Sunday's Well

HISTORY

1899 TO 2009

Tennis Championship c1940

OVERVIEW

A PLACE FOR FRIENDS

The history of any club is essentially the story of a community coming together to enjoy a favoured pastime, and Sunday's Well Boating and Tennis Club on the Mardyke in Cork is no different.

Enscribed beneath the club's ornate weather vane, the dates 1899-1999 are an instant reminder of the deep history that surrounds the club, and its place in the social and cultural history on Leeside.

The club has faced a myriad of challenges over the years, which are detailed within this book. The knock-on effects of a flailing economy in the 1950s, the unlikely role squash played in dragging the club out of financial trouble and the contentious issue of female membership are perhaps the most memorable, but they are by no means exclusive.

Beautifully situated just west of Cork city centre on the banks of the Lee, the club emerged as a by-prodcut of annual boating regattas at the Mardyke.

The first edition of its rules and bylaws illustrate that learned legal gentlemen were involved in its formative years. Their vision of high standards in all aspects of the club has been retained through the years, and Sunday's Well continues to strive towards excellence.

Tennis continues to be the mainstay of the club, but boating, billiards, squash, cricket, bowls, card-playing and fishing, among others, have all had halcyon years throughout the club's history.

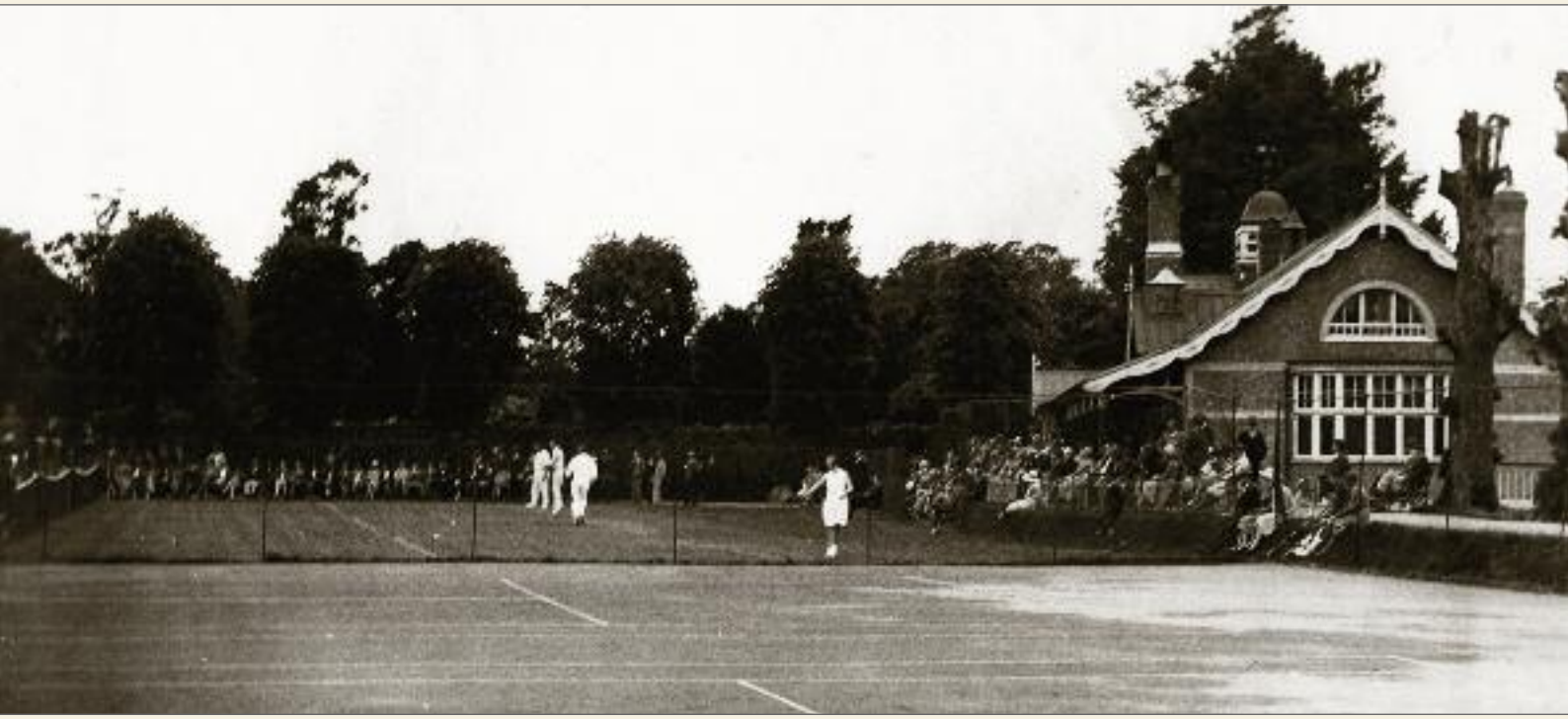
Within the premises, each successful sporting season is immortalised in the club's minute books, perpetual tournament trophies and on the numerous photos that adorn the clubhouse walls.

The minute books also give an insight into the significant voluntary input that continues to be a hallmark of the club, detailing the work of the committees that have been key strands in the club's development. In addition, the reading room's roll of honour remembers the contribution of the various sporting captains.

As with any social history, there are countless characters that are not immortalised on a roll of honour, but tradition has ensured their legacies are firmly intact.

TESTING TIMES AND DESPERATE MEASURES

The early decades of the 20th century saw the club put down roots and consolidate its aims. In this vein, its rules were brought into conformity with the Registration of Clubs (Ireland) Act in 1904.



The upkeep of the grounds was important to the club's image, and monies from members were pumped into improving the infrastructure of the club, be it purchasing billiard balls, providing electricity or trying to solve the ever-present problem of a collapsing river bank.

But while improvements were being made around the clock, time was also ticking for an ageing all-male membership. By the 1950s, the club was also feeling the full effects of a flailing economy and unprecedented emigration and unemployment.

Accounts of those times paint a depressing picture; Mossie Flynn, who joined in 1952 and is one of Sunday's Well's oldest members, remembers a conservative club that was going stale in more ways than one.

"There was no club in the social sense when I joined; the playing of tennis was at a low ebb. We had the place to ourselves every Wednesday afternoon," he recalls.

"It was a gentleman's drinking club more than anything. The bar was used a lot by older gentlemen – whisky was drunk in modest amounts, there was no draught beer or stout, and they always had the same number of drinks.

"They were a stale bunch, not a lively lot for someone like me in his late 20s. The steward often drove those guys home, and several had sad family stories."

During this time, running the club proved a constant struggle; its financial situation gradually worsened while a bank overdraft steadily increased. The Munster and Leinster Bank pressed for a reduction in the overdraft, a request the club couldn't accommodate while many members were failing to pay their subscriptions on time.

Conscious of the unstable state of the Irish economy and its effects at local level, various committees endeavoured to keep subscription fees low.

However, these still trebled between 1949 and 1967, and membership predictably nose-dived as a result. The club lost almost a third of its membership in 1963 alone, dropping from 200 to 144.

The club's very existence was in jeapordy during this uncertain period. But the sanctioning of limited junior and female memberships in the 1960s – the latter proving an extremely thorny issue until it was finally resolved with the advent of full female membership in 1994 – helped stem the financial tide, while new blood galvanised the club socially.

However, it was the re-introduction of squash in the 1970s that set the club back on the path to success. Various members gave generous loans to help erect two squash courts, and membership spiralled amid the game's burgeoning popularity and Cork's paucity of squash facilities.

BACK ON TRACK

Sunday's Well has since gone from strength to strength, and financial security has allowed significant additions to the club's infrastructure, such as a conservatory overlooking the river and a viewing balcony, as well as the merger with the Cork City and County Club in 1995.

These days, the club is open 363 days a year, boasts one of the best junior tennis coaching structures in the country and has an ever-expanding roster of more than 1,000 members.

