

The Big House at play: archery as an elite pursuit from the 1830s to the 1870s

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Any worthwhile study of Ireland's nineteenth-century landed elite invariably focuses on the central importance of field sports, particularly fox-hunting, as recreational and associational activities for the class that stood at the apex of rural society.¹ The hunt was integral to the lifestyle of the landed elite, even if the extravagance involved was a major contributory factor to landlord indebtedness.² For the landed elite, regardless of whether they were wealthy aristocrats or minor gentry, fox-hunting was an 'essential compound' that bound them together and set them apart from other groups in Irish society; it 'regenerated and re-energized the community on an annual basis', periodically bringing together the different strands of the elite and helping to reinforce its collective sense of identity and exclusiveness.³ Fox-hunting functioned on a number of levels, then: as sport, as status symbol, and as bonding agent. A strong argument can be made that archery – a subject hitherto overlooked by historians – performed a similar multiple role in the lives of the Irish landed elite in the early and mid-Victorian decades. From the 1830s to the 1870s, enthusiasm for archery affected all levels of the landed elite, as they adopted it as a sport and pastime exclusively for themselves. Some of the archery meetings in this period were of purely local significance, expressions of status by a small number of families in a particular community, often involving only the minor gentry, but it was also common for the minor gentry and the aristocracy of particular counties or, occasionally, the country as a whole to mingle at archery meetings. An examination of their participation in archery adds an important further dimension to our knowledge and understanding of the social history of the landed elite in this period: archery, like hunting, not only allowed all ranks of the elite to socialize together, it also served as an important assertion of status and of separation from the rest of Irish society.

In the 1860s, a Westmeath lady, Mrs Smyth of Gaybrook, near Mullingar, a member of one of the 'leading landed families in the county', was credited with having introduced archery to Ireland in the early 1830s.⁴ Although this pioneering

1 For just some examples, see Mark Bence-Jones, *Twilight of the ascendancy* (London, 1987), pp 1–6, 61–2; Terence Dooley, *The decline of the big house in Ireland: a study of Irish landed families, 1860–1960* (Dublin, 2001), pp 56–9; Tom Hunt, *Sport and society in Victorian Ireland: the case of Westmeath* (Cork, 2007), pp 10–38; L.P. Curtis, 'Stopping the hunt, 1881–1882: an aspect of the Irish land war' in C.H.E. Philpin (ed.), *Nationalism and popular protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987), pp 139–62. **2** W.E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994), p. 132. **3** Hunt, *Westmeath*, pp 37–8. **4** Tom Hunt, 'Women and

lady certainly played an important role in the early development of Irish archery, it is an exaggeration to say that she introduced the sport to the country. For instance, there is evidence to show that 'a society of gentlemen and eminent citizens' practised archery in Dublin in the first half of the eighteenth century, before finally giving up their pastime in 1745,⁵ while at Ballynahinch Spa in the latter part of the century special archery contests for ladies formed part of the amusements that were provided for the resort's fashionable clientele.⁶ Archery also featured in the recreational activities of Theobald Wolfe Tone's circle of acquaintances at Rathcoffey in the 1790s, with the future rebel leader recording in his diary that he attended archery shooting there on three occasions in September 1792.⁷ It is likely that archery was practised in various parts of Ireland before Mrs Smyth and two Meath landlords, Gustavus Lambert of Beauparc and James Naper of Loughcrew, established an archery society, the Meath Archers, in 'about' 1833.⁸ The evidence is, admittedly, sketchy, but the fact that the viceroy, the duke of Northumberland, had an official bowyer named Blang in 1830, and that Blang conducted the archery department of the 'Royal Shooting Saloon' at Horne's Hotel on Usher's Quay in Dublin, is suggestive of at least some interest in archery in the capital in the period leading up to the establishment of the Meath Archers.⁹ Stronger evidence of archery's appeal to sections of the Irish elite at this time comes from Sligo in 1832. In August, at Markree Castle, Joshua Cooper hosted an archery meeting that attracted much of the elite of Sligo society, including the owners of the Hazelwood, Portland, Temple House, Lissadell, Annaghmore, Castle Neynoe, Cooper's Hill, Newpark and Castle Dargan estates and their families, as well as the bishop of Ossory's family.¹⁰

Although Mrs Smyth and her collaborators among Meath's landed elite were not the first Irish archery enthusiasts in the nineteenth century, they were among the first Irish people to adopt the new approach to the sport that had taken hold of much of fashionable society in the neighbouring island. In Britain, by the 1830s, archery was no longer an ad hoc pastime of the landed elite but was being promoted on a semi-regular basis by numerous clubs that organized frequent competitions during the summer months for their members, which were almost invariably followed by dinners and dances. The British landed class was attracted to archery for a number

sport in Victorian Westmeath', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 34 (2007), 29–46 at 34–5.
5 *New Annual Register* (1788), 151; *The European Magazine, and London Review*, 15 (May 1789), 375; Joseph Cooper Walker, *Historical memoirs of the Irish bards* (2 vols, Dublin, 1818), ii, p. 151n.
6 Peter Somerville-Large, *The grand Irish tour* (London, 1982), p. 298.
7 William Theobald Wolfe Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone* (2 vols, Washington DC, 1826), i, pp 181–2. Unfortunately, the diary entries do not state whether Tone participated in the shooting or not.
8 Hunt, 'Women and sport', 34, n. 39. Lambert and Naper were deputy lieutenants for Meath.
9 *Freeman's Journal*, 20 Nov. 1830. The 'Saloon' also catered for those who wished to engage in rifle and pistol shooting.
10 *Freeman's Journal*, 18 Aug. 1832. Cooper's nephew, the Tory MP for Sligo and famous astronomer, Edward Joshua Cooper, who succeeded to Markree in 1837, was prominent in the establishment and promotion of archery in Sligo: *Lady's Newspaper*, 4 Sept. 1852.



of reasons. Not only did the sport represent a fashionable and romantic form of conspicuous consumption, adding a colourful new dimension to the obligatory displays of hospitality that were important elements in the upper class' affirmation of its own status,¹¹ but archery's pre-industrial associations meant that it was easily absorbed into the enthusiasm, sometimes verging on an obsession, for neo-medievalism that swept much of landed British society in the nineteenth century; an obsession that was partly fuelled by Walter Scott's writings, especially his hugely popular *Ivanhoe* (1820).¹² Increasingly, Britain's archers organized themselves in clubs in the decades after the Napoleonic wars, a process that culminated in the establishment of one of sport's first national championship competitions, the annual Grand National Archery Meetings, the first of which was held at York in 1844.¹³

