations were minimal, voluntary participation in clubs and societies which had a set of rules, a declared purpose and a membership marked by some formal act of joining and paying a fee, were usual.[5] These evolving networks of clubs and societies were overwhelmingly male-dominated and primarily an urban phenomenon, spreading from large cities to provincial towns.[6] In contrast to Britain, Ireland's rural society, its economic underdevelopment and the small size of its predominately Protestant elite conspired to ensure that outside Dublin and Belfast, the emergence of a similar culture of association was sluggish.[7] Nevertheless, broader developments in Irish life, which had been evolving since the Great Famine, meant that by the last decades of the nineteenth century, Ireland would also develop a vibrant mosaic of associational culture.

One of the most vital changes which underpinned this was the advance of mass literacy. This was expedited by the creation of the national school system in 1831.

By 1901, 750,000 children were in primary education in Ireland with 35,306 more attending secondary or 'superior' schools.[8] The impact of the opening of State-funded education was dramatic and in the fifty years before 1914, illiteracy levels fell from 61% to 11%.[9] Various acts of Parliament which allocated State funding for public libraries and abolished newspapers taxes in 1855, further encouraged the development of a mass reading society.[10] The rapid expansion of the Irish rail network (growing from 400 to over 3,000 miles between 1850 and 1894) and the introduction of the telegraph helped to cement this process.[11] Increasing levels of education stimulated a burgeoning desire among Ireland's rising Catholic middle classes for social advancement and to contest the traditional economic and political dominance of the small Protestant elite in the country.[12] In Kerry, one manifestation of this would be the number of societies and organisations now emerging to advocate for various political, social and cultural issues. This essay will examine the nature and incidence of associational culture in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Kerry and how it was influenced by the day-to-day realities of the county's social, economic and political circumstances.

Anglo-Irish dominance of associational culture in Kerry

In 1901 Kerry was an overwhelmingly rural and economically depressed county, with a declining population which was heavily dependent on agriculture for its survival. Its population of 165,726 (96.9% Catholic and 2.7% Protestant) represented a 7.5% reduction on the 1891 figure.[13] Mass emigration as a result of Kerry's economic underdevelopment accounted for much of this depopulation and the 1901 Census returns noted that nearly 39,000 people had left the county in the 1890s alone.[14] Kerry had little industry and agriculture accounted for 71.5% of the male workforce.[15] Meanwhile only around 8.4% of its working population was employed in middle-class occupations associated with the professions and commercial life. Despite such constraints, Kerry experienced many of the conditions which would stimulate the development of an array of clubs, societies and associational bodies. In the decades after the Great Famine, Ireland went through an extensive process of urbanisation and by 1914, more than a third of its population lived in urban areas of over 2,000 people.[16] This trend was reflected in Tralee and Killarney, the populations of which rose by 11.2% and 4.9%, respectively, between 1891 and 1911.[17] By 1901, nearly 75% of the Kerry population was literate and 729 teachers taught in the 374 national and five secondary schools in the county.[18] Moreover, despite the low incomes earned by the majority of Kerry's inhabitants and the economic hardships associated with Irish agriculture, the fifty years before 1901 saw wages in the sector double in actual terms.[19] As a result, Kerry had a growing urban population which was increasingly educated and enjoying greater levels of disposable income than previous generations.

Yet on the surface Kerry society seemed to be dominated by a mostly Protestant elite of landed gentry as well as a cohort of wealthy business families. As late as 1876, a mere twenty-six landlords possessed over three-fifths of total land area in the county.[20] It was around such luminaries that much of the social and sporting life of Kerry orbited. The patronage of horse racing, organised hunts and formal gatherings surrounding race meetings and hunting clubs were all conspicuous methods of displaying the power and privilege of the local gentry.[21] The Kerry Hunt Club held regular meetings in the rooms of the County Club in Tralee which served as the epicentre of much of the social calendar of Kerry's gentry.[22] Within the walls of such institutions, the tight social bond that existed in rural Ireland between the landed elite and the officer classes of the British military was clear. Thus in September 1883, the County Club hosted a grand ball for the officers of the 80th South Staffordshire Regiment as it departed Tralee barracks.[23] Indeed, such was the reputation of the County Club that following the 1886 appointment of Sir Redvers Buller to lead a special task force of police to eradicate continuing land agitation in Kerry, the Kerry MP, Edward Harrington, mockingly inquired in Parliament if Buller, 'like all other magnates sent down to Kerry, would simply take up residence in the County Club' and get all his information from landlords who frequented it.[24] Another wag described it as 'the nursery of all the Toryism and Shoneenism in the county'.[25] Landlords were likewise prominent in the committees which oversaw local regattas, a popular new addition to the social calendar of nineteenth-century Kerry. Annual regattas were recorded in Cahersiveen, Dingle, Fenit, Kenmare, Killorglin, Spa and Valentia but undoubtedly the largest took place on the Lower Lake in Killarney each Summer. The 1887 event was a particular success, being patronised by the Earl of Kenmare and Lord Castlerosse, and organised by a committee headed by another prominent landowner, Major Francis Hewson. Huge crowds converged on the lake shore while others made their way by boat to Innisfallen Island to witness the competitive races between crews representing the Ahagdoe and Loch Leine boat clubs (which Lord Kenmare also patronised).[26]