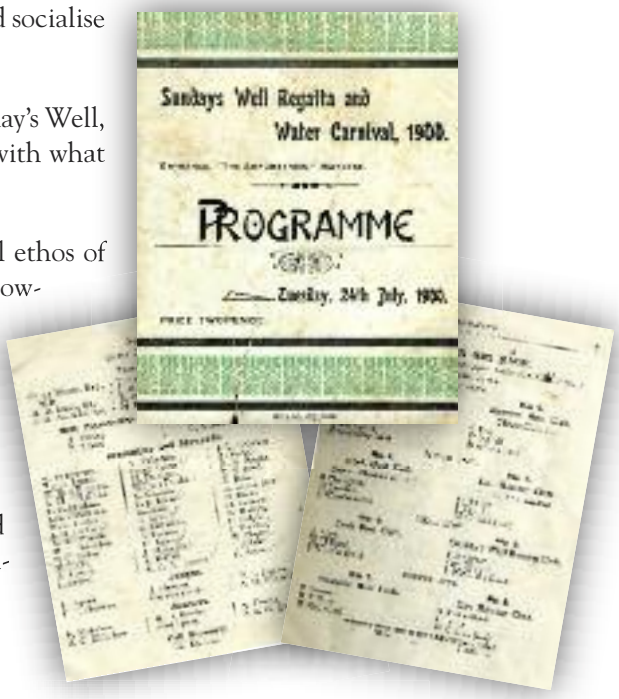
The splicing of old and new at Sunday's Well is evident in the club's present infrastructure, which sees the architictural character of bygone years preserved, with one eye on the future.

John Walsh, who began his work as secretary manager in the club in 1999, says the modern Sunday's Well club is a "cross between a commercial leisure centre and a hotel".

"There is a structure in place as regards the way the club should be run," he explains. "The capital expenditure is maintained for continuity, and the scale of finances to look after the club today is large.

"The nature of running the club 30 years ago was impromptu but not acceptable now. Today there are health and safety issues from food hygiene to staff welfare.

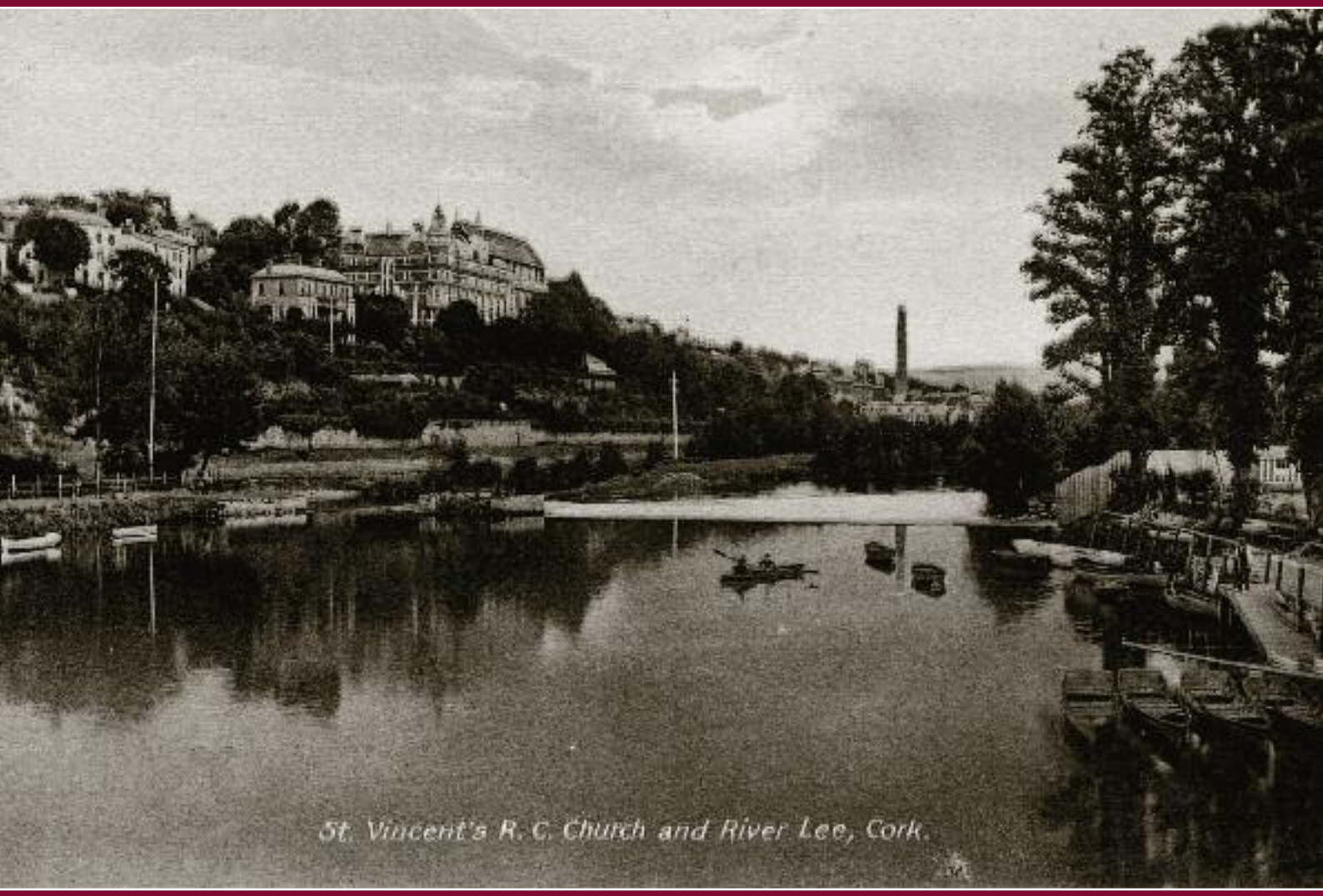
"I feel the club should be comfortable. It is supposed to be a fun place to be. It is not a work place but a place to relax and socialise with friends."



Des Scannell has seen the bad times come and go at Sunday's Well, but says its ethos has remained intact and is delighted with what he sees now.

"From its very inception, it has always had a wonderful ethos of sportsmanship and fair play, great facilities and good fellowship It is a sporting club in the truest sense," he says.

"This continues right up to the present time. We can thank all the past chairmen, committees and trustees for guiding the club, since its founding, for maintaining the well-established traditions and continuously improving the facilities, while adapting to the great and rapid changes in society over the years. Long may it continue!"


St. Vincent's R. C. Church and River Lee, Cork.

THE MAKING OF A CLUB

A WATERY CENTREPIECE

For Corkonians, the river Lee is a keynote feature of their city, which each generation is brought up to respect. At Fitzgerald's Park and the Mardyke, the river becomes a children's playground, but in more grown-up terms, the Lee has been a key factor in the city's growth, providing transport and energy.

Today, two channels of the river encompass the city's urban centre, but prior to the development of a settlement in this area, numerous channels flowed in and around more than a dozen marshy islands.

Until the early 1700s, the area encompassing the present-day Mardyke was one such marshland, and was generally known as the Western Marshes.

However, in 1719, Edward Webber, town clerk of the Corporation of Cork, purchased a large section of the marshes, and constructed a raised walkway across them as a first step to reclaiming the land.

He aptly named this after a promenade in Amsterdam called the Meer-Dyke, which means "an embankment to protect the land from the sea". He also built a house at the western end, where he developed gardens planted with fruit, laid pathways of gravel and installed seats for the "accommodation and entertainment" of those who frequented the walk. Webber's teahouse soon became a place for high society to meet, and the area continued to prosper for more than two centuries after his death in 1735.

Between 1795 and 1850, the teahouse was used as a summer residence for the Mayor of Cork. In the early 1830s, there was a renewed interest in the Mardyke walk from the general public, which led the Corporation to make the promenade more attractive by erecting a slate-covered bandstand.

The house was varyingly occupied throughout the 1800s by the Beamishes of the brewing industry, the Sisters of the Bons Secours, former Mayor of Cork, Barry Sheehan, and Corporation member Cornelius Desmond.