The Meath Archers were the first archery club to be established in Ireland in the nineteenth century, and the Westmeath Archers, formed in January 1834, were the country's second toxophilite club. They followed the template of their British counterparts by adopting uniforms, admitting new members by ballot, and encouraging sociability by holding shooting competitions at the houses of different members. The Westmeath Archers had four male patrons, including Sir Percy Nugent, and four 'lady patronesses', including Lady Nugent and Mrs Smyth of Gaybrook. Only the families of members were allowed to attend the club's competitions, which were to alternate between the houses of the male patrons and lady patronesses, and then at the homes of any members who wished to host them; in every case, a 'collation' had to be provided after the archery.¹⁴ One gets a better sense of the scale of some of these occasions from the fact that at one of the Meath Archers' meetings, in July 1838, which was hosted at Headfort House, Kells, by the marquis of Headfort, 'upwards of 180 persons' sat down to dinner in a marquee erected for the occasion.¹⁵ An example of a less lavish Meath Archers affair was the meeting hosted by John Tisdall of Charlesfort in June 1844, when 'a party of seventy of the *elite* of the county' attended to participate in or observe the archery competitions. After dinner, the 'Lady Paramount', the countess of Bective, distributed the prizes, one of which she herself had won. After this, 'In the evening the company adjourned to the house for dancing,

11 E.G. Heath, *A history of target archery* (Newton Abbot, 1973), pp 63–4, 68, 71; Martin Johnes, 'Archery, romance and elite culture in England and Wales, c.1780–1840', *History*, 89:294 (Apr. 2004), 193–208 at 193–7, 202; Martin Johnes, 'Archery' in Tony Collins, John Martin and Wray Vamplew (eds), *Encyclopedia of traditional British rural sports* (London and New York, 2005), pp 25–6. **12** Johnes, 'Archery and elite culture', 200, 205–6; Johnes, 'Archery', pp 27–8; Marc Girouard, *The return to Camelot: chivalry and the English gentleman* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1981). **13** John Burnett, 'Sport and the calendar: archery and rifle shooting in Scotland in the nineteenth century', *Scottish Studies*, 33 (1999), 110–30 at 120. **14** Hunt, 'Women and sport', 35; *Rules of the society of the Westmeath archers* (Mullingar, 1834), p. 5 (Westmeath County Library, Mullingar, Small Collections). **15** *Freeman's Journal*, 10 July 1838. For accounts of Meath Archers' meetings at various members' demesnes, see *Bell's life in London and sporting chronicle*, 12 Aug. 1838, 2 Sept. 1838, 4 Sept. 1838, 18 July 1852; *The Era*, 4 Sept. 1842, 10 Aug. 1845; *Freeman's Journal*, 22 July 1844.



which was kept up until a late hour, when they separated highly delighted with the day's amusement and the hospitality of their kind host and hostess'.¹⁶

Generous hospitality to one's guests was an early and enduring feature of Irish archery meetings, as, indeed, it was a feature of landed elite life throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁷ This was evident at one of the first recorded archery meetings in Ireland, a 'grand archery Fête' that was held at Rathfarnham Castle in June 1835, where some 'two hundred of the *haut ton* sat down to dinner', following the competitions and prize giving. After a promenade through the castle park, refreshments were served to the guests and then dancing was 'kept up until a late hour', the music being provided by the band of the 15th Hussars and a quadrille band.¹⁸

Not even the Famine put an end to such convivial gatherings, although their number appears to have decreased during the years of the catastrophe. A particularly interesting meeting was held in 1847 at Ballynahinch Spa, under the auspices of Lady Selina Ker, who was keen to have an archery society inaugurated in Down along the lines of the Meath Archers, 'the ladies of which headed by Lady Fanny Herbert, annually distinguish themselves at the use of the bow'.¹⁹ This took place on 13 July; there were some 150 guests, and around 800 people attended altogether, when one includes the local peasantry who were attracted by the novelty of the event, as well as by such side attractions as a donkey race and foot race in which they could compete, and a 'mock tournament'. The latter involved the gentlemen guests engaging in a tilting competition, in which they had to negotiate a specially laid out course on horseback, spearing suspended rings of various sizes, 'balls in imitation of faces', and 'a wooden man in armour, on a pivot, with arms extended' while they did so.²⁰

In addition to these planned amusements, the proceedings were further enlivened by the arrival of Revd C. Boyd, 'the loyal vicar of Magheradroll', mounted upon a spirited horse and 'decorated with orange insignia', who was 'loudly cheered by the assembled multitude'. The needs of the thirsty guests were well provided for:

There was a cow on the grounds, ornamented with garlands of flowers, for the purpose of affording milk for syllabub, and from the number who partook of that beverage, she was as able and willing to exercise the virtues of hospitality as her kind and generous owners. She was attended by a 'lady in waiting' dressed in a grotesque cap, petticoat and skirt 'à la Suisse'.

The proceedings finished, as was usual, with a dinner, 'which consisted of everything the season could afford, or hospitality devise'; this was followed by a quadrille dance in the pleasure grounds, and then a larger dance later in the evening, which lasted into the early hours of the morning 'until papa and mama interfered' and 'this most agreeable entertainment' finally came to a close.²¹

¹⁶ *Freeman's Journal*, 22 June 1844. ¹⁷ Dooley, *Decline*, pp 44–7, 52–6; Bence-Jones, *Twilight*, pp 11–12. ¹⁸ *The Court Journal*, 13 June 1835. ¹⁹ *Downpatrick Recorder*, 10 July 1847. ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17 July 1847. ²¹ Account by 'Correspondent' in *Downpatrick Recorder*, 17



In August 1846, the Meath Archers held their second meeting of the year at Oakley Park, the seat of George Bomford, 'a modern place, tastefully laid out by Mr McNevin'. After the shooting, which took place under the direction of 'the popular lady paramount for the year', the guests commenced dancing at 9pm, and 'the dancing kept up with great spirit till three o'clock, when the party broke up delighted with their day's amusement, and anxiously looked forward to their next meeting, which was to take place at Beauparc'.²² Three years later, the Meath Archers held an enjoyable meeting at Naper's demesne at Loughcrew, which was 'most fashionably attended'. The band of the 35th Regiment, from Mullingar, played during dinner, which was served 'in the ornamental grounds attached to the splendid mansion, in a spacious marquee', while the shooting took place on the lawn in front of the mansion. In the evening, there was a ball in the mansion, 'where dancing was kept up with unabashed spirit till daylight, to the music of Hanlon's band'.²³ In November of the same year, the Wexford Archers held their annual ball, described as 'this brilliant reunion of the nobility and gentry composing the members of the Archery Club', in Wexford's Assembly Rooms. The fact that they held their ball suggests that they also had a full season's shooting.²⁴