By the 1880s, an elite nexus of landed and business wealth was also noticeable in clubs promoting the new codified sports which were spreading from mainland Britain. In the decades before the emergence of the GAA, cricket was perhaps the most popular field game in Ireland.[27] In Kerry, there were at least fourteen cricket teams active between 1885 and 1896.[28] The local gentry, along with the professional and military classes within Kerry's largest towns, were prominent backers of the game.[29] Colonel Denny lined out for the County Kerry Amateur Athletic and Cricket Club (CKAACC) team based in Tralee while the Killarney Cricket Club had Lord Kenmare as a benefactor and rented their grounds from him.[30] The CKAACC was also the principal athletic club in Kerry. Its governing committee consisted of some of the wealthiest men in Tralee and included three

members of the Denny family, Henry Donovan and Robert McCowen (two of the principal general merchants in the town), R.T. Dobson (whose family ran a successful agricultural suppliers firm) and Edward Harrington, owner of the *Kerry Sentinel* newspaper.[31] From the 1880s, the formal athletic meetings organised by such clubs had begun to effectively displace the traditional sports gatherings which for centuries had been a common part of the landscape of rural Ireland. By 1884, the CKAACC held one of the largest and most high-profile annual athletic meetings in Ireland. Yet such events were run under English rules which purposely excluded working-class participation, thus ensuring that they remained the domain of the gentleman amateur athlete.[32] For the moment, the working classes who crowded into the Tralee Sports Ground could only admire from afar men of means like Dobson who starred in these athletic meetings.[33]

The eclipse of the elite

Nevertheless, a social revolution was taking place across Ireland, one which would ultimately break the power of the landlords in Irish life. The dramatic effects of this 'Land War', documented elsewhere in this volume, would be felt at every level of local society. The Land League and National League movements which spread into the county represented perhaps the first mass engagement with a form of associational culture in Kerry. The forces unleashed over the land question fundamentally altered the eco-system and traditional leadership patterns of rural Ireland. However, throughout the Land War, widespread intimidation and violence was directed not only at landlords but at aspects of their associational and social activity as well. For example, a nationwide 'stop the hunt' campaign was orchestrated by the Land League during the winter of 1881-2 which in Kerry forced the disbandment of the popular Kilcoleman Hunt.[34] During the National League's agitation, the Listowel branch initiated a successful boycott of the Listowel Races in 1886 in response to the appointment of local land agents as stewards for the event.[35] Such action reflected a polarisation of the relationship between the landlord classes and the peasantry. A contemporary Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) report on Kerry remarked how the people 'seem to dislike everyone who they think is of the "landlord class" and the old civility and ... courtesy has effectively died out, especially with the younger men'.[36] In such a rural society, the bitterness and violence which erupted over the land issue deepened the chasm between both societal groups and would lead to an inexorable retreat of the landed gentry from their role as patrons of social and associational life in the county over the next three decades.

Undeniably, one instance of the gentry's disengagement was seen in their increasing promotion of golf, a game very much confined to Kerry's social elite.[37] In the aftermath of the land agitation, the sport's popularity exploded and Kerry boasted eight of the 103 golf clubs which had been established nationally by the

end of the 1890s.[38] The Killarney Golf Club, formed in 1893, had Lord Kenmare as its patron and president while its first captain was a local bank manager, Walter Butler.[39] Therefore, the exponents of the game in Kerry formed an intimate, albeit highly influential circle.[40] The gentry's sponsorship of this socially exclusive game represented a conscious attempt to preserve and cultivate their standing in the community, at the very time their social ascendancy was coming to an end.[41] Concurrently, sports like rugby and hockey had become popular among Kerry's urban middle classes.[42] Within fifteen years of the formation of the Tralee Rugby Club in 1882, the game had spread to every other major town, often by university students returning from their studies.[43] Indeed rugby's mushrooming popularity was such that Tralee played host to the inter-provincial test between Munster and Leinster in January 1900.[44] Like rugby, hockey was promoted by the well-to-do urbanites of the county. A meeting in Henry Donovan's business establishment formed the Tralee Hockey club in 1895 with Donovan, Dr William Hayes and S.A. Waters, the town's senior RIC officer, elected to its governing committee.[45] Hockey was also one of the first examples of competitive sport in Kerry in which women participated and a match in February 1899 pitted the Kenmare and Tralee ladies teams against each other.[46]

A new form of club association also emerged around the introduction of the bicycle which brought a transport revolution to late-nineteenth century Ireland. In particular, the development of the pneumatic-tired safety bicycle opened the world of cycling to the Irish middle classes.[47] From 1886, clubs were established in Tralee, Dingle, Milltown, Cahersiveen and Killarney. By 1896, the Tralee Bicycle Club had 110 members who paid a 2s 6d subscription fee. The only stipulations to joining were that all members should live within five miles of the town, should conduct themselves in a decorous manner and not drink to excess on club outings![48] Most clubs offered a mix of organised races, sedate day outings and other entertainment.[49] The Tralee club paid to renovate the bike track in the Tralee Sports Ground for race meetings and also organised events like tennis parties, with one such gathering in 1891 being entertained by the band of the 'famous traveling medicine vendor', 'Dr Squash'.[50] Another social attraction was the regular day cycles, usually taking in nearby scenic or historical sites with cycling groups decked out in the 'stylish' club uniform of a fawn coloured cap and badge.[51] However, the increasing participation of women in organised cycling drew concerns from the local press. One writer feared that the 'rational dress' women now wore on the saddle combined with their habit of 'drinking lemonade as men do' while resting, contributed to the 'very dangerous risk of taking a chill … Cold drinks may be very tempting to women who are hot, but they are decidedly dangerous!'[52] In any event, each of these new forms of sport and leisure added to Kerry's growing patchwork of clubs and societies. Yet, as was the case with bicycle clubs, the prohibitive costs of equipment and membership fees

ensured that they usually remained the preserve of all but the better paid and wealthy in society. However, with the arrival of the GAA a revolution in Irish sport, comparable to the greater social upheaval over the land question, was already underway.