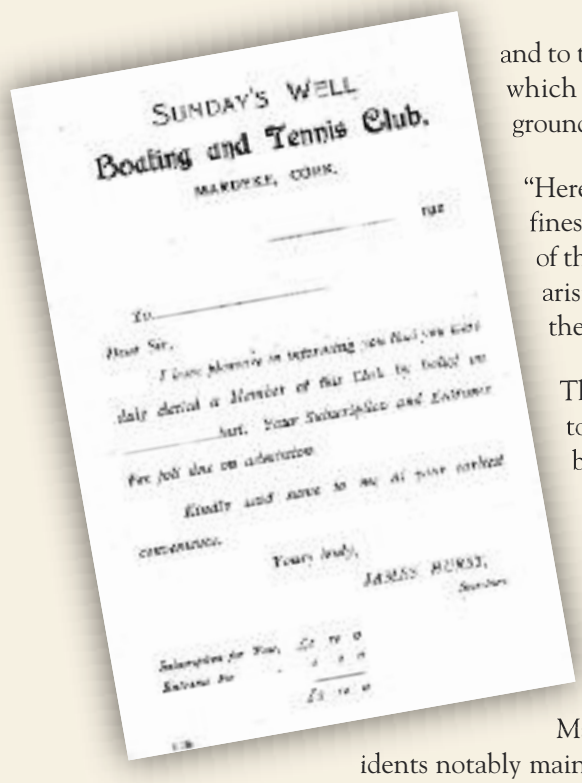
MERCHANT MANIA

While the development of the Mardyke as a recreational area was ongoing on one side of the river, it was business that prompted progress on the other in the Sunday's Well area located a mile to the north west of the Walled Town of Cork.

In the 18th century, Blarney Road was one of the principal 'highways' bringing farmers with butter to the Cork Butter Market at Shandon. The prosperity that products such as butter brought to city merchants led several to build houses and gardens in the Sunday's Well area.

The foci of attention for the mercantile classes in the city were the developing of bridges, residences, quays and warehouses on islands to the west and east of the walled town, to help cater for a population that almost quadrupled from 20,000 in 1690 to 73,000 in 1750.

Charles Smith's History of Cork in 1750 describes developments in Sunday's Well thus: "On the north bank of the river, are several pretty improvements, and country houses, of the citizens;


SUNDAY'S WELL
Boating and Tennis Club.
MARDYKE, CORK.

and to the north-west of the city, several houses and pleasant gardens, which form a pretty hamlet, called Sunday's Well, lying on rising ground, and command a view of the city and river.

"Here are very great plantations of strawberries, of the largest and finest kind, as the chilli and the hautboy strawberry. The planters of those fruit pay considerable rents for their gardens, by the profits arising from them alone, and they have also great plantations of them round other parts of the city."

The Sunday's Well area also has a distinctive 19th century history, linked to the British Empire, the legacy of which can still be seen via a glance across the river from the club.

The varied architectural housing on the present landscape reveals preferred individual tastes amongst original owners. The nature, size, external appearance, internal arrangement and general location of the family dwelling were important ideas of the time.

Many of the houses featured gardens leading to the river, and residents notably maintained them with flowering shrubs, choice flowers, rare trees and fruit gardens.

Sunday's Well was also the preferred location for several municipal services, which were built in the 19th century, such as Cork City Gaol (1824), Our Lady's Hospital Lunatic Asylum (1845) and Cork City Waterworks (1857).

There is also the presence of religious buildings, comprising the Catholic Church of St. Vincent's (1853), the Protestant Church of St. Mary's (1879), The Good Shepherd Convent (1874), and Mount St. Joseph, the Presentation Brother Training College (1892).

NUTS, BOLTS AND BOATS

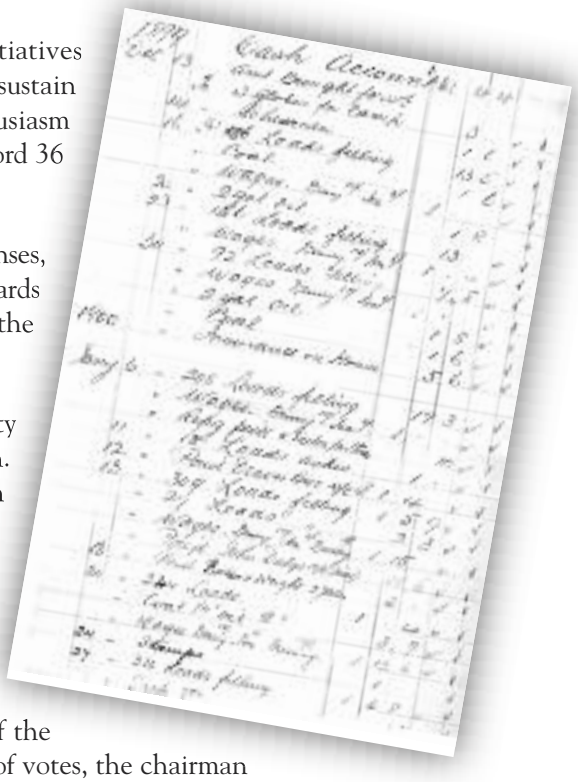
Boating, with a high society classification in the 19th century, was a popular pastime in the river adjacent to Sunday's Well, where mini regattas were organised by the elite.

Due to limited revenue, boating events were not organised every year, but the races are remembered for the Chinese lanterns and bunting that illuminated the gardens at the riverbank, as well as the balloon and firework displays at sundown.

In 1899, inspired by a successful Sunday's Well Regatta and Water Carnival held that July, the Sunday's Well Boating and Tennis Club was founded. It was formed by a number of organisers of the regatta, several of whom were residents in Sunday's Well.

Very little is known about the construction of the first clubhouse or the first building used; it is assumed a premises was already on the site when the club was set up.

The surviving club committee minutes start on the June 23, 1900. At the general meeting, Henry PF Donegan was the honorary secretary, William Bullen was made captain of boating and William Lyons was his tennis counterpart.



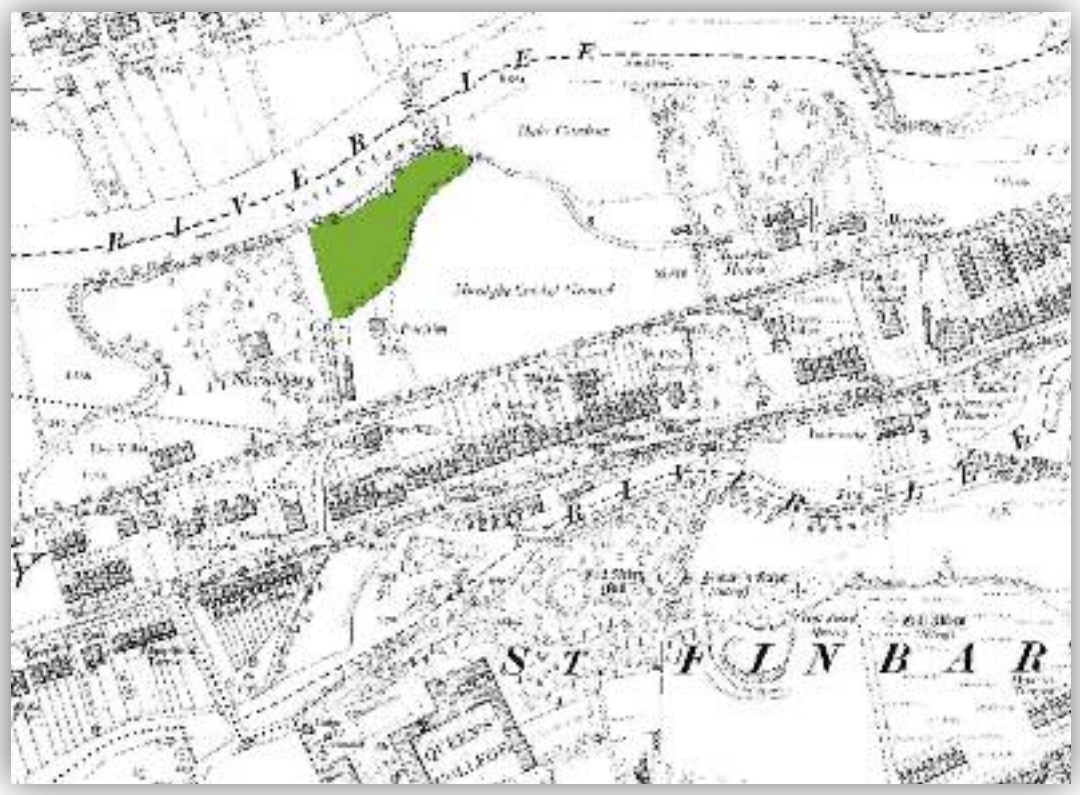
The minutes reveal a busy first two years, with several initiatives organised to improve the club premises and to attract and sustain members. The period is noteworthy for the time and enthusiasm invested in the fledgling club by committee members; a record 36 committee meetings were held in 1901.