After the Famine, the elite of Wexford society – and much of the landed gentry and aristocracy throughout the rest of Ireland – continued with their sociable archery meetings.²⁵ The second meeting of the Wexford Archers' 1850 season was held at Ballinkeeffe, 'the beautiful residence of John Maher, Esq'. After the shooting, some 140 guests sat down to 'a very elegant collation' in 'a spacious and beautiful tent' that was furnished by Hynes' of Silver Street, Dublin; the proceedings were watched over by the club's vice-president, C.H. Cliffe, in the absence of the president, Lord Carew. According to the *Wexford Independent*, 'the amusements of this delightful and social reunion were concluded by dancing in the beautiful suite of rooms in the mansion house, which were thrown open for the purpose by the hospitable proprietor'.²⁶ While clubs continued to be important in the organization of archery contests in this period, there is also evidence that some aristocratic families included archery as part of other amusements for their guests. For example, in August and September 1853, the earl and countess of Erne put on a fortnight's entertainment for a large number

July 1847. 'Magheradroll' is today spelled 'Magheradrool'. For a discussion of the Famine in Down, see Trevor McCavery, 'The Famine in County Down' in Christine Kinealy and Trevor Parkhill (eds), *The Famine in Ulster: the regional impact* (Belfast, 1997), pp 99–127.

²² *Bell's life in London and sporting chronicle*, 30 Aug. 1846. ²³ *Anglo-Celt*, 24 Aug. 1849. For a discussion of the Famine in Meath, see Noel E. French, 'The impact of the Great Famine on the population of County Meath', *Ríocht na Midhe*, 18 (2007), 156–69. ²⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Nov. 1849. For a discussion of the Famine in Wexford, see Anna Kinsella, *County Wexford in the Famine years, 1845–1849* (Dublin, 1995). ²⁵ For an anonymously authored fictional account of an archery fete in the grounds of 'Ballyhowley Castle', which was written by somebody who apparently had pleasant experience of the largesse at these kind of gatherings, see 'An archery fete', *Irish Metropolitan Magazine*, 34:16 (July 1858), 410–17. ²⁶ Undated *Wexford Independent* report in *Freeman's Journal*, 8 Aug. 1850.



of visitors to their Crom Castle Estate in Fermanagh, which included an archery fete, the first prize in which was won by their daughter, Lady Louisa Crichton.²⁷ A year later, the Ernes put on another archery fete for the visit of the lord lieutenant, the earl of St Germans, to Crom Castle.²⁸

According to Alfred Perceval Graves, son of the bishop of the united diocese of Limerick, Ardfert and Aghadoe, the 1860s in Limerick were halcyon days for 'we young people', with fishing, boating, archery and picnic parties by day and dances and concerts by night ensuring that 'socially our Limerick days in the sixties were delightful ones';²⁹ archery also constituted one of the few amusements for daughters of Church of Ireland clergymen in rural Munster in the same decade.³⁰ Most of the evidence suggests that clubs were the mainstay of archery in the post-Famine period, with a marked growth in their number from the late 1850s to the 1860s. These clubs were, in many respects, typical of the myriad associations that sprang up in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland for the purposes of providing opportunities for socializing with people of similar background or interests:³¹ what distinguished the archery clubs from most contemporary recreational associations was, of course, that their membership was drawn from the upper tiers of Irish society.

Army officers and their families played a leading role in some of these clubs. As early as July 1856, archery formed the principal attraction in the field day and exercises of the officers at the Curragh. Some thirty marquees were pitched for the comfort of the spectators and competitors, who consisted of a 'large number of fashionables of both sexes'. By 1858, weekly archery competitions formed part of the regular routine at the camp, and by 1861 a Curragh Archery Society was in existence, holding competitions for officers and civilian gentlemen and ladies.³² Officers and their families were to the fore in the archery competitions and balls that formed the principal amusements of the Templemore and Ormond Archery Clubs in the late 1850s and early 1860s, with the officers of the Templemore garrison often hosting these affairs and inviting large numbers of 'the elite of North Tipperary' to attend.³³ The officers of the Belfast garrison were so keen on archery that they formed the Belfast Military Archery Club in 1862, with the officer-commanding as president. The five 'lady patronesses' included Lady Donegall and Lady Massereene. By 1864, there were some eighty members in the club, who practiced on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays in the Royal Botanic Gardens, with a monthly prize meeting in June and July and a major prize meeting in September.³⁴ At the other end of the country,

²⁷ *The Lady's Newspaper*, 3 Sept. 1853. ²⁸ *Morning Chronicle*, 7 Aug. 1854. ²⁹ Alfred Perceval Graves, *To return to all that: an autobiography* (London and Toronto, 1930), p. 147. ³⁰ Anonymous, 'Recollections of an Irish home', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 161:978 (Apr., 1897), 578–91 at 578. ³¹ James Kelly and Martyn Powell (eds), *Clubs and societies in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2010); Jennifer Kelly and R.V. Comerford (eds), *Associational culture in Ireland and abroad* (Dublin, 2010), pp 11–47, 105–27. ³² *Freeman's Journal*, 11 July 1856, 16 July 1861; *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 July 1858. ³³ *Nenagh Guardian*, 12 May 1858, 5 June 1858, 9 Oct. 1858, 11 June 1859, 18 Aug. 1860, 29 Aug. 1860. ³⁴ J. Sharp (ed.), *The archer's register: a yearbook of facts for 1864* (London, 1864), p. 128.



the membership roll of the Doneraile Archery Club, founded on 11 June 1863, varied considerably, depending on the number of 'military gentlemen' who were stationed nearby. In 1865, there were some forty-nine members in the club, which was much smaller than in previous years, when the garrison – and the pool of potential officer members – had been larger.³⁵

The attractions of archery for gentlemen officers had almost nothing to do with its potential military usefulness. Most contemporaries recognized that the longbow had long outlived its usefulness as a weapon in war: indeed, in 1860 the lord lieutenant, the earl of Carlisle, caused amusement in some of his audience when he gave a speech at a Joneswell archery fete, in which he praised the Kilkenny Archers for being ready 'to furnish a fair band of defenders who showed so much skill and efficiency in those formidable weapons of our ancestors, the bow and arrow'.³⁶ However, a few people persisted in believing that archery potentially served a useful military purpose. In a letter to the *Belfast News-Letter* in June 1865, a Bangor correspondent, while complaining of the dangers which one 'son of Mars' posed to the public by practising his archery in an area that was frequented by passers-by, suggested nevertheless that he and other nuisance archers could put their skill to good use against the Fenian threat³⁷ – it is difficult to believe that even the Fenians, ill-equipped and poorly trained as they were, would have had much difficulty in overcoming opponents who were armed with bows and arrows. At the Exhibition grounds in Dublin in 1866, where the Grand Leinster Archery Society held their annual prize competition, Captain John Norton of the County of Dublin Archers demonstrated to his fellow toxophilites his 'percussion shell arrow', which exploded on contact with the grass; Norton explained to his audience that 'it would also explode on striking a ship's sail, and might be found useful against pirates'. A few years previously, he had also argued that the same arrow 'might be used effectively against wild animals, such as lions, tigers, buffaloes &c., even when shot from a lady's bow'.³⁸