The emergence and development of the GAA in Kerry

Of all the organisations and societies which now emerged in Kerry, none became such a pervasive presence as the GAA. The Association's establishment was the harbinger for the democratisation of modern, codified and competitive sport in Ireland. Previously the organised games which had been introduced from Britain had struggled to make any real impact outside Ireland's urban-based upper and middle classes. Indeed, before the foundation of the GAA in 1884, organised sport on this island was mostly controlled by, as well as managed in the interests of, a social and sectarian elite.[53] The Association's establishment and development dramatically altered this situation. For the first time, the majority of ordinary Irish people had access to competitive games and many were given their first opportunity to administer clubs affiliated to the new sports body. Thus, the establishment of the GAA signified a fundamental shift in sports participation in Ireland.[54] Indeed, an attempt to reform Irish athletics was central to Michael Cusack's motivation in founding the Association.[55] The incentive behind the inaugural GAA event held in Kerry was Cusack's desire to wrestle back control of popular athletics in Ireland from those bodies promoting both elitism and as Cusack saw it, the spread of British cultural imperialism.[56] Cusack choose Tralee to be the venue for the first great demonstration of the GAA's power. On 17 June 1885, he staged a major athletics event on the same day the CKAACC was hosting their popular annual athletics' meeting.[57] In preparation for this, Cusack courted the support of prominent local nationalist figures who were active in both the National League and the secret, revolutionary, Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB, such as William Moore Stack, Thomas Slattery and Maurice Moynihan.[58] At a meeting in the town's National League rooms on 31 May, the first branch of the Association in Kerry was formed.[59] Although the Tralee GAA sports proved to be a huge success, completely overshadowing the CKAACC's event, in its aftermath the Association in Kerry remained stillborn.[60]

Only in late-1887 were serious attempts made to revive the GAA in Kerry. In November Maurice Moynihan, having received backing from IRB elements which had taken control of the Association's ruling Central Executive, re-established the Tralee Mitchels branch.[61] In 1888, exhibition games under GAA rules in hurling and Gaelic football were staged across the county among a growing number of emerging clubs. Several factors lay behind the rapid expansion of the GAA's club network in Kerry. Firstly, the organisational structure of local National League branches served as a template. Reports from

GAA club meetings in the local press resembled League gatherings in structure, with committees established and resolutions proposed and adopted.[62] There was also a widespread cross membership between the organisations. Six of the men who founded Killarney's Dr Crokes were members of the town's National League and James O'Leary and J.D. Sheehan performed the roles of secretary and president of both.[63] Such an overlap of membership in many areas meant that GAA meetings would frequently begin in the same premises as soon as the local League gathering ended.[64] Several Kerry GAA clubs were also vocal in their support for the land agitation and their condemnation of the actions of the British Government.[65] As such, there was a political element to the initial popularity and expansion of the GAA in Kerry. Yet more than this, the appeal of the Association was down to the colour, excitement and pageantry its games brought to rural life. In March 1888, players of the newly formed Castleisland Desmonds travelled to play Tralee Mitchels in a convoy of decorated horse cars. On arrival, they were met by the Boherbee Fife and Drum band who led a parade of both teams and supporters through the town and on to the Sports Ground. [66] The GAA's constitution which allowed only one club per parish, tapped into a powerful sense of community identity and exploited traditional local allegiances and rivalries.[67] In contrast to sports of British origin, the Association held events on Sundays, the customary day of rest and recreation in rural Ireland. Likewise, for a poor population it also offered the best value-for-money in terms of membership and entrance fees. The support of the local press was also vital. Through the pages of the nationalist *Kerry Sentinel* Maurice Moynihan conducted a spirited rallying campaign throughout the autumn of 1888:

> I would say to the young men of Kerry, join the ranks of the Gaelic Athletic Association ... Do it because it is your duty; do it out of pride; do it for any motive, because it is an association which … at present is a great force, and is bound to become a much greater one in the athletic, social and political life of this country.[68]

At a County Convention, convened by Moynihan in November 1888, Kerry's first County Board was formed with Thomas Slattery elected president and Moynihan as secretary.[69] Within a year, thirty-three clubs had affiliated to the Kerry GAA and 1889 saw the first county hurling and football championships take place.[70] Though the impact of economic recession, migration and political in-fighting would make the 1890s a challenging time for the Kerry GAA, the Association's recovery at the turn of the twentieth century and the Kerry footballers maiden 1903 All-Ireland title laid foundations which ensured that the GAA remains the dominant presence in Kerry's sporting culture to this day.

Associational culture and the Gaelic revival

The GAA's arrival in Kerry also coincided with the rising tide of cultural nationalism which was sweeping across Irish society at the time. The Association would soon become a pillar of the 'Gaelic Revival' emerging off the back of the widespread rediscovery and public engagement with all aspects of Irish culture and heritage as the nineteenth century drew to a close. Many were convinced that the GAA could play a key role in this largely intellectual movement. An editorial in the *Kerry Sentinel* asked why the GAA 'confines its efforts to the cultivation of muscle'.[71] Supporting such views, Moynihan lauded the Castlegregory GAA's intention to establish a branch of the Young Ireland Society, a nationwide organisation which encouraged the study of Irish history and culture in order to foster Irish nationalist identity.[72] Three branches with 290 members were active in Kerry. Moynihan's championing was unsurprising since he acted as secretary of its Tralee branch.[73] The intellectual engagement with Irish culture, fostered by the Gaelic Revival, was also evident in the founding of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society in 1907. It received the support of notable local figures such as Dr John Mangan, the bishop of Kerry, John Boland MP, Lord Kenmare and the Crosbies of Ardfert.[74] Yet the elitist nature of its inaugural meeting drew sharp criticism, with one paper enquiring as to who knew more about Kerry's ruins and relics 'than the very people who live by them?'[75]

