The Westmeath Hunt



- Historical Background
- Masters of the Hunt 1850 1900
- Masters of the Hunt 1900 1960
- Bibliography

Historical Background

The earliest records of hunting in Westmeath date from circa 1690 when Bishop Dopping of Meath kept a pack of hounds at Lowtown near Killucan.

Mr Thomas Pakenham MP for Longford and owner of Pakenham Hall (now Tullynally Castle) kept hounds and also had a fine stable of horses for hunting in 1738. About 1802 the Sonna Harriers were started by Mr Hugh Tuite, the kennels were located at Coolnahay. They hunted a circuit from Lough Owel to Ballynacarrigy and south of Sonna



Mr Hugh Morgan Tuite

Mr Hugh Morgan Tuite, MP for Westmeath from 1826-1830 and again from 1842-1847 succeeded his father and maintained the Sonna Harriers until the time of the Famine in the 1840's.

Mr Sam Reynell, the son of Richard Reynell of Killynon, was responsible for the establishment of a scientifically bred pack of hounds at Clonderlever and Archerstown and was the first to hunt in an organised way in the early 1800's effectively establishing the Westmeath Foxhounds in 1835.

During the years of Famine and distress which changed the whole landscape of the country, people thought little of hunting and were more concerned with keeping themselves and their neighbours alive.

The hunting season began in November and ended in March and weather permitting, members and followers would expect to enjoy up to eighty days hunting in a season.

The highlight of the social calendar was always the annual Hunt Ball. It is first recorded as having being held at Ballinlough Castle in 1861 and at Knockdrin Castle in 1865.



Knockdrin Castle



In 1854 a notice was issued to landowners in Westmeath that a pack of foxhounds had been purchased by *Sir Richard Levinge*, a committee was established and a subscription of £600 was raised, hence the Westmeath Hunt Club was established.

Prior to the introduction of tennis and golf, hunting provided the only sporting recreational outlet available to the female landed gentry.

At the conclusion of the hunting season an annual steeplechase race meeting was organised which was confined to members of the Hunt and to supportive farmers.

Masters of the Westmeath Hunt 1850-1900

The first Master of the Westmeath Hunt was *Sir Richard Levinge* who erected kennels in the stable yard at Knockdrin Castle. The opening meeting of the hounds took place on the 1st November 1854 at Ballynegall, then the residence of J. W. Middleton Berry, followed by a meeting at Rosmead the residence of Lord Vaux of Harrowden. This was followed by a further meeting in 1855 at Clonhugh House, home of Col Fulke Greville M.P.



Sir Ri chard Levinge

In 1856 George Augustus Rochfort Boyd of Middleton Park became Master of the Hunt, a position he held until 1858 when John Fetherstonhaugh Briscoe of Grangemore, Killucan replaced him as Master until 1860.



Mr Gerald Richard Dease

Mr. Gerald Richard Dease of Turbotston House, became Master in 1861 agreeing to take a loan of the hounds under certain conditions from his predecessor

This agreement formed the basis on which the pack of hounds would transfer from one Master of the Hunt to the next.

"I have received the above hounds from J. Fetherstonhaugh Briscoe, and agree to keep up this pack, restoring to the proprietors of these hounds, when I give up hunting the Westmeath country, thirty-five couple of hounds. The proprietors of the Westmeath Foxhounds to have the right to select that number from any hounds I may have, and also to give them their choice of eight litters of puppies or bitches in whelp. I further agree to purchase at my own expense all drafts which may be necessary for keeping this pack in an efficient state.

"(Signed), GERALD R. DEASE.

"TURBOTSTON, COOLE, 29th June, 1861."

Copy of agreement between owners of Westmeath hounds and Gerald R.Dease taken from "A Complete History of the Westmeath Hunt by Edmund F.Dease

Mr Dease spent seven seasons as Master (1861-1868) and during that period it was decided to build county kennels at Culleen (sometimes called Cullion) and in 1866, some £330 was raised by subscription for this purpose.

de	deciben to	Mech	meath Sunt.		459		
14 1865 1	1866			1864		1866	
				8 0	10		
6 5				25			
			neight Savare	10	10		
5 25			M remick hier	68 5	5		
			IN THE HAIL MAY	*	×		
0 21			deperora	10	10		
			in Perou. 6	1 10			
10 11			Mygent Sint		10		
				1 1		,	
	5		of the prince	- 10	15		
	Late for	here	Tirda Seren	, 5	5		
	Baken a	francis .					
5	1		described ot 6.	0	5		
	6 5 10 10 6 5 5 25 7 7 CO 20 11 10 10 5 5 5 5 6 6 5 5 6 6 5 5 5 6 6 5 5	6 5 10 10 5 5 66 5 6 5 5 6 6 5 5 6 6 5 5 6 6 6 5 5 6 6 6 5 5 6	6 5 10 111 0 5 5 6 5 10 11 11 10 5 5 6 25 10 11 11 10 5 5 6 25 16 15 6 16 15 6 16 16 16 16 16 16 16 16 16 16 16 16 1	the 1865 1866 The riay Charles nearly Charles nearly Collection School Stand	harray Charles 10 nearly Charles 10 nearly Charles 10 nearly Sung 10 nearly Sing	10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 1	

List of subscribers to the Westmeath Hunt 1864 - 1866 showing names of subscribers and amounts paid

Mr C.MacDonald Moreton took over Mastership of the Hunt between 1868-1871.