The committee met to discuss club matters ranging from expenses, entertainment, employment of staff, allowing the playing of cards in the club house to building a boat house and consolidating the rules of the club.

In December 1900, the club was to be made a limited liability with a capital of £50, divided into shares of 2s and 10d each. The general rules of the club were approved and passed at an AGM held on January 17, 1902. The name of the club was agreed upon, the subscription fee was set at one guinea and the entrance fee was one guinea.

The club was to have a paid secretary, who was to be made an honorary member, and the committee consisted of seven members who were elected at the AGM. Three members of the committee could form a quorum, and in case of an equality of votes, the chairman had a second or casting vote.

The ballot committee, which comprised the ordinary committee and five additional members, voted new members in. The names and particulars of each candidate for election with the names of his proposer and seconder had to be handed to the secretary.



HOME IS WHERE THE CLUB IS

Discussions began among members regarding the proposed establishment of a new clubhouse in October 1904, and it wasn't long before the bungalow design of Robert Walker Jr's was agreed upon.

Walker was asked to prepare a section and elevation, and tenders were invited by interested contractors. William O'Connell submitted the lowest costs, but his fee was still above the anticipated cost.

As a result, a number of omissions - including a ladies room, the filling of a concrete wall, a balcony and gas fittings - were made to the plan.

The balance of the money was to be borrowed from the bank on the security of the club lease and premiums. In an act of goodwill to help the club pay back the loan, club secretary James Hurst suggested that he would take just half his salary until such time as the club committee felt it was in a position to restore it.

The development of a new clubhouse provided an obvious focus for the club, and various tenders were accepted over the following two decades to improve the building. These included extensions, the provision of electricity and an entrance lamp.

The club was continuously committed to retaining its image, as reflected by the various monies spent cleaning, varnishing and waxing floors, and the purchase of club crockery, each piece of which bore the club's coat of arms.

Consolidation and reclamation of land were also vital to the club's progression, with nearly 100 tonnes of sand and gravel bought between 1924 and 1934 to improve the club's courts and walkways.

Economic difficulties in the 1950s and 60s, addressed elsewhere in this book, left the clubhouse in disrepair, but renovations were completed in the more buoyant times of the late 1970s and 80s.

In January 1984, the introduction of fire precautions meant that £85,000 was needed to revamp the clubhouse, and there was consensus among members that further improvements should be made during this overhaul.

A total of 1,400 square feet was added to the clubhouse floor space, giving a vastly extended ladies' locker room area, while work was also completed on the steward's house.

However, further work was needed on the house, prompting the suggestion to erect a bungalow on the existing site, but the house was instead renovated at a cost of £3,000.

A MODERN WAY OF THINKING

Recent years have seen the club take giant strides in improving and modernising its facilities, with a number of keynote developments during the 1990s and 2000s.

While the old-age charm of the clubhouse and billiard room remain, they are now complemented by a gym, a conservatory overlooking the river, a refurbished kitchen, a new administration office and committee room, an extended car park and a new roadway entrance.

Club secretary John Walsh, who played an integral part in the development and implementation, explains that the rationale was to modernise the club without compromising the club's old charm.

"The old dressing rooms at west end were freed up, so we upgraded this end of the clubhouse, acquired the house at the entrance and made the garden into a car park, as insufficient parking had been a problem here," he says.

"We were very conscious of preserving the atmosphere and the ethos of the club, and the architects had been instructed not to take away from what is good here. You might say the east block is very nouveu, but it was designed to fit in with the old clubhouse.

"The squash court was tacked on when there were no real planning issues, but we took the opportunity to renew the façade of that and make it look like a purpose-built, modern building that complemented the existing one. The outside of the clubhouse is exactly as it was when it was first built.

"The roof on the River Room is stylised to match what's there; yet it increased the functionality of the club considerably. We have greater use of floor space; it was very difficult to have proper social functions here when we just had the bar and the Cork and County Room.

"It was hard on staff too – every time we had a meal, we'd have the tables all set then we'd have to get everyone to stand up, collapse the tables and put down a portable dancefloor. Now we have a purpose-built one, and the management of it is much better; consequently, people are more likely to come along."

In addition to the structural and aesthetic renovations to the club, the 1990s also saw the merger with the Cork City and County Club.

Established in 1828, the Cork and County Club had a long history in the city, and first made formal contact with Sunday's Well in 1974, when they had approached the club with regard to possibly finding a temporary home there.

Nearly twenty years later, the Cork and County Club had just 38 members. Incidentally, of these thirteen were either existing members of Sunday's Well, or members who had left in good standing.

The Cork and County Club had reached a stage where they were considering winding up, so in 1995, then-chairman of Sunday's Well, Norman Damery, arranged that two members from each committee would meet with their respective solicitors to work out the finer points of a merger.

At that time, Cork and County Club had approximately £50,000 worth of assets, as professionally valued in 1993. These consisted of various items such as furniture, clocks, paintings and trophies.

Agreement was reached between the clubs, with the merger officially carried at the 96th AGM in March 2006. Existing members of the Cork and County Club became "amalgamated members" of Sunday's Well, while the latter's trustees undertook the administration of the former's funds.

The name of Sunday's Well Boating and Tennis Club was amended, with the term "incorporating Cork and County Club" added in brackets. Sunday's Well gave an undertaking that the cash introduced by the Cork and County Club was to be used for the refurbishment of the reading room, which now bears the Cork and County Club's name.

The members of the Cork and County Club were to be offered free membership of Sunday's Well for a number of years, while the bar, carpet, tables and chairs of the Cork and County Club were incorporated into the Sunday's Well clubhouse.

Lithograph of the Great Exhibition 1903 in Fitzgerald's Park showing The Club in the lower left and the great slide on the right

A STYLISH AFFAIR

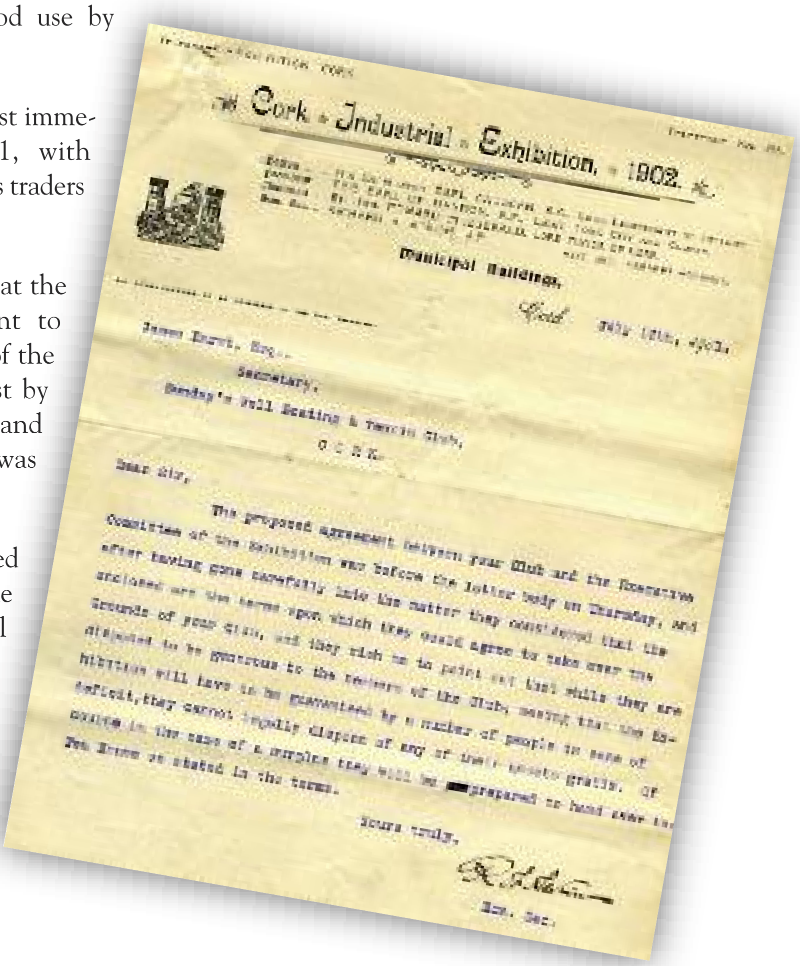
One of the most noteworthy events ever to take place at Sunday's Well Boating and Tennis Club was the Cork International Exhibition, which began in 1902 and encompassed the club's grounds for two years.