Undoubtedly, the body most associated with the Gaelic Revival was Douglas Hyde's Gaelic League. Motivated by the enormous decline in the use of Irish since the Famine, the Gaelic League strove to preserve and revive the language.[76] In the process, the League hoped to reverse the increasing Anglicisation of Irish life and transform Irish society into a populist Gaelic culture.[77] It became a powerful national movement and grew to 671 registered branches by 1908.[78] Following the establishment of its first Kerry branch in Tralee in March 1896, a large public convention expressed the belief that Kerry was uniquely positioned to be in the vanguard of the language movement given the county possessed 74,000 Irish speakers.[79] The local nationalist press soon became enthusiastic supporters and the *Kerry Sentinel* carried a dedicated Irish column on its back page. The Gaelic League was very much an urban phenomenon that attracted a mostly lower middle-class membership composed of teachers, office clerks, shop assistants and civil servants: in effect the young, educated and socially frustrated elements within Irish society for whom the emerging ideology of cultural nationalism exerted a powerful psychological appeal.[80] Nationally, the Gaelic League experienced its period of most rapid expansion between 1899 and 1902, benefiting from the burgeoning nationalist sentiment which was encouraged in the country in the wake of the centenary celebrations of the 1798 rebellion and public opposition to Britain's war in South Africa.[81] In order to capitalise on this, the League hired a corps of traveling organisers to promote

the organisation.[82] Thomas Concannon was sent to undertake this role in Kerry and helped establish eight new branches within the first six months of 1900.[83] Like the GAA before it, the Gaelic League brought spectacle and enthusiasm to local towns and villages. It attracted members through a broad range of activities. The Listowel branch charged a weekly subscription of one penny and offered Irish lessons every Saturday for members and their children.[84] The Tralee branch organised regular outings, including one day-trip to Ballybunion with members conveyed on wagonettes, their journey being 'enlivened by songs and music and frequent stops for refreshment'.[85] In Killorglin, a grand céilí was organised with the intention of promoting old Irish dances.[86] The success of such Gaelic League concerts prompted one member to attack local concert halls as 'amongst the most potent and insidious agents of Anglicisation, [filled with] English vocal filth and rubbish, fit only for the delectation of the cockney'.[87]

The Catholic clergy were a vital source of support and in Kerry local priests were invariably prominent in every branch of the organisation.[88] The League was also one of the only contemporary societies that gave access to women on an equal basis. Indeed, the opportunity to mingle with like-minded members of the opposite sex was a significant factor in appealing to young people.[89] The committee of the Tralee branch made special appeals to encourage female participation while the Valentia branch noted with enthusiasm that twenty-four women had attended its first language class.[90] Another major devotee of the League's endeavours in the county was Thomas O'Donnell, the Irish Party MP for West Kerry. Writing in December 1900, O'Donnell warned that if Ireland threw away its language, 'Irishmen are outcasts on the seas of time without a past to inspire or ennoble them'.[91] In October 1901, an Executive Committee, with O'Donnell as president, was appointed to oversee the running and development of the Gaelic League in Kerry.[92] The following year, the first Kerry Feis was held in Killarney, hosting competitions in singing, dancing, story-telling and recitation. The *Kerry Sentinel* proudly proclaimed the event, 'showed that Ireland has a really living, native language, beautiful and expressive, as in the far-off days of St Patrick'.[93] That November, the Executive drew up a 'Manifesto to the People of Kerry'. The document appealed to all parents and schools to guarantee that children would be given the opportunity to learn the language, asked statutory bodies and commercial businesses to encourage the use of Irish among employees, advised organisers of social gatherings to 'ensure that due prominence shall be given to native music, songs and dances' and finally suggested that people 'should use only Irish salutation in meeting and parting, and to use the language as much as possible in ordinary conversation'.[94] The Executive also successfully lobbied Kerry County Council to make knowledge of Irish 'obligatory upon candidates for all appointments within their gift'.[95] The Gaelic League was likewise an enthusiastic advocate of the campaign to revive and

promote Irish industry with its Lixnaw branch calling on local shopkeepers to only stock goods of Irish manufacture.[96]

The League found a kindred spirt in the GAA and both organisations were close associates.[97] In Kerry this led to a significant overlap in their respective membership. John O'Connell was president of both the Tralee Mitchels and the town's Gaelic League; Thomas Ashe, secretary of the Lispole GAA, was appointed as assistant organiser to the county's Gaelic League in 1902 while Thomas F. O'Sullivan, the County Board secretary, was a prominent League activist in his native Listowel.[98] The League also played a significant role in promoting hurling. Its members viewed the game, which Cusack had helped to resurrect, as a contemporary link to Ireland's Gaelic golden era.[99] In Tralee, where hurling had struggled to gain a foothold, local League members set up the Celtic Hurling club in August 1901. Austin Stack, an employee of O'Connell's, was appointed its secretary.[100] Meanwhile a female version of the game, camogie, was created in 1904 by members of the Keating's Gaelic League branch in Dublin.[101] Two years later, the Whit Sunday GAA tournament, held under the auspices of the Killarney Gaelic League, hosted the first every exhibition of the new sport in Kerry. The press reported the crowd as being '[pleasantly] surprised to see the energy and courage with which the ladies entered the game'.[102]