It is unlikely that many officers had thoughts of shooting either Fenians, tigers or pirates when they participated in archery: it is possible, however, that in their imagination many of them – and their civilian counterparts – pictured themselves as latter day Robin Hoods or other mythical or real figures from the medieval past. The widespread popularity of archery among the landed elite allowed them to sustain their romantic role-playing as medieval heroes. The setting of many archery contests helped to maintain the sport's neo-medieval trappings. Ruined castles, such as the King's Castle at Ardglass³⁹ and Monkstown Castle, the evocative setting for the

35 J. Sharp (ed.), *The archer's register: a yearbook of facts for 1865* (London, 1865), pp 160–1.

36 *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Sept. 1860. **37** Letter from 'Douzenberry' in *Belfast News-Letter*, 17

June 1865. **38** *Belfast News-Letter*, 11 Sept. 1866; John Norton, *A list of Captain Norton's projectiles, and his other naval and military inventions: with original correspondence* (Gravesend, 1860), p. 136. Like many Irish officers, Norton spent part of his military service in India.

While stationed there in 1823, he developed a percussion rifle shell. **39** *Belfast News-Letter*, 5 Sept. 1837.



County of Dublin Archers' meetings,⁴⁰ or mock Gothic castles, such as Markree Castle in Sligo,⁴¹ easily lent themselves to this kind of illusion. The landed elite's fascination with a romanticized vision of the medieval past⁴² was not revealed solely by their indulging in archery, but also by the construction of hundreds of 'Big Houses', either built as neo-medieval castles or featuring such neo-medieval features as castellations and turrets.⁴³ As in Britain, where archery meetings 'had the cultivated feel of a medieval tournament',⁴⁴ Irish toxophilites created a neo-medieval atmosphere by such means as erecting tents and marquees at their archery competitions, employing buglers to announce the entry of competitors or the attainment of 'gold' scores,⁴⁵ or decorating archery grounds and ballrooms with flags and banners displaying heraldic devices.⁴⁶ The occasional awarding of such prizes as a golden arrow, which was presented to the best female competitors at the Meath Archers' meetings of June 1844 and August 1845 and at the Royal Irish Grand National Archery Club's meeting at Bray in August 1863,⁴⁷ or a statuette of Robin Hood, which was presented to the best female shooter at the Grand Leinster Archery Club's competition in September 1865,⁴⁸ further helped to achieve the desired effect.

The rhetoric employed in the sporting and general press to describe Irish archery meetings also frequently emphasized the neo-medieval character of these occasions. For example, one observer commented that the archery competition at Ballynahinch Spa in July 1847 'might remind one of the happy days of "Merry England"',⁴⁹ while the excellent shooting of the ladies and gentlemen at the Royal Irish Grand National Archery Club competition at the Rotundo Gardens in Dublin in July 1861 was deemed 'worthy of the brightest days of "merry Sherwood" itself'.⁵⁰ An effort was

40 G.R. Powell, *The official railway handbook to Bray, Kingstown, the coast and the county of Wicklow* (Dublin, 1860), p. 47; *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Sept. 1864. 41 *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Aug. 1832. 42 This is further evidenced by the participation of a number of Irish aristocrats in the extravagant Eglinton tournament of 1839: *Downpatrick Recorder*, 7 Sept. 1839. For a full treatment of the Eglinton tournament, see Girouard, *Return to Camelot*, pp 88–110. See also the photograph of Sir Charles Barrington wearing medieval armour, in his guise as 'deputy warden of Glenstal Castle' in Bence-Jones, *Twilight*, p. 179. 43 For good discussions of two of these neo-medieval 'Big Houses' – Gosford Castle in Co. Armagh, the construction of which began in 1819, and Glenstal Castle in Co. Limerick, which was designed in 1836 – see Lindsay Proudfoot, 'Placing the imaginary: Gosford Castle and the Gosford estate, ca.1820–1900' in A.J. Hughes and William Nolan (eds), *Armagh, history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 2001), pp 890–9; Marion D. McGarry, 'Creating a noble past: the design of Glenstal Abbey, 1836–1861', *Old Limerick Journal*, 42 (2006), 20–3. For photographs of some of the neo-Gothic houses that were built in the nineteenth century, see Bence-Jones, *Twilight*, pp 33 (Killeen Castle, Co. Meath), 35 (Mitchelstown Castle, Co. Cork), 218 (Gurteen le Poer, Co. Waterford). 44 Johnes, 'Archery', p. 27. 45 Anonymous, 'An archery fete', 412; *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Sept. 1860, 27 Aug. 1867. 46 *Downpatrick Recorder*, 17 July 1847, 9 Nov. 1872; *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Sept. 1860, 10 Sept. 1874; *Belfast News-Letter*, 15 May 1865, 8 Aug. 1867, 2 Oct. 1873. 47 *Freeman's Journal*, 22 June 1844; *The Era*, 10 Aug. 1845; *Belfast News-Letter*, 15 Aug. 1863. 48 *Freeman's Journal*, 21 Sept. 1865. 49 *Downpatrick Recorder*, 17 July 1847. 50 *Freeman's Journal*, 27 July 1861.



made to entice the Bray public to attend the competition of the latter club in August 1863 with an announcement that they would be treated to a display of ‘that “anncient and ryghte nobile pastime” of archery’ should they attend.⁵¹ The *Freeman’s Journal* was particularly prone to this kind of rhetoric. In September 1874, it informed its readers that

Archery has attractions altogether and peculiarly its own. There is no sport or science which has been so long known and so universally practised, and there is none with which so many pleasant and interesting associations are connected. In every age of the world’s history the bow has been the favourite weapon of every nation in every corner of the globe. [...] From [Homer’s] day to our own bows and arrows have done wonderful execution in the hands of verse makers and romance writers. They play a particularly prominent part in the metrical and non-metrical, but equally fascinating romances of the ‘Great Wizard of the North’ [...] In the story of ‘Ivanhoe’, perhaps the most fascinating passages are those in which the doings of Robin Hood and his merry men are so delightfully detailed. Indeed, the memory of the jovial band of outlawed archers ought, in itself, to be sufficient to popularise the sport, for it is hard to look upon a bow and arrows without being reminded of the waving leaves, and glancing deer, and groups of merry outlaws in the shady forests of Nottingham.⁵²

On a number of occasions, the newspaper evoked images of Robin Hood, and reminded readers that the sport ‘is associated more with history, poetry and romance than any other’, in its coverage of Irish archery contests.⁵³