Large-scale exhibitions and trade fairs were not new to the city; the first major exhibition in Cork was held in 1852, the second in 1883. The exhibitions were the brainchild of the social 'elites' in 19th century Cork, and were presented as hallmark events in the development of the cultural life of the city and also helped put Cork on the global map.

These exhibitions sought ideologically to consolidate and extend the authority of the city's corporate, political and scientific leadership. Exhibitions weren't commercial by nature; rather than include merchandise marts, they promoted ideas about Cork's relations internationally, the spread of education, the advancement of science, the nature of domestic life and the place of art in Cork society.

Inspired by the Paris International Exhibition in 1900, Lord Mayor Edward Fitzgerald mentioned his interest in staging such a venture in Cork at a Corporation meeting in the Old City Hall in February 1901.

The resolution was unanimously and enthusiastically passed, and a public meeting was held in the following months. This meeting was largely attended by key city businessmen, many of whom put their business acumen to good use by forming an executive committee.



Cork Industrial Exhibition, 1902.

Municipal Buildings,

Secretary,

Dear Sir,

Yours truly,

Hon. Sec.

A fundraising campaign got underway almost immediately and continued throughout 1901, with subscriptions and support sought from Cork's traders and shopkeepers.

It was initially intended to stage the event at the rear of the Municipal Buildings adjacent to Anglesea Street, which had been the site of the 1883 exhibition. However, initial interest by potential exhibitors grew so successfully and with such rapidity that the ground space was found totally insufficient.

A new site in the Mardyke was then selected and the various owners, which included the Cork Cricket Club, the Sunday's Well Boating and Tennis Club, Captain Jennings and Cornelius Desmond, placed their grounds at the disposal of the exhibition's executive committee. Once the site was secured, the plans of the buildings were prepared and tenders were invited for the construction of the exhibition buildings.

DEAL OR NO DEAL

Henry Donegan

From the early stages of organisation, the Sunday's Well were embroiled in discussion with the executive committee over compensation for the use of the land.

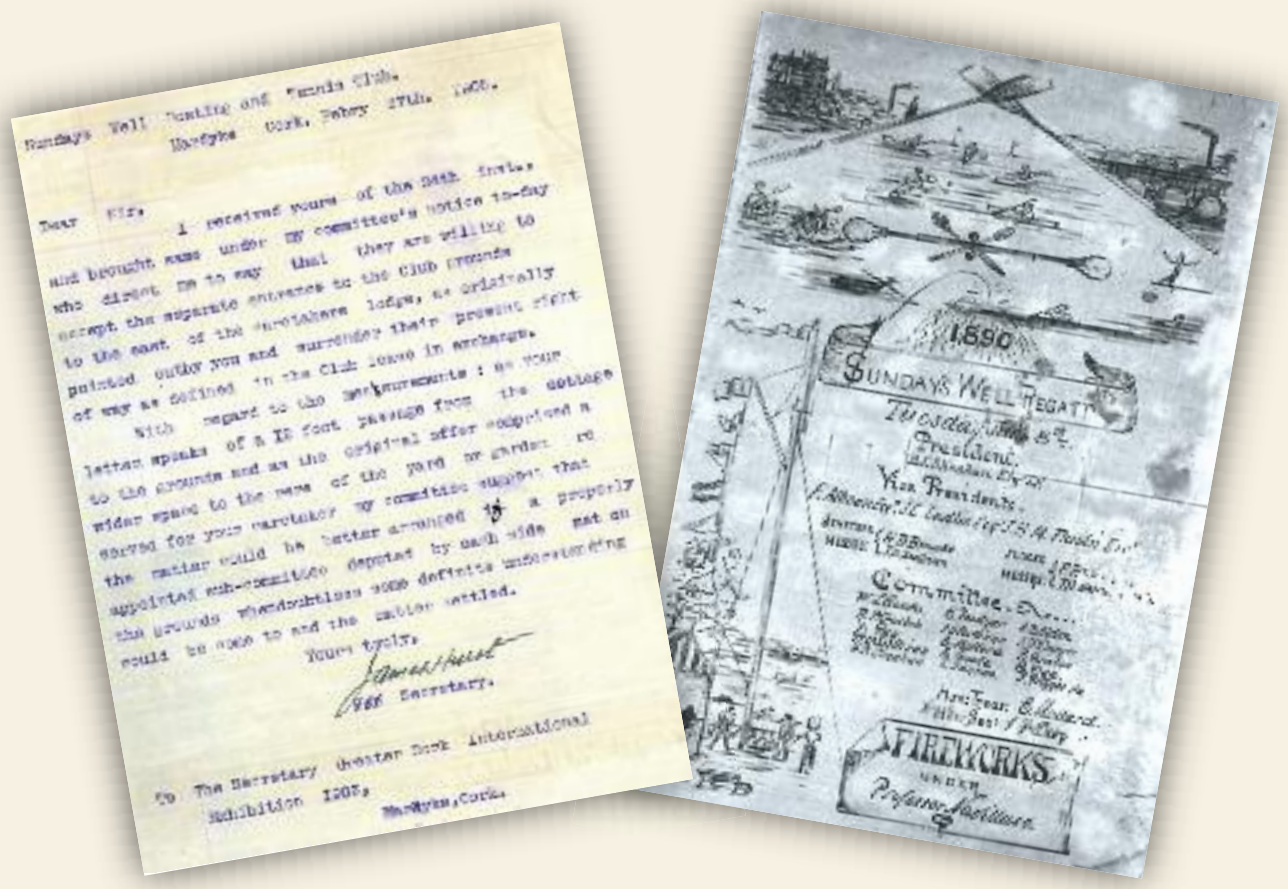
The club lands, which were being leased from Cornelius Desmond, were to be hired for the year by the exhibition committee, while it was proposed that a tea house be built on the site of the clubhouse.

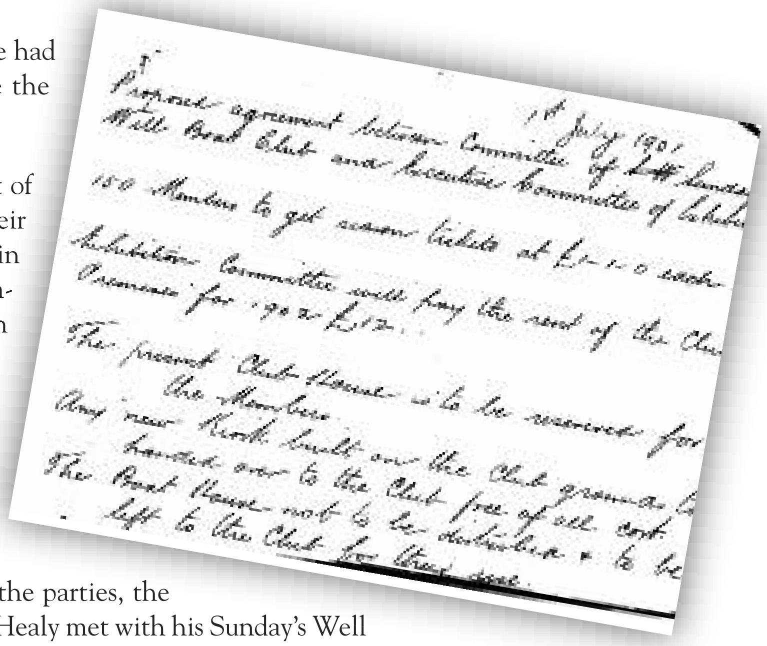
There were two club committee meetings held in July 1901 to discuss the proposed agreement. The question of whether a new clubhouse could be built at the expense of the exhibition committee, in lieu of the club's co-operation, was the principal item on the agenda.