Temperance campaigns and societies

By the turn of the twentieth century, associational culture had become an integral part of Kerry life. Commentating on the wealth of organisations in Tralee alone, one writer exclaimed that, 'every interest, which it was possible for any member of the community to possess, was being catered for by either one or other of the numerous "specialist" societies'. They also realised that a fundamental attraction was the 'considerable degree of exclusiveness in most of these societies … For instance, a clerk earning 15s a week would not be seen dead, with a mere mechanic who hands his wife 3s 5d every Saturday afternoon'.[103] Casting aspersions on the town's Total Abstinence Society however, the same writer labelled it 'a harbour of refuge for the seasoned tippler'.[104] By then such temperance clubs were a notable feature of contemporary Kerry society and reflected the acute anxieties of middle-class church and lay organisations throughout Britain and Ireland about the major social issues which affected the working classes as well as concerns about with their moral reform.[105] The drinking culture, underscored by the proliferation of public houses in Ireland, was an obvious target for their attention.[106] In Kerry, this issue seemed particularly acute. Travelling the county, the French writer, Paul Dubois, drew attention to the enormous social power of local publicans with Tralee having 117 such establishments in the 1890s.[107] Meanwhile a Parliamentary Report from 1890 showed that there 3,729 arrests for drunkenness, and drunk and disorderly behaviour were made in Kerry, the largest number in any district in Munster.[108]

In response to such widespread abuse of alcohol, activists like Father Theobald Matthew had already formed the Total Abstinence Society which pledged its members to live a life of total sobriety.[109] Such movements grew with force throughout the nineteenth century and by the 1880s, Kerry had several Temperance branches, catering to both Catholics and Protestants.[110] The Church of Ireland Temperance Society, formed in 1885, had 131 members by 1887.[111] All of these societies provided their members with a range of entertainments and facilities and promoted various sporting and leisure activities as an alternative to the attractions of the public house. The Tralee Young Men's Temperance Society organised frequent day excursions such as one which was taken in 1884 by its members to Killarney where they paraded through the streets behind their band and were 'loudly cheered', before setting off to tour 'the scenic locality, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves without the superfluity of an introduction to Mr Jameson or any members of his family!'[112]

In Listowel, the St Patrick's Temperance Society erected a temperance hall in 1894 and established a reading room in 1907 which according to the Society's president, Father Dillon, offered members access to daily and weekly newspapers, illustrated journals, periodicals, card games, draft, chess and 'a magnificent billiard room'. Such amenities were seen as essential to ensure that the youth of the town would be kept away from 'visiting establishments where a passion – a desire for drink is easily acquired'.[113] In 1895, the society affiliated a Gaelic Football team to the Kerry Board and took part in that year's county championship.[114] Ironically, given its origins, the history of the club was short and tempestuous. They were thrown out of the Kerry GAA after their first ever county championship game 'in consequence of the disgraceful conduct of their players and supporters who have brought discredit on the Association here'.[115] However, prominent nationalist organisations like the GAA and the Gaelic League were eager to support the cause of temperance. At the Kerry GAA annual convention in 1912, the secretary, Michael Griffin, lectured delegates on the pressing need to teach young men the benefits of 'self-denial, temperance and other characteristics of noble men … by doing this boys, in the towns, particularly, will be removed from the corrupting and deadly influence of the … public-houses'.[116] The Killarney Gaelic League's popular Whit Sunday Tournament banned the sale of alcohol.[117] Reflecting on this, the *Kerry Sentinel* ruefully observed how the Gaelic League survived and accomplished its 'mighty work' on a 'pittance' of £5,000 a year while the Irish people collectively spent £13,000,000 annually on drink.[118] However, temperance was just one of numerous moral campaigns being conducted by organisations in Kerry. The Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), an Irish Catholic, nationalist society which was closely associated with membership of the Irish Party, was also very active in this field.[119] From 1908, the AOH waged a purity crusade against imported,

mass-circulation illustrated papers which carried explicit pictures and lewd advertisements.[120] In 1912, a supply of such 'objectionable literature' which reached Tralee was purchased by members of the town's AOH and publicly burnt on Denny Street. A year later, the branch helped form the Tralee Vigilance Committee to clamp down on the sale and supply of 'evil and pernicious publications in the town'.[121]

Associational culture and political nationalism

The decades prior to the First World War were among the most politically volatile in Irish history. Throughout the 1890s, the Irish Party remained divided amid a storm of bitter infighting following the death of their former leader, Charles Stewart Parnell. Yet the reunification of the Party ushered in a new era of expectation that Home Rule for Ireland would be realised. Conversely, a more militant form of nationalism, inspired by the Gaelic Revival, was increasingly challenging the Irish Party's constitutional strategy for Irish self-government. From 1912, the imminent prospect of Home Rule led to a perilous political crisis in Ireland as unionists armed to oppose it while nationalists did likewise to protect its introduction. All of these developments would be reflected in various political organisations surfacing in Kerry.

It was the demoralised state of the Irish Party and the popular perception that Home Rule was losing its political force, which motivated the former Irish MP, William O'Brien, to found the United Irish League (UIL) in 1898.[122] First emerging in Connacht, the UIL campaigned for the greater redistribution of land to small impoverished farmers.[123] O'Brien also hoped to use land issues as an anchor to unify the various factions of the Irish Party and breathe new life into the Home Rule movement.[124] By the end of 1899, 1,150 branches with a national membership of 121,443 had been established.[125] Such spectacular success inspired the opposing factions of the Irish Party to lay aside their differences and to reunite under John Redmond's leadership in January 1900.[126] Following this, the UIL morphed from being an independent body focussed on greater land reform to effectively being the Irish Party's grassroots constituency organisation.[127] Between October 1898 and December 1902, fifty-three branches were established in Kerry.[128] There it operated much like the old National League. It collected money for the Irish Party while branch meetings were often dominated by the examination of local land disputes and the passing of resolutions denouncing Government policy in Ireland.[129] Nationalists who were prominent on local government bodies were invariably appointed to positions of power in the movement. For example, Eugene O'Keefe of the Rathmore Rural District Council was elected as president of the village's UIL when it was formed in March 1900.[130] Given this, the RIC noted that a major factor in the UIL's appeal was that membership enhanced the chances of individuals looking for

potential election to local government bodies or of securing lucrative business contracts from them.[131]

