

The Corrib Club

“The Galway Corrib Club held their annual regatta on the splendid river of the Corrib at Menlo. The day was as fine as “sunshine and pageantry” could make it, and the ivy-mantled Castle of Menlo, the residence of Sir Thomas Blake, Bart., was decorated with flags of all nations, and waved gracefully in the breeze. There was not a ripple on the bosom of the lake unless what was created by the oars of the several beautiful little crafts which were constantly scudding up and down the river, freighted with some of Nature’s fairest daughters. There was a band in attendance and during the day discoursed some beautiful music. Great credit is due to the commodore, P.T. Grealy, Esq., and the members of the club for the satisfactory manner in which the whole arrangements were carried out. After five races between four oared gigs, outriggers and punts, the sports of the day terminated with a duck race, which was most amusing. At seven o’clock, the amusements terminated and the delighted spectators returned home, highly pleased with the day’s sport. Although there were places of refreshment, there was not a man to be seen the worse for liquor, so that the whole affair was a complete success”.

This rather gushy report appeared in the Irish Times on Tuesday, August 23rd, 1866. The Corrib Club had been formed two years previously. The club was situated at Wood Quay for a short time, then transferred to land beside the weir and remained there until 1903. Obviously, the club then had to move and sites were examined at Wood Quay, the field at the Fever Hospital, the field at University Road etc. but then Mr. Persse presented a site on which the clubhouse still stands today. During the period of the transmission from the old club to the new, committee meetings were held at the Mechanics Institute.

It was this club who introduced competitive rowing to the river, initially in the form of “Badge Races” which were confined to club members. These races took place from the black buoy opposite Steamer’s Quay to the “Iodine Works” and back again. The earliest extant minutes of the Corrib Club dates to July 5th, 1866. Reading through extracts from the minutes is a fascinating exercise, which gives one an insight into the history of the club and also into the social life in Galway at the time.

Politics occasionally entered into proceedings. In September 1881, the president denounced in very strong language the removal from the frame in the committee room of the letter of H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh accepting the invitation to become an Honorary Member. In 1897, Captain O’Hara of Lenaboy Castle and Sir Valentine Blake of Menlo Castle both resigned membership “because the club had decided to take no active part in the celebration of the Queen’s Jubilee”. In June 1916, the president explained that there was “no audit of the account this year owing to the arrest of the secretary”. The secretary was in fact John Faller who was arrested after the Rising and sent to Frongoch.

All of this information including the photograph (c.1905) of the clubhouse is included in a book published by the late Maurice Semple in 1997. The title is “A Century of Minutes, or, The Story of the Corrib Club 1864-1966”. As usual with Maurice, the book is full of old photographs, which, with the text, give a wonderful overview of the history of this old Galway Club.

The Old Galway Society start their new season of lectures this evening, 9th September 2010, in the Mercy School, Newtownsmyth, at 8.30pm. It will be given by Hayden Lawford on "The History of Aviation in Galway". Hayden is an expert on the subject having published a book on the topic. All are welcome.

On Monday next, the 13th September 2010, the Galway Archeological and Historical Society will host a talk on "The Rule of St. Clare and the early history of the Irish Poor Clares" which will be given by Dr. Bernadette Cunningham in the Harbour Hotel starting at 8pm. All are welcome.

On Wednesday next, the 15th September 2010, An Taisce host a lecture by Peadar O'Dowd in the Bridge Centre, St. Mary's Road at 8pm. The subject is "Famous Galway People" and again, all are welcome.

TK

Please forward any queries/comments to oldgalway@kennys.ie

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