In a letter to the exhibition's honorary secretary, Robert Atkins, the club outlined their terms. They requested that a total of 150 members should get season tickets for the exhibition at one guinea each, while the exhibition committee should pay the rent of the club premises for 1902 (£12).

In addition, the club felt that the plans for a substantial tea house proposed on the grounds should be to their satisfaction, and that any new kiosk built on the club grounds should be handed over to the club free of cost.

Furthermore, the boat house was not to be disturbed and was to be left to the club for their use, unless it became necessary for the purpose of passage. However, if the boat house had to be moved, it would have had to be re-erected by the exhibition committee on a suitable site chosen




Proposed agreement between Committee of S^t Sunday's
Well Boat Club and Executive Committee of Exhib
1st July 1901
150 Members to get season tickets at £1-1-0 each
Exhibition Committee will pay the rent of the Clu
Premises for 1902 £12.
The present Club House is to be reserved for
the Members.
Any new Work built on the Club grounds to
handed over to the Club free of all cost.
The Boat House not to be disturbed & to be
left to the Club for their use.

by the club, while the original boat house had to be put back on its' original site once the exhibition had finished.

The club also proposed that in the event of the club deciding to hold boat races or their annual regatta in July, they would do so in conjunction with the executive committee, with any profit divided between the parties.

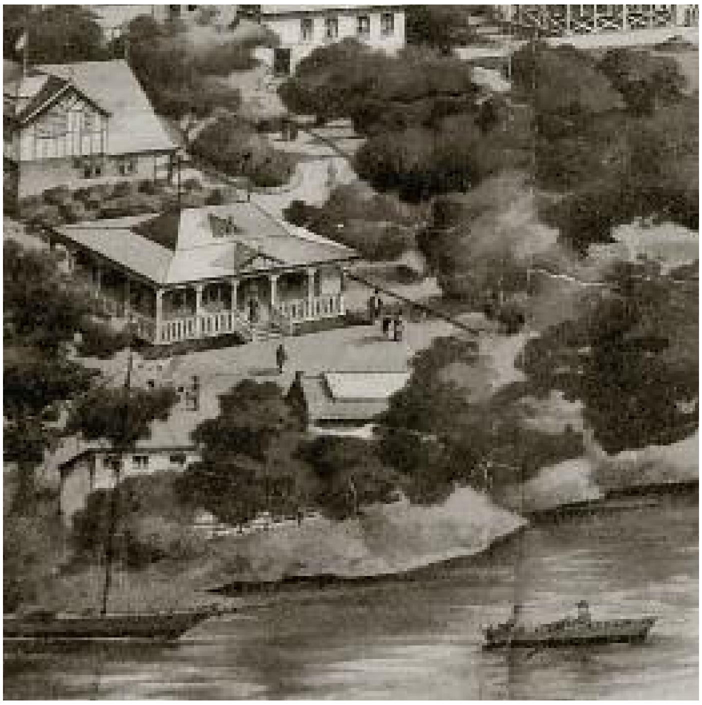
Predictably, the exhibition committee didn't accept all of the terms, and an agreement couldn't be reached at a subsequent meeting between the parties.

In a bid to resolve the impasse between the parties, the exhibition committee's solicitor Maurice Healy met with his Sunday's Well counterpart Henry Donegan in November 1901.

A lack of communication from the exhibition committee in the following weeks caused concern at Sunday's Well, especially so given that construction of exhibition buildings had begun on lands adjacent to the club.

However, a draft agreement was finally drawn up in December, and after the club had hammered out the clauses for inclusion, Sunday's Well secretary James Hurst met Atkins over Christmas, and an agreement was reached.

To compensate members for the loss of tennis, the altered draft agreement provided that season tickets would be given to club members at £1-1-0 each, or ten shillings and six pence. A guarantee payment of £168 was made to the club in early March 1902 as security.



THE MAIN EVENT

The club grounds were taken over by the Cork International Exhibition thereafter, and the privileges of the members were curtailed for the duration of the event. The grounds were levelled in the early part of 1902, and a tea house constructed, while two croquet courts were also marked out on the grounds and were in use until the close of the exhibition.

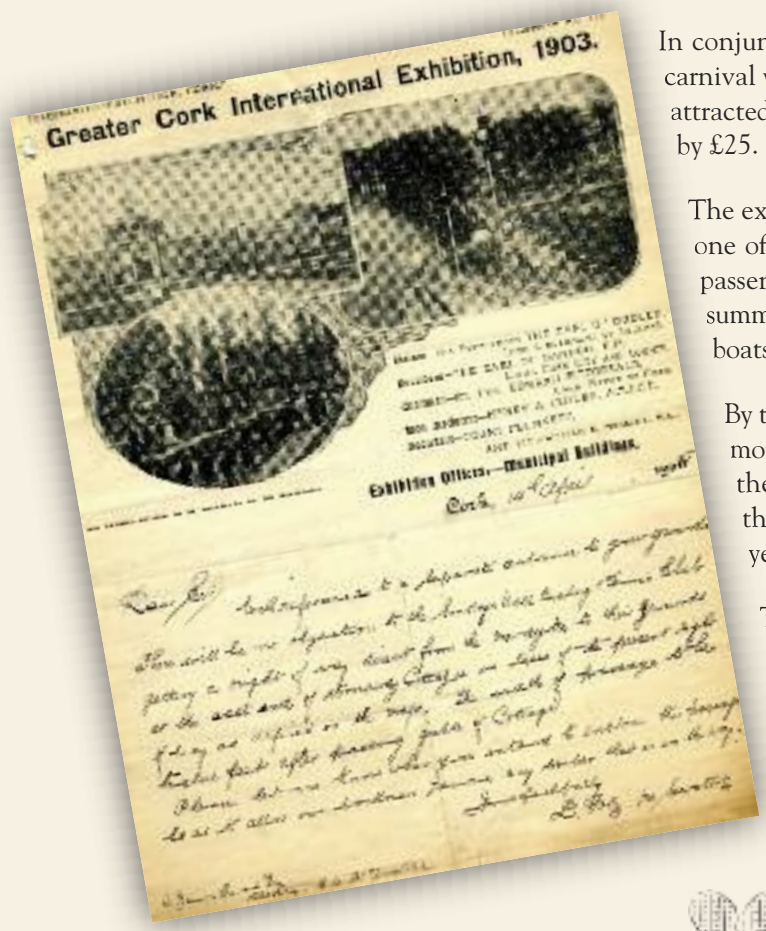
The exhibition proved to be a striking event, with an array of impressive pre-fabricated buildings erected. The entrance was located opposite the main gate of Queen's College – now University College Cork - on Western Road. Confronting the visitor through the turnstiles were various teahouses, bars and kiosks as well the Grand Concert Hall was the main entrance of the imposing Industrial Hall.

From May to October 1902, several hundred exhibits were on display. Exhibitors could mark the selling price of the article exhibited for the information of the visitors, but they could not sell any products without the special permission of the executive committee.

The principal categories of exhibits were the women's section, raw materials section, geological specimens, natural history section, modern science section, archaeological and historical section, raw materials industrially treated, forestry, educational section and the nature study section.

The women's section was marketed as a key part of the exhibition, and craftswomen of every description throughout Ireland gladly availed of the opportunity to show their work and gain a deeper knowledge of their various crafts.

The amusements were varied with three bandstands on the grounds, while the Great Concert Hall, which boasted a grand organ, had comfortable seating for 2,000 spectators.