Nationally, the UIL declined in activity as the comprehensive tenant land purchasing agreements of the 1903 Wyndham Land Act robbed it of much of its *raison d'être*.[132] In 1909, however, efforts were made to reconfigure the organisation in north Kerry. At a large public meeting in Abbeydorney, Michael Joseph Flavin, the local MP, addressed the crowd and reminded his listeners 'were it not for the policy of the Parliamentary Party would they be peasant proprietors today?'[133] UIL activity intensified again during the Home Rule crisis. Redmond spoke at a massive demonstration organised by the Cahersiveen branch in October 1913 and declared that 'nothing was more certain than that the people of Ireland were on the verge of Liberty'.[134] Regardless, the outbreak of the First World War and the mothballing of the 1914 Home Rule Act fundamentally altered the political balance in Ireland. As the Irish Party's popularity was decimated by the seeming inevitability of the partition of Ulster and by its own active promotion of the British war effort, the UIL's influence in Kerry depreciated accordingly. By 1916 the RIC noted that though on paper the UIL had seventeen branches with 1,293 members, in reality it existed there 'only in name'.[135]

Sinn Féin had also now dawned on Kerry's political horizon and by December 1906 four branches existed there.[136] Although Arthur Griffith's party was far from the mass nationalist movement that it became after the 1916 Rising, its founding was inspired by the virulent nationalism developing on the back of the Gaelic Revival.[137] Sinn Féin advocated for the protection of Irish industry and commerce, for Irish control over her own resources and refused to recognise the authority of the British Parliament.[138] While Sinn Féin campaigned for Irish independence, Griffith was no indoctrinated republican and hoped for a non-violent, constitutional separation from Britain.[139] The party's appeal among young urban men and women was down to a growing disillusionment with the lack of progress by the Irish Party in securing Home Rule.[140] The *Kerryman* was a robust advocate and its editor, Maurice Griffin, chaired meetings of the Tralee Sinn Féin club.[141] There was also a significant overlap between Sinn Féin activists and prominent figures in the local GAA and Gaelic League. Michael Griffin was a founding member of the Listowel Sinn Féin club while his colleague, Thomas F. O'Sullivan, was instrumental in the GAA's controversial decision to ban from its membership all members of the RIC and British armed forces in January 1903.[142] In the aftermath of this decision, RIC reports equated such legislation as indicative of the growing connections between extremists in the GAA and the Sinn Féin movement.[143]

The AOH also experienced substantial expansion across Ireland at this time. Often referred to as a Catholic 'Green' counterpoint to the Unionist Orange

Order, the AOH was started by Fenian elements in America and spread to Ireland in the years surrounding 1900. In 1905, a split emerged between one faction, the AOH Irish-American-Alliance (IAA), which was dominated by the IRB and another, the AOH Board of Erin, which was under the Belfast MP, Joe Devlin. Devlin's group was closely aligned to the Irish Party and became a major influence within the Home Rule movement.[144] Under his leadership, the AOH's membership soared to over 170,000 by 1914.[145] It spread rapidly in areas like Kerry because it was named as one of the approved benefit societies under the terms of the 1911 National Insurance Act and this entitled its members to access the health and unemployment insurance embodied in that legislation.[146] By 1916, there were twenty-five branches of the Board of Erin and five branches of the IAA with a combined membership of nearly 3,000 in the county.[147] Nevertheless, in Kerry tensions remained between both AOH factions. In reference to a speech in Leeds in which Devlin referred to the Irish as the most 'loyal race on the face of the earth', one member of the Kerry AOH IAA asked readers of the *Kerry News* to reflect on the loyalty professed by Devlin 'to the British Empire which levelled our homes, persecuted and hunted down our Catholic priests, destroyed our industries, strove to kill our language and drove our countrymen into exile'.[148]

By now the growing radicalisation and militarisation of Ireland's political landscape, was also being reflected within several organisations operating in Kerry. Both the local GAA and Gaelic League had come under the increasing influence of the IRB.[149] As early as 1905, the RIC claimed that there was a noticeable upsurge in IRB activity in Kerry and that the Gaelic League was fast coming under the sway of men 'of extreme views'.[150] In 1913, the Gaelic League's national executive was effectively taken over by an IRB-backed faction which included the Ballylongford native, Michael Joseph O'Rahilly as well as Thomas Ashe.[151] The effects of the IRB's radicalisation of the local Gaelic League naturally filtered through the cross-membership which the League shared with the Kerry GAA. An IRB element had always maintained a strong influence within the leadership of the Kerry GAA, most notably personified by Austin Stack, the Kerry GAA chairman who had become the acknowledged head of the IRB in the county.[152] Indeed Kerry was arguably unique in how closely the connections between the Association and radical and physical force nationalism were.