A British officer serving in Ireland in the 1830s commented on the obsession of what he called ‘the Anglo-Irish party’ with the myths and legends of England, an obsession which was nurtured from childhood and which formed an important element of the revival of interest in archery in the nineteenth century:

The mythic heroes of their childhood are King Arthur and ‘the knights of the round table’ – Sir Lancelot, Sir Tristram, Sir Percival, Sir Gawain and the rest of that fair throng. Merlin is their wizard. Robin Hood and Little John are of their familiar acquaintance from the first; and the old glories of English archery swell their little hearts from the moment they can draw a tiny bow.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *Freeman’s Journal*, 8 Aug. 1863. ⁵² *Freeman’s Journal*, 22 Sept. 1874. For a recent discussion of Walter Scott and Ireland, but which, unfortunately, does not focus on *Ivanhoe*, see R.F Foster, *Words alone: Yeats and his inheritances* (Oxford, 2011), pp 14–21. ⁵³ *Freeman’s Journal*, 13 Aug. 1863, 15 June 1864, 17 Sept. 1865, 17 Sept. 1869, 21 Sept. 1872, 2 June 1875. ⁵⁴ Anonymous (‘An officer in a marching regiment’), ‘Of Ireland in 1834’, *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country* (Feb. 1835), 193–217 at 202.



Although there were some traditions connecting Robin Hood and his associates with Ireland,⁵⁵ these do not appear to have been particularly important in sustaining the Irish elite's interest in archery. Instead, it is likely that it was the perceived essential *Englishness* of the Robin Hood legends, rather than their reputed Irish episodes, which appealed to at least some sections of the Irish landed gentry. This was also a factor in the vogue among some of the landed elite for neo-medieval 'Big Houses', allowing their builders to emphasize their Norman or alleged Norman ancestry.⁵⁶ In England, as Stephanie Barczewski has argued, the cult figure of Robin Hood, as a Saxon hero, was an ideal tool to exploit in a project for bolstering a sense of Englishness in the multicultural and partly 'Celtic' United Kingdom.⁵⁷ Hood was also used to bolster the Irish elite's sense of separateness from the rest of Irish society, as well as their sense of shared values with their counterparts in Britain. This sense of separateness was made apparent to a British tourist in Co. Tipperary in 1869, who congratulated a young woman on winning an archery contest that he had witnessed. On explaining to her how glad he was 'to see an Irish girl carrying all before her', the victor insisted that she was not Irish: her response was: 'I'm a Tipperary girl, if you like; but Irish I am not'.⁵⁸ Abbé Emanuel Domenech, a French priest who visited Ireland in the 1860s, considered the efforts of female archers to be wasted, commenting that:

Had I to give advice to the young women of Erin, it would be to recommend them to found, not archery clubs, but a vast patriotic association, the first statute of which should be that not one of them would consent to marry a man who spoke anything but Celtic, and to obstinately reject all who did not speak it.⁵⁹

Such advice is unlikely to have appealed to the victorious Tipperary archer, or to many of her sister toxophilites. The various archery clubs, then, helped to reinforce the elite's sense of separateness and to strengthen its unique sense of collective identity. As we have seen, some of these clubs were closely associated with the army officer corps – which was itself largely drawn from the ranks of the aristocracy – but most Irish archery clubs were organized and joined by civilian members of Ireland's landed elite, with the result that archery made a pleasant addition to their social round in the summer.⁶⁰ Some of these clubs appear to have been more select than others. The South Tipperary Bowmen, 'an aristocratic archery club',⁶¹ for example,

⁵⁵ *Irish Shield and Monthly Milesian*, 1 (1829), 401; 'Little John in Ireland', *Dublin Penny Journal*, 1:2 (7 July 1832), 13–14; *Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction*, 20:568 (Sept. 1832), 204; *All The Year Round* (20 Nov. 1869), 584; *Freeman's Journal*, 2 June 1875.
⁵⁶ Proudfoot, 'Placing the imaginary', pp 895–9; McGarry, 'Glenstal Castle', 20–3.
⁵⁷ Stephanie L. Barczewski, *Myth and national identity in nineteenth-century Britain: the legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford, 2000), pp 99–105, 107–8, 124–34, 137–41.
⁵⁸ *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* (Aug. 1869), 185. ⁵⁹ *Times*, 4 Jan. 1867.
⁶⁰ Dooley, *Decline*, p. 53. ⁶¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 20 Sept. 1862.



were considered to be particularly exclusive, and James Mason, the Confederate States of America's special commissioner for Europe, probably felt at home when he was entertained at the club's fete at Knocklofty, the seat of the earl of Donoughmore, in September 1864. Mason donated a prize of 'a valuable jewelled brooch' to the club and Donoughmore, when presenting it, 'took occasion to allude in kindly terms to the sympathy felt for his countrymen in their struggle for independence'. The earl, who also received Mason as a guest in the previous year, was considered 'one of the South's staunchest supporters' in Europe.⁶² Another relatively exclusive club was the Ulster Archers, founded in 1865 by 'the nobility and leading gentry' of Ulster. Among its patrons were the marquis and marchioness of Donegall, the marquis and marchioness of Downshire, the earl and countess of Charlemont, the countess of Caledon, the earl of Dartrey, Lord and Lady Dufferin, Lord Edwin Hill-Trevor, Viscount Massereene and Ferrard and Lord and Lady Lurgan.⁶³

While no other Irish toxophilite club could match the Ulster Archers for the eminence of its members, what all these clubs shared was a relatively select membership, which was drawn almost entirely from the country's landed elite. One club, the Castleconnell Archery Club, founded in 1859, initially took the idea of exclusion to the extent of limiting membership to just twenty-four families; however, on 1 May 1865, at a meeting at Captain Vansittart's house at Coolbawn, the club wound itself up and decided to reconstruct itself as the Munster Archers, and to base itself in Limerick city, as this would facilitate 'encouraging the practice of archery in this and the adjoining counties'.⁶⁴ There were at least thirty-two archery clubs in Ireland in the 1860s, the decade when the sport was at its most popular (see table 9.1). These clubs performed a dual role: they enabled their members to associate in agreeable surroundings with people of similar background while participating in or observing archery competitions,⁶⁵ while also excluding people who were not of the desired sort.

The clubs' balloting mechanism ensured that undesirable candidates for membership could be blackballed,⁶⁶ while prohibitive membership and entry fees had a similarly excluding effect. Although in 1860 the Kilkenny Archers had what was considered a low annual subscription of 10s., with a 5s. entrance fee,⁶⁷ even these charges would have been prohibitive for most strata of Irish society. In 1865, the Sligo Archers had an annual subscription of 7s. for an individual member and 10s. for a family membership, with entrance fees of £1 for an individual member and £1 10s.