In conjunction with the Sunday's Well club, a water carnival was held in September 1902, an event which attracted large numbers and swelled the club's coffers by £25.

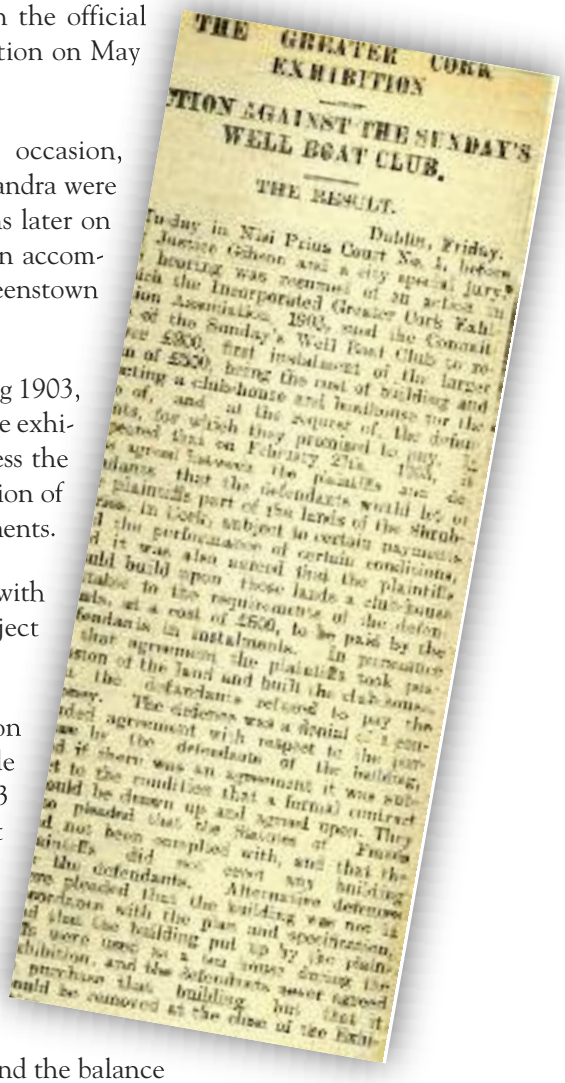
The exhibition also boasted a 'Great Water Chute', one of the first of its kind in Ireland. Cars carried passengers up a gradual ascent to the 70-foot summit, before the thrill-seekers were moved into boats that careered downhill at significant speed.

By the close of the exhibition in November 1902, more than a million visitors had passed through the grounds in just six months, fuelling belief that it should be run again over the coming years.

To this end, Lord Mayor Fitzgerald gave a stirring speech at a memorable exhibition committee meeting, receiving warm support for his proposal that the event make a return the following year.

A ROYAL WAVE

Fitzgerald's dream became reality the following year, with the official opening of the re-named Great Cork International Exhibition on May 28, 1903 by Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Earl of Dudley.


THE GREATER CORK EXHIBITION

TION AGAINST THE SUNDAY'S WELL BOAT CLUB.

THE RESULT.

Dublin, Friday.

The Lord Lieutenant brought significant news to the occasion, announcing that British King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra were to pay a visit to the Cork Exhibition. Just over two months later on August 1, the royal steamboat, Victoria and Albert, with an accompanying flotilla of naval vessels, duly dropped anchor off Queenstown (now Cobh).

More than two million people visited the Mardyke site during 1903, with a total of £80,000 spent in laying out and maintaining the exhibition buildings and gardens over the two years. More or less the same exhibition stands were involved, as well as the utilisation of the same unique and ornate exhibition buildings and amusements.

For Sunday's Well, the year had begun with more discussions with the exhibition committee regarding the re-staging of the project and the re-acquisition of club lands.

Once more, a number of points were agreed to; free season tickets would be again made available for all members, while a suitable clubhouse would be erected at the close of the 1903 exhibition at the eastern end of the grounds, at a cost not exceeding £500.

The exhibition committee was to provide the money for the clubhouse, but would have rent-free use of the building as a tea house during the term of the exhibition. It was proposed that the building become the property of the club on its completion, when they were to pay £200 of its costs and the balance over the ensuing three years.

But by the time the exhibition opened, the tea house was quite different to what was agreed upon in the original design. It was a timber building reputed to last only 30 years, a design that was not acceptable to the Sunday's Well committee, who regarded the building as unsafe, unsuitable and unsightly.

A prominent architect advised them that steel girders should be substituted for the defective bressemers, and the deemed breach of agreement led the club to refuse to pay the £200 in costs.

The exhibition association duly brought a legal action against the club in pursuit of the costs, and the case was heard by Justice Gibson at the Nisi Prius Court in Dublin.

The jury found for the club, and judgement was entered accordingly with costs. The exhibition committee paid the club's taxed costs, and entered the grounds to take down the building. No discussions took place with the club regarding the sale of the building, and with the club not making any offer, it was taken down and the fabric sold off.

BORDER TENSIONS

After the exhibition closed at the end of October 1903, work began on the demolition and auctioning off of exhibition buildings. By the end of 1903, the exhibition committee had agreed to purchase an additional five acres of land, which fronted the Mardyke and Ferry Walk, from Captain Jennings for £1,250.

The organisers wished to give the grounds to the people of Cork as a place of recreation, and it was decided to name the new public space after Edward Fitzgerald.

Endless delays in creating Fitzgerald's Park were caused through disagreement by the various sub-committees of the exhibition committee; many did not want the grounds to be directly handed over to the Corporation of Cork.

However, a general park committee was agreed upon and established, which aspired to promote and provide funding for band recitals, 'water carnivals' and the upkeep of the park.

In August 1904, Sunday's Well were given a right of way through the municipal park, but the exhibition committee wished to rescind it in order to create an entrance to the park only.

The issue was finally resolved the following February, when the club accepted the separate entrance to their grounds to the east of the caretaker's lodge, as originally highlighted by the park committee, surrendering their right of way in the process.

The new right of way was a twelve-foot passage from the adjacent Normandy Cottage to the club grounds, and it is, in one sense, a legacy of the dispute between the club and the exhibition committee.

During the early 20th century, various railings were replaced and rebuilt, dividing the grounds of Fitzgerald's Park from the club, some of which caused disputes over the years.

Through the intervening decades, there have been suggestions and plans for the alteration of the gateway on the Mardyke to the club premises. The matter has finally been put to rest with the purchase of Normandy House and the redesign of the entrance to the club.

MEMBERSHIP

NOT JUST ANOTHER BAR

Sunday's Well's ability to survive the test of time is testament to the hundreds of members who have nurtured and sustained its growth, stability and high standards for more than half a century.

Rules for the club were created via trial and error as incidents necessitated them during its fledgling years in the early 1900s.

Membership had to be sought by written application, and though number increased from 116 to 185 in just a year in 1901/02, the committee did, on occasion, reject certain applications.

Notably, they refused a group of 15 from the Munster and Leinster Bank, who wished to join without paying an entrance fee due to the size of their group.

Such was the interest in the club that a membership limit of 320 was set in 1922, and a waiting list was established. The clubhouse bar traded every night of the week, and had its own regulars as well as members who used the bar facilities after play.

This is, in part, down to the varierty of purposes the club has served over the years, housing card-playing, billiards and a reading room that ensured it was more than 'just a bar'.