The re-emergence of the Home Rule Question in 1912 was the catalyst for the militarisation of Irish politics. The intense passions evoked by the issue, particularly among the Unionist community in Ulster, led to the emergence of the paramilitary Ulster Volunteers Force (UVF) to oppose its implementation, by force if necessary.[153] In response to this threat to Ireland's aspirations of self-government, Eoin MacNeill urged that Irish nationalists should emulate the UVF's example and create a similar force to protect their right to Home Rule.[154]

Following this, the Irish Volunteers were formally launched at a rally in Dublin in November 1913.[155] Across Ireland the Volunteers spread rapidly. In Kerry, perhaps the first corps to be formed outside the capital was started by Padraig Ó Siochfhradha, the Killarney Gaelic League's Irish tutor.[156] On 10 December, a large meeting, organised by Stack and fellow members of the Kerry GAA, established the Tralee corps.[157] The Irish Volunteers were the associational craze of 1914 among Ireland's young, male, nationalist population. Its membership exploded from 14,000 to nearly 121,000 between April and July.[158] One thousand men had already enlisted in Kerry by the spring and forty-eight companies would eventually be formed by the end of 1915.[159] The influence of the revolutionary IRB was clear, if clandestine, and the organisation acted as a kind of inner circle within the Kerry Volunteers. Habitually, prominent figures in the local Brotherhood were elected to command local Volunteer Battalions.[160] Yet the Volunteers received backing from across the spectrum of nationalist organisations in Kerry. The Tralee AOH pledged its membership to co-operate fully with the objectives of the Volunteers.[161] Likewise at that summer's Feis in Killarney, a resolution was unanimously adopted praising the Volunteer movement.[162] By the outbreak of the Great War, the Volunteers strength in Kerry was built upon the sophisticated networks of nationalist organisations constructed over the previous decades. The wide support it enjoyed among Kerry's nationalist local community and its close, if hidden, links with the IRB would ensure that the county became one of the most active areas of physical force activity during the political violence which enveloped Ireland from 1916 on.

The emergence of an elaborate associational culture in Kerry was facilitated by a range of societal developments which had accelerated in the half century following the Great Famine. Its evolution also reflected these broader, often radical, changes occurring in Irish life. Initially, the communal dominance of the predominately Protestant landed and business classes in the county was mirrored in their engagement with, and patronage of, an array of exclusive and fashionable associational endeavours. Yet the seismic social transformations heralded by the introduction of mass, State-funded, education and the progressive resolution of the 'Land Question' saw the predominately Catholic middle classes increasingly eclipse the power and authority of the Protestant elite from the late-nineteenth century onwards. This too was mimicked in the range of societies and organisations, such as the National League and the GAA, which spread into the county to contest the traditional authority of the gentry in the diverse spheres of politics, cultural endeavour, sport and leisure. Ireland's 'Gaelic Revival' and the particular appeal which its fervent cultural nationalism held for younger, educated and socially ambitious Catholics, further stimulated widespread public engagement with a number of emerging cultural bodies in Kerry, most notably the Gaelic League. All the while the prevalent moral anxieties

over major contemporary social issues, especially the abuse of alcohol, drove the development of popular and influential temperance movements catering to both Protestants and Catholics. As the Home Rule issue began to dominate Irish politics in the decade preceding the Great War, its importance was implied by the extensive support enjoyed by organisations such as the UIL and the AOH in Kerry at this time. Conversely, the increasing radicalisation of Ireland's political landscape was evident in the burgeoning appeal of Sinn Féin in the county and the growing, if hidden, influence of the IRB in both the local GAA and Gaelic League. The swift and unprecedented militarisation of Irish politics, owing to Ulster Unionist paramilitary resistance to Home Rule from 1912, was likewise evidenced in the rapid rise and expansion of the Irish Volunteer movement in Kerry. The county would soon boast one of the strongest Irish Volunteer networks in Ireland. By 1914, a rich tapestry of associations pervaded Kerry society. As we have seen, they concerned themselves with all manner of activity ranging from politics to morality, leisure to language. Many, such as the UIL burnt brightly before fading utterly from history. Others, like the GAA, remain a ubiquitous element in Kerry's social landscape.

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14. ibid., p. viii.
15. *1901 Census, Kerry*, p 92; Kieran McNulty, 'Revolutionary movements in Kerry from 1913 to 1923, a social and political analysis' in *JKAHS* (series 2), 1 (2002), p. 10. Altogether over 90% of Kerry's male and female workforce were employed in agriculture, domestic service or in general labour and retail.
16. Murphy, 'Associational life', p. 13. In 1901, 12.75% of Kerry's population lived in the four towns with populations over 2,000: Tralee, Killarney, Listowel and Cahersiveen; see *1901 Census, Kerry*, p. vii.
17. Tralee's population increased by 982 and Killarney's by 286; see *1901 Census, Kerry*, p. vii; *Census of Ireland for the year 1911, general report*, pp 71-2. [Cd. 5691], H.C. 1911, lxxi.
18. *1901 Census, Kerry*, pp viii and 181.
19. Neal Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004), p. 8.
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21. Murphy, 'Associational Life', p. 387. In Kerry, the Godfreys of Milltown, the Herberts of Muckross and the Blennerhassets of Ballyseedy were prominent landed families on the hunting scene; see Thomas Egan (ed.), *Milltown parish a centenary celebration* (Naas, 1994), p. 50.
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23. *KEP*, 29 Sept. 1883.
24. *KS*, 3 Sept. 1886.
25. *KS,* 23 Feb. 1901.
26. *KEP*, 27 July 1887.
27. Paul Rouse, *Sport and Ireland: a history* (Oxford, 2015), p. 122.
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29. ibid., pp 22-3.
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31. *KS*, 27 Jan. and 10 Feb. 1885; *KEP*, 10 June 1885.
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37. Horgan, *Victorian visitor*, p. 43.
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39. Hickey, *Killarney golf and fishing club*, p. 7.
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42. McElligott, *Forging a kingdom,* pp 102-7.
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45. *KS*, 20 Nov. 1895.
46. *KS*, 4 Feb. 1899.