On the opening day of the Season in 1871-2 *Captain Richard Coote* was appointed Master, he had previously hunted harriers in his native County Cavan. He remained Master until 1872 when he was replaced by Capt Reginald Greville-Nugent who lived at Clonhugh.

Reginald Greville Nugent was more renowned as a steeplechase jockey who spent a lot more time at race meetings in the United Kingdom than as a huntsman. In 1874 he resigned to concentrate full-time on steeplechasing.

In 1875 the Hunt subscription amounted to £1,154 and there were 105 members.

Sir Montague Chapman, son of Sir Benjamin Chapman, the 4th Bart. of Killua Castle near Delvin became Master in 1876 and held the position until 1881. Mr Chapman was responsible for starting the first Point-to-Point races in Westmeath.

The first recorded Point –to Point was held at Loughegar in 1875. During the 1878-79 season, a number of distinguished English visitors joined in the hunting, among them the

Duke of Marlborough, then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland who stayed at Knockdrin Castle and Lord and Lady Randolph Churchill.

Captain James Towers-Clark, an officer in the 1st Royals Regiment became Master of the Hunt in 1883 and held the position until 1886. He was a good huntsman who built up the county pack during his time as Master.



Lord Greville

Lord Greville who lived at Clonhugh and who was MP for Westmeath from 1865 to 1874 succeeded Captain Clark as Master in 1886.

It was during Lord Greville's tenure that a by-law was put on the statute books of the Hunt in 1887 which stated that "The name of a proposed new member be submitted through the Hon. Sec to the Committee on being proposed by a member of the Hunt; that the Committee may; if they think necessary call a general meeting and submit the name for admission". The minimum membership subscription at that time was £5.

However in November of the same year at the instigation of Lord Greville "farmer" members were admitted on payment of a yearly subscription of two guineas.



Clonhugh House

This was the first resolution of its kind ever passed in an old established Hunt and brought about a material change in the Hunt as a club for the landed gentry only. The custom of using whistles to call the hounds was also introduced at this time. A number of English regiments who were quartered in Mullingar Barracks among them the Royal Irish Rifles and The East Lancashire regiment became members of the Hunt during this period.

Lord Greville was also Chairman of the Newbrook Racecourse and the Hunt races were run there in the 1890's. He along with a board of local directors developed the racecourse during the period of his Mastership of the Hunt Club.

Upon the resignation of Lord Greville in 1893, he was succeeded by the *Earl of Longford*, a subaltern in the 2nd Life Guards and his brother the *Hon. Edward Michael Pakenham*, a Captain in the Coldstream Guards.

Lord Longford succeeded to the title and estates in 1887 on the death of his father the fourth Earl. Mr Pakenham inherited Cookesborough from Mr Adolphus Cooke whose property adjoined Lord Longford's in North Westmeath.





Earl of Longford

Hon Edward Michael Pakenham

Apart from attending to hounds and kennels, the joint Masters did a good deal to make the countryside easier to traverse by putting passes and bridges in place in a number of locations. They remained as joint Masters until 1900, when their regiments set sail for South Africa.

Masters of the Hunt 1900 -1960



Westmeath Hunt Meeting circa 1920

Mr Frank Barbour was Master between 1908 –1912, he was succeeded by an American *Mr Harry Worcester Smith* of Worcester Massachusetts. He brought his own pack of hounds called the Grafton Hounds from the United States, and following a nine month quarantine period he set about hunting the countryside.

Mr E.W. Hope – Johnstone was Master from 1913-1924.

Apart from *Lt. Col. Denis Purdon* and his brother *Lt. Col. Purdon – Winter* who shared the Mastership for twenty nine years between 1927 and 1966 most other Masters of the Hunt during the 20th Century only held the position for short periods of time.

.

Bibliography

Dease, Edmund F A Complete History of the Westmeath Hunt

(Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1898)

Hunt, Tom in Mary Farrell (ed) Mullingar: essays on the history of a Midlands Town in the 19th Century.

(Mullingar: Westmeath County Library, 2002 pp 1-38)

Watson, J.N.P. Foxhunters of old Westmeath, in Country Life 8 Nov 1973, pp 1446-8.

British Hunts and Huntsmen

(London: Biographical Press, 1911)pp. 403-420



Mr Edmund Dease

Photograph of Mr Edmund F Dease, nephew of Mr Gerald Dease Master of the Hunt from 1861-1868, author of A Complete History of the Westmeath Hunt