62 *Freeman's Journal*, 21 Aug. 1863, 4 Sept. 1863, 8 Sept. 1864; *Morning Post*, 6 Sept. 1864; Gerald M. Garmon, *John Reuben Thompson* (Boston, 1979), p. 117. For accounts of South Tipperary Bowmen's archery meetings, see *Freeman's Journal*, 23 June 1863, 31 Aug. 1866.

63 *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Aug. 1866, 9 Aug. 1867. **64** Sharp (ed.), *Archer's register for 1864*, p. 132; Sharp (ed.), *Archer's register for 1865*, p. 163. **65** Archery clubs consisted of shooting and non-shooting members. **66** Mike Huggins, *The Victorians and sport* (London and New York, 2004), p. 34; *Rules of the Society of the Westmeath Archers* (Mullingar, 1834), p. 11 (Westmeath County Library, Mullingar, small collections); *The Sligo Archers: rules* (Sligo, 1865), p. 8; *Belfast News-Letter*, 15 Aug. 1877. **67** *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Sept. 1860.



Table 9.1 Archery clubs in the 1860s.⁶⁸

Club name	Founded	Membership
Archers of the Bann		
Armagh Archers	17 November 1863	'upwards of 200' (1864)
Belfast Military Archery Club	1862	82 (1864)
Buttevant Archery Club		
Carlow Archers		
Castleconnell Archers	1859	24 families (1864)
County of Dublin Archers	c.1845; re-founded 14 June 1857	60 (1864)
Curragh Archery Society		
Doneraile Archery Club	11 June 1863	49 (1865)
Fermoy Archery Club	1860	c.100 (1864)
Fingall Archers		
Grand Leinster and Munster Archery Society	1863	68 (1864)
Inishannon Company of Archers	1861	24 (1864)
Kildare Archers		
Kilkenny Archers	c.1857	
King's County Archers		
Kinsale Archers		
Mallow Archers	2 May 1863	60 (1865)
Meath Archers	c.1833	
Munster Archers	1 May 1865	'upwards of 100' (1865)
North Tipperary Archers		
Ormond Archers	c.March 1859	
Queen's County Archers		
Queenstown Archers		
Rathkeale Archers		
The Rock (Cashel) Archers		
Royal Irish Grand National Archers	May 1861	100 (1864)
Sligo Archers		
South Tipperary Bowmen		
The Ulster Archers	20 July 1865	'exceeds 100' (1865)
Waterford Archers	1860	c.200 (1864)
Wexford Archers	1845	195 (1864)

for a family membership.⁶⁹ Essential equipment such as bows, quivers, arrows, tassels, arm guards and targets added to archery's expense.⁷⁰ Attending archery clubs' annual

68 Information from *The Era*, 31 Aug. 1845; *Nenagh Guardian*, 5 Mar. 1859; *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Sept. 1860, 12 Oct. 1860, 16 July 1861, 13 Aug. 1863, 28 July 1864; *Sporting gazette*, 15 Aug. 1863; *Bell's life and London and sporting chronicle*, 23 Aug. 1863; J. Sharp (ed.), *Archer's register for 1864*, pp 125, 128, 131–5; J. Sharp (ed.), *Archer's register for 1865*, pp 160–3, 165. With thanks to Tom Hayes and Patrick Bracken for information on the Rathkeale and Rock (Cashel) clubs, respectively. **69** *Sligo Archers*, p. 7. **70** For the cost of these and other archery items,



balls involved further expenditure: in the 1870s, ladies and gentlemen paid 12s. 6d. and 15d., respectively, for tickets to the Downshire Archers' annual ball.⁷¹ The Downshires, founded in 1870, principally through the efforts of Mrs Jane Blakiston-Houston of Orangefield, were considered 'by far the most aristocratic and select' sports club in Co. Down.⁷²

The uniforms sported by most archery clubs were a further expense and were signifiers of both belonging and exclusion: the uniforms heightened members' sense of collective identity, while distinguishing them from the common herd; their cost also helped increase clubs' exclusive nature.⁷³ Archery uniforms varied in design and appearance: the Westmeath Archers required lady members to wear a uniform of 'White dress, of any material, with green ribbon; white chip, or straw hat, trimmed with green ribbon, feather or flower', while men had to wear a dark green coat and white trousers;⁷⁴ the Meath Archers wore white and crimson uniforms.⁷⁵ The ladies who participated in Lady Selina Ker's archery competition at Ballynahinch Spa wore striking uniforms: according to one observer, these consisted of 'green jackets, white skirts and straw hats, with broad brims, turned up at the right side', while another described their uniforms as 'Polka jackets of green velvet, and silver buttons, black muslin dress, with black boots; large leaved straw hats, looped on the right side with a rosette of green and white ribbon under the chin with the same, together with a bow and a quiver of arrows'.⁷⁶ The ladies' uniform of the County of Dublin Archers consisted of 'white petticoats, green jackets and turned-up straw hats, decorated with ostrich feathers', while the men wore Lincoln green velvet caps and uniforms. The Kilkenny Archers also sported green uniforms.⁷⁷ The ladies of the Armagh Archers wore a uniform consisting of 'a white lustre skirt, with a rich green light-colo[ur]ed trimming, and a cashmere jacket of the same colo[u]r' (fig. 9.1).⁷⁸ One enterprising bootmaker, Mr Butler of Nassau Street in Dublin, even produced a 'royal archery shooting boot', which was showcased at the Dublin International Exhibition in 1864. Reaching halfway up the wearer's leg, this leather boot was 'composed of fine green cloth, massively worked out with shamrocks and turned over at the top with a hand-

see 'J.T.H.' (ed.), *John Lawrence's handbook of cricket in Ireland, and record of athletic sports, football &c. Fourteenth number, 1878-79* (Dublin, 1879), p. 213. A number of shops catered for archers' various needs, including John Lawrence's sports goods shop on Grafton Street and Barrett's archery warehouse on St Stephen's Green, both in Dublin, and Henry Greer's archery warehouse on High Street in Belfast: *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Apr. 1854, 27 July 1861, 22 June 1864, 5 Sept. 1866, 29 Aug. 1867; J. Sharp (ed.), *The archer's register: a year-book of facts for 1866-67* (London, 1867), p. 160. **71** For accounts of the Downshire Archers' annual ball, see *Belfast News-Letter*, 29 Oct. 1870, 28 Sept. 1871, 2 Oct. 1873, 22 Sept. 1874, 18 Oct. 1879; *Downpatrick Recorder*, 9 Nov. 1872, 30 Nov. 1877, 30 Nov. 1878, 11 Dec. 1880. **72** *Belfast News-Letter*, 10 Sept. 1874; *Downpatrick Recorder*, 30 Nov. 1877. **73** On this aspect of clubs' uniforms, see Jennifer Kelly and R.V. Comerford, 'Introduction' in Kelly and Comerford (eds), *Associational culture*, p. 6. **74** Hunt, 'Women and sport', 35n41; *Rules of the Society of the Westmeath Archers*, p. 11. Uniforms were optional for non-shooting members. **75** *Freeman's Journal*, 22 July 1844. **76** *Downpatrick Recorder*, 17 July 1847. **77** *Freeman's Journal*, 9 Aug. 1860, 13 Sept. 1860. **78** *Belfast News-Letter*, 10 Aug. 1867.