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50. *KS*, 20 Jan. 1892.
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61. *KS,* 15 Nov. 1887. Thomas Slattery was elected president and Moynihan secretary.
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63. Eamonn Fitzgerald (ed.), *Dr Crokes Gaelic century 1886-1986* (Killarney, 1986), p. 13. Sheehan was also the Irish Party MP for South Kerry.
64. *KS*, 15 June 1889.
65. See for example, *KS*, 16 Dec. 1887.
66. *KS*, 28 Mar. 1888.
67. Garnham, 'Early success of the Gaelic Athletic Association', p. 76.
68. *KS*, 27 Oct. 1888
69. *KS*, 10 Nov. 1888.
70. *KS*, 9 Feb. 1889
71. *KS*, 16 Oct. 1889.
72. *KS*, 18 Jan. 1890; J.C. Beckett, *The making of modern Ireland* (Norfolk, 1981), p. 417.
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85. *KS*, 10 Aug. 1901.
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90. *KS*, 17 Feb and 14 Apr. 1900.
91. *KS*, 12 Dec. 1900. O'Donnell would become the first MP to address the House of Commons in Irish.
92. *KS*, 16 Oct. 1901.
93. *KS*, 16 Aug. 1902.
94. *KS*, 29 Nov. 1902.
95. *KS*, 12 Mar. 1902.
96. *KS*, 3 Feb. 1906.
97. The RIC noted the close bond between it and the GAA, with one 'educating the mind', while the other trained 'the body'; see NAI, CDSB: Inspector General (IG) & County Inspector (CI) reports, box 2: monthly confidential report of Inspector General for Feb. 1901, 12 Mar. 1901, 24242/S.
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99. Art Ó Maolfabhail, 'Hurling, an old game in a new world' in Jarvie, Grant (ed.), *Sport in the making of Celtic cultures* (Leicester, 1999), p. 154.
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101. Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 323.
102. *Kerryman*, 9 June 1906. The game pitted the Keatings club against Cuchullains, another Dublin branch.
103. *KS*, 23 Feb. 1901. The writer went on to namecheck twenty-five separate societies, not including various charities operating in the town.
104. *KS*, 23 Feb. 1901.
105. Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 136; Clark, *British clubs and societies*, p. 472.
106. Between 1891-2, 100,528 arrests were made for drunkenness; see Diarmaid Ferriter, 'Sobriety and temperance' in Shane Kilcommins and Ian O'Donnell (eds.), *Alcohol, society and law* (Chichester, 2003), p. 8.
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112. *KWR*, 10 May 1884.
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114. *KS*, 1 May 1894.
115. *KS*, 7 and 14 Aug. 1895. During their first match against Tralee Mitchels, the team 'finding themselves outplayed and seeing no hope of beating their illustrious opponents by football means', began 'at every opportunity' to foul their Tralee opponents, actions that resulted in a mass brawl among the players. The supporters of the Listowel club then invaded the pitch and started to attack the Tralee players as they tried to leave the ground.
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117. *KS*, 9 June 1906.
118. *KS*, 14 Mar. 1908.
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120. Katherine Mullin, 'Irish chastity? British social purity associations and the Irish Free State' in Kelly and Comerford (eds.), *Associational culture*, p. 145.

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129. NAI, CDSB: IG & CI reports, box 2: IG report for July 1900, 10 Aug. 1900, 22530/S.
130. *KS*, 28 Mar. 1900.
131. NAI, CDSB: IG & CI reports, box 3 & 4: IG report for Mar. 1903, 22 Apr. 1903, 28369/S.
132. Maume, 'Violence and moderation', p. 76.
133. *Killarney Echo*, 29 May 1909.
134. *KS*, 1 Oct. 1913.
135. NAI, British in Ireland collection, CO 904, microfilm archive (MFA) 54/59: IG and CI monthly confidential reports May-Aug. 1916, 11509/S.
136. They were formed in Tralee, Castleisland, Listowel and Killorglin; see NAI, CBS: IG & CI reports, box 10: IG report for Dec. 1906, 14 Jan. 1907, 1264/S.
137. Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland, a history* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 353.
138. F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (London, 1985), p. 257.
139. Kevin Rafter, *Sinn Féin 1905-2005, in the shadow of gunmen* (Dublin, 2005), p. 43.
140. Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London, 1988), p. 457.
141. *Kerryman*, 5 May 1906.
142. The ban on active members of the RIC, Army and Navy joining the GAA was introduced in Jan. 1903; see Croke Park Archive, GAA/CC/01/01, Central Council minute books, 1899-1911: Adjourned annual convention of the GAA, 11 Jan. 1903.
143. NAI, CDBS, IG & CI reports, box 9: IG Report for Apr. 1906, 14 May 1906, 769/S.
144. Maume, 'Violence and moderation", p. 79; Fergal McCluskey, "Make way for the Molly Maguires!"The Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Irish Parliamentary Party, 1902–14' in *History Ireland*, 20:1 (Jan./Feb. 2012), p. 33.
145. Mel Cousins, 'The creation of association: The National Insurance Act, 1911 and approved societies in Ireland' in Kelly and Comerford (eds.), *Associational Culture*, p. 161.
146. ibid., p. 162.
147. NAI, CO 904, MFA 54/59: IG and CI reports May-Aug. 1916, 11509/S.
148. *KN*, 9 Apr. 1913.
149. The influence of the IRB within the controlling body of the Kerry GAA was reflected in that fact that in 1900, the Kerry Board was said to contain seven prominent members of the Brotherhood; see NAI, CDSB: precis box no.2, 22189/S.
150. NAI, CDSB, IG & CI reports, box 7: IG report for Apr. 1905, 15 May 1905, 501/S/ 43126.
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152. Gaughan, *Austin Stack*, p. 30.
153. See Ronan Fanning, *Fatal path: British government and Irish revolution, 1910-1922* (London, 2013), p. 74.
154. *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 1 Nov. 1913.
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160. McElligo=tt, *Forging a kingdom*, p. 247.
161. *KS,* 27 May 1914.
162. *KN*, 3 Aug. 1914.