9.1 'The Armagh Archers, 1874' (courtesy of the Armagh County Museum).

some gauntlet'.⁷⁹ Regardless of the kind of uniform favoured by Irish archers, their appearance made a favourable impression on many observers of archery contests in this period,⁸⁰ which was undoubtedly the wearers' aim.

Creating a favourable impression at archery meetings was a particularly important consideration for many female archers: as many contemporary observers commented, mingling and cutting an attractive figure at archery contests enhanced unmarried women's chances of finding a husband.⁸¹ This is not to say that archery was not important as a sports activity in its own right for female participants; indeed, archery in the post-Famine decades was the sport with the highest female participation, and was often a majority female affair.⁸² The evidence suggests that Irish female toxophilites were often keen competitors⁸³ and that their level of skill equalled, and sometimes surpassed, that of male competitors.⁸⁴ Indeed, Ireland's first female inter-

⁷⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 15 June 1864. ⁸⁰ *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Aug. 1863; *Belfast News-Letter*, 21 Sept. 1865, 23 Sept. 1865; *Our Boys and Girls*, 1:14 (6 Apr. 1867). ⁸¹ For the case of British women, see Johnes, 'Archery and elite culture', 199; Hugh D.H. Soar, *The romance of archery: a social history of the longbow* (Yardley, 2008), p. 142. ⁸² Henry Parkinson and Peter Lund (eds), *The illustrated record and descriptive catalogue of the Dublin International Exhibition of 1865* (Dublin and London, 1866), p. 531; *Belfast News-Letter*, 28 Aug. 1867; *Times*, 14 Sept. 1869; Tom Hayes, "'God save the queen, God save the green, and the usual loyal toasts": sporting and dining for Ireland and/or the queen' in Peter Gray (ed.), *Victoria's Ireland? Irishness and Britishness, 1837-1901* (Dublin, 2004), p. 82. ⁸³ *Times*, 6 July 1863; *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Aug. 1863, 18 June 1869; *Belfast News-Letter*, 10 Aug. 1866, 10 Sept. 1874. ⁸⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 20 Aug. 1850, 14 Sept. 1864; *Belfast News-Letter*, 21 Sept. 1865.



national sports champion was an archer, Cecilia Maria Eleanor Betham. Betham, the daughter of the Cork herald and captain of the County of Dublin Archers, Molyneux Cecil John Betham, took the archery world by storm when she won the British championship for the first time at Alexandra Park, London, in 1864, setting a record score in the process. She won further British championships in 1865, 1866 and 1868,⁸⁵ as well as the Irish championship in 1864, 1865 and 1867.⁸⁶ Such was her fame that she even had a dance named in her honour (fig. 9.2).⁸⁷

Betham was the most notable of the hundreds of Irish women from landed families who availed of the opportunities that archery provided for physical exercise in this period; opportunities that were otherwise rare for most women of this class. Mid-Victorian Ireland shared the attitudes of mid-Victorian Britain concerning what constituted appropriate physical activity for men and women: robust physical exertion by women was frowned upon as not only physically dangerous but also posing a threat to women's essential femininity.⁸⁸ Archery, however, could safely be participated in by women, without prevailing norms of gender behaviour being challenged; while the sport benefited women's health – according to the *Freeman's Journal* in 1869, women's archery was 'worth all the croquet in the world'⁸⁹ – the amount of physical exertion involved was well within acceptable limits. The *Belfast News-Letter* approved of women's archery, claiming in 1870 that 'its healthy effect can hardly be over-estimated', especially as it 'gives an erect and graceful bearing to the entire body, which no other out-door exercise for ladies can lay claim to'.⁹⁰ The sport was unusual in this period in that it allowed not merely for female participation, but also for female competition,⁹¹ which probably added to its attractions in the eyes of many women from Ireland's landed families.

Despite Betham's remarkable victories at archery competitions in Ireland and Britain, sporting success was not necessarily uppermost in the minds of most Irish women who joined archery clubs in the Victorian period; indeed, the same point may be made about men who attended archery meetings. As Martin Johnes explains, 'archery, complete with the romantic associations of Cupid and his bow and arrows, offered men and women an opportunity to meet, view and enjoy their social equals'.⁹² A lovelorn Belfast correspondent recognized that archery involved more than the mere winning of such prizes as jewellery, money, bracers or bows and arrows

85 Parkinson and Lund (eds), *Dublin International Exhibition*, p. 531; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 13 (July–Dec. 1874), 167. **86** *Bell's life in London and sporting chronicle*, 6 Aug. 1864; *Belfast News-Letter*, 2 June 1865; *Freeman's Journal*, 17 Aug. 1867. **87** Richard F. Harvey, *The Irish archers: Valse, dedicated to Miss Betham and the archery clubs of Ireland* (Dublin, c.1866). **88** For a good discussion of these fears, see Kathleen E. McCrone, *Playing the game: sport and the physical emancipation of English women, 1870–1914* (Lexington, KY, 1988), pp 7–8. **89** *Freeman's Journal*, 17 Sept. 1869. **90** *Belfast News-Letter*, 26 Aug. 1870. **91** Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting females: critical issues in the history and sociology of women's sports* (London and New York, 1994), p. 88; Arthur G. Credland, 'The Grand National archery meetings, 1844–1944, and the progress of women in archery', *Journal of the Society of Archer-Antiquaries*, 43 (2000), 68–104. **92** Johnes, 'Archery and elite culture', 199.



DEDICATED TO MISS BETHAM,
and the Archery Clubs of Ireland.

V A L S E



THE IRISH ARCHERS

R. W. MURPHY & SONS

M. GUNN & SONS
PIANO-FORTE & HARMONIUM IMPORTERS

9.2 Dance dedicated
to Cecilia Betham,
c.1866 (courtesy of the
National Library of
Ireland).

– to itemize just some of the prizes awarded at Irish archery meetings – when he called in 1862 for the establishment of an archery club in the northern city. He explained that,

Once started, you may depend upon it the amusement would be most popular, besides giving young men, like myself, in search of a wife an opportunity for seeing the beauties of the Northern Athens, now only seen on such



rare occasions as a lord lieutenant's visit, or through the opening of an Ulster Hall.⁹³

The *Freeman's Journal* pointed out that archery 'is at once the most graceful as well as the most healthful of outdoor amusements', and 'almost the only one in which we enjoy the privilege of ladies' society', where 'they not only compete with honour to themselves, but add largely to the beauty and interest of the scene'.⁹⁴ Archery contests allowed women from the elite of society to display their figures without causing scandal,⁹⁵ and flirting with male archers and spectators was often integral to the proceedings.⁹⁶ The opportunities that archery meetings provided for meeting or attracting members of the opposite sex are described vividly in Nicholas Gannon's *Above and below*, a novel of 1864 that was praised for the accuracy of its depiction of Irish archery contests.⁹⁷ Set in the fictional Grangemore Hall, 'the wood-studded domain of the de Lacys', a 'great archery meeting' is organized by Rosamond de Lacy, the novel's heroine:

It was a gathering of the county gentry, and its rank and fashion were well represented. As the eye ranged along those benches, rich in parti-coloured silks and shawls of varied pattern, it was impossible to avoid being struck with the aristocratic appearance of the assemblage, and the beauty of many of the ladies who composed it. Exceptions of course there were as in all meetings of the kind, but the general appearance of those around was decidedly such as to impress one strongly with the conviction that Ireland yields to few countries in the loveliness of its daughters.⁹⁸

The narrator continues:

All are unanimous in admitting that woman is the most beautiful object in creation; but many differ in their opinions as to the costume or attitude which makes her look most to advantage. Some there are who maintain the invincibility of the ball dress; others are dazzled by the witcheries of a riding habit; many, and with much justice, express indomitable faith in the attitude formed when [women are] sweeping the strings of the harp; but it is difficult to conceive how anything can render woman more attractive than the pose of her figure, as dressed in appropriate attire, with the most becoming of little hats upon her head, she gracefully bends the bow, and sends the feathered arrow on its flight.

⁹³ Letter from 'Toxophilote' (sic) in *Belfast News-Letter*, 27 May 1862. ⁹⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 8 Aug. 1863. ⁹⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Aug. 1863, 20 Sept. 1873; *Times*, 5 June 1865; *Belfast News-Letter*, 10 Aug. 1867, 26 Aug. 1870. ⁹⁶ *Our Boys and Girls*, 1:14 (6 Apr. 1867); *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* (Aug. 1869), 185; Oliver Optic, *Shamrock and thistle: or, Young America in Ireland and Scotland* (Boston, 1868), pp 174–5. ⁹⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 21 Oct. 1864. ⁹⁸ Nicholas J. Gannon, *Above and below* (2 vols, London, 1864), i, pp 132–3, 134–5.





9.3 Robert Edward Dillon and Georgiana Dillon playing 'archery on Clonbrock lawn, Co. Galway, c.1883' (courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).

The costume itself does wonders for the wearer, provided she have a good figure and a pretty face; but when to this be added the kindling eye, flushed cheek and indescribable grace imparted by such elegant exercise, a combination of unrivalled fascinations are formed which would melt the heart of the most strong-hearted gunosymist [misogynist] that ever lived.⁹⁹

Predictably, Rosamond, who 'seemed, as she glided, rather than walked . . . the very embodiment of grace and loveliness', wins the heart of a young aristocrat, one Arthur O'Leary of Benbow Castle, with her graceful display at the archery contest.¹ Newspaper accounts of archery contests also describe how ladies' arrows metaphorically struck the hearts of male observers.²

Archery clubs, which formed such a vibrant part of the social round of Ireland's elite in the 1850s and 1860s, went into decline in the 1870s. Notwithstanding the romanticizing of the sport in newspapers, poetry and fiction, unless one were actually taking part in the sport as a contestant, archery was not a particularly exciting pastime, a fact that was admitted on a number of occasions by both archers and journalists.³ Archery went into inevitable decline as an organized sport once alternative

⁹⁹ Gannon, *Above and below*, i, pp 140–1. This idealized image of the female archer displaying her figure while wearing 'becoming' headgear is captured well in William Powell Frith's 1872 painting, 'The fair toxophilites'. ¹ Gannon, *Above and below*, i, pp 142–3. ² *Downpatrick Recorder*, 17 July 1847; *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Aug. 1863. ³ Sharp, *Archer's register*





attractions grew more popular, such as croquet⁴ and hunting, the latter of which attracted increasing numbers of female adherents from the 1860s onwards.⁵ Lawn tennis also grew in popularity among the landed class from the 1870s onwards,⁶ to the detriment of archery. One of Ireland's first lawn tennis clubs, the Monkstown club, was started by the County of Dublin Archers in 1877,⁷ the same year in which the Downshire Archers also started playing lawn tennis.⁸

Lawn tennis quickly displaced archery in the affections of the Downshire and other Irish toxophilites. Archery did not disappear entirely as an elite pastime in the late nineteenth century, however. It remained as a largely private pursuit, conducted without the neo-medieval pageantry that had characterized the sport in its mid-century heyday:⁹ no longer an organized sport, but a pastime, enjoyed by parents and siblings on the lawns of country estates (fig. 9.3) or the back gardens of city mansions.¹⁰ Before its eventual displacement by more popular pursuits, however, archery played an important role in the lives of Ireland's landed elite, providing opportunities for enjoyable socializing and group bonding as well as displays of conspicuous consumption, generous hospitality and social status at a local and wider level, and offering rare opportunities for women from the landed elite to compete in sports contests.

for 1866–67, p. 12; *Freeman's Journal*, 2 June 1875, 29 July 1876. **4** For the increasing popularity of croquet as a pastime among Ireland's landed elite, see Hunt, *Westmeath*, pp 76, 80–1, 85–6. **5** Hunt, *Westmeath*, pp 17–19. **6** *Ibid.*, pp 76–84; N.D. McMillan, *One hundred and fifty years of cricket and sport in County Carlow* (Dublin, 1983), p. 13; Patrick Bracken, "Foreign and fantastic field sports": *cricket in County Tipperary* (Thurles, 2004), pp 44–5. **7** Caoimhín Kenna, *A glance back: a brief history of Monkstown Lawn Tennis Club* (Dublin, 1978), p. 3. **8** *Belfast News-Letter*, 15 Aug. 1877. **9** As an example of archery as a private affair of the landed classes in the 1870s, rather than a club activity, it is instructive that when W.E. Gladstone visited the earl of Meath at Kilruddery, Co. Wicklow, in 1877, he was able to engage in archery there as a substitute for cutting down oak trees, 'as an outlet for his excessive muscular power': see *Funny Folks*, 3 Nov. 1877. **10** See the photograph of the Guinness family practising archery at Iveagh House in Dublin, in Laurence O'Connor, *Lost Ireland: a photographic record at the turn of the century* (London, 1984), p. 33.