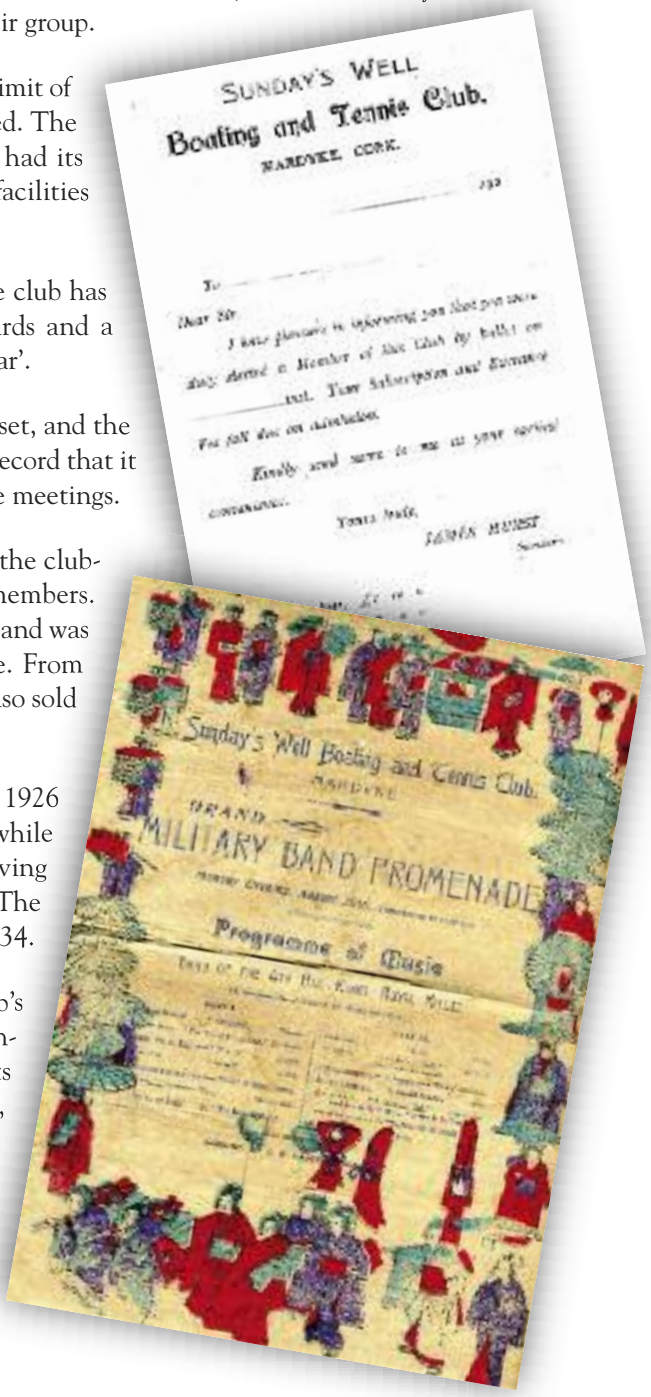
Respect for the clubhouse was established at the outset, and the club's minute books, which date back to June 1900, record that it was a regular feature of discussion at early committee meetings.

In late November 1901, an oil stove was bought for the clubhouse, to heat up the room for the comfort of members. Initially, liquor was bought from Cornelius Desmond and was to be made available to members at the clubhouse. From early September 1901, cigarettes and tobacco were also sold in the bar.

The club was forced to alter its alcohol sale policies in 1926 due to the Intoxicating Liquor (General) Act 1924, while at this time the steward was also instructed to stop giving credit to any member owing more than £2 at the bar. The credit system was eventually abolished in October 1934.

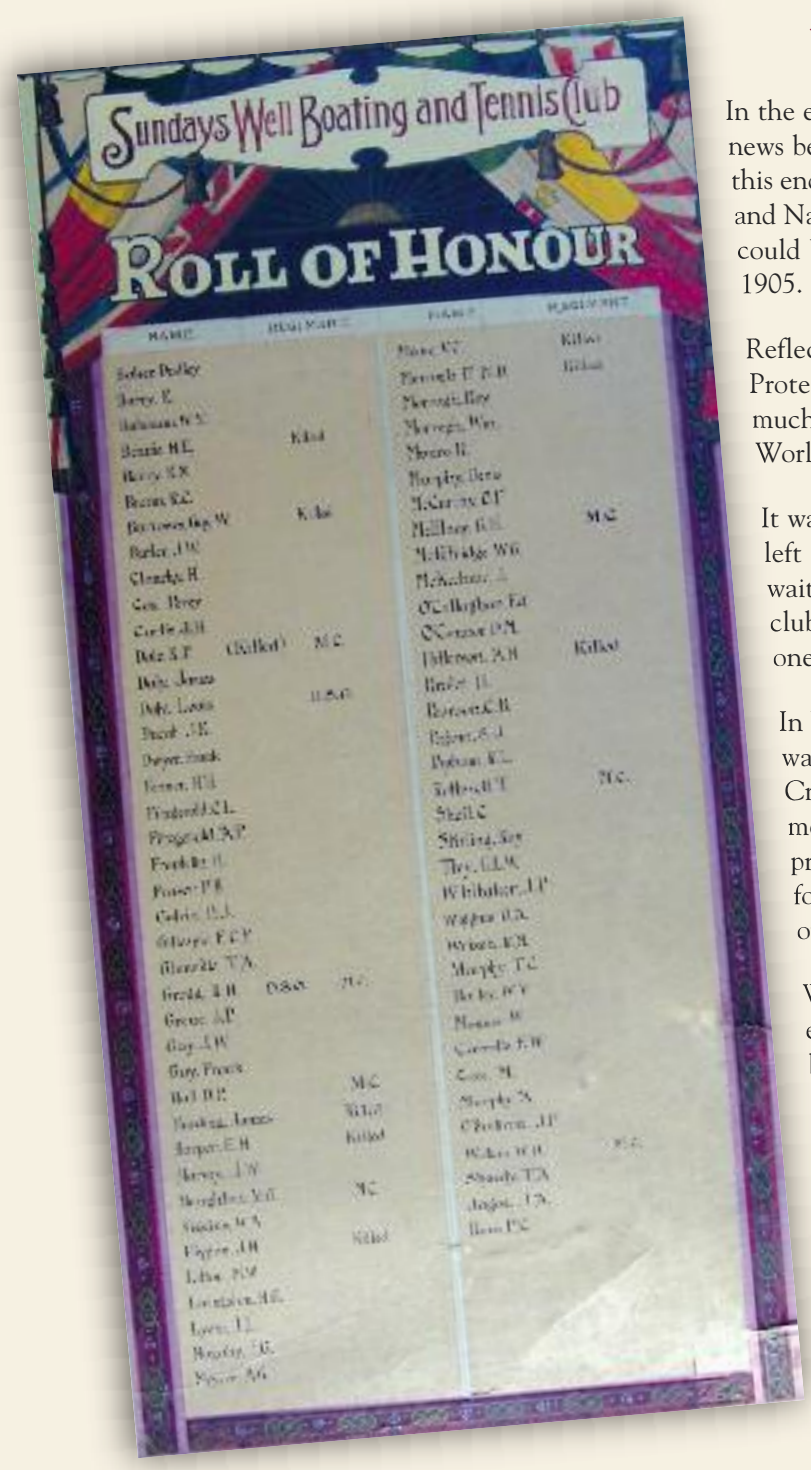
Band promenades were regular features of the club's early years; ten such events, plus successful two open-air concerts, were held in 1902 alone. These nights were transformed into the club dinners a decade later, with the first of these held on St Patrick's Day in 1912.

Other forms of casual entertainment at Sunday's Well included billiards and reading. The club provided a number of newspapers and periodical magazines for members to enjoy in the reading room.



In the early years, these included Sphere, Sporting and Dramatic, Tatler, Sketch, Frys and the Strand.

In April 1925, several new papers were ordered for the club, comprising the Chambers Journal, English Times, Truth and the Irish Statesman. In July 1943, members were reminded that the papers and periodicals should not be mutilated or removed from the reading room as they eventually became the property of the members who purchased them at AGMs.



WAR ALL THE TIME

In the early 20th century, an interest in foreign news became a feature of club membership. To this end, a motion proposing that British Army and Navy officers temporarily residing in Cork could be admitted as members was carried in 1905.

Reflecting a membership that was largely Protestant and Unionist, Sunday's Well did much to acknowledge those who fought in World War I, both actively and symbolically.

It was agreed in 1914 that any member who left to join the British forces be put on a waiting list, while the following year saw the club provide tea for wounded soldiers as a one-off event.

In November 1916, a snooker competition was arranged for the benefit of the Red Cross, in recognition of the pride in club members who joined the forces. The present clubhouse houses a roll of honour for WWI veterans who were also members of Sunday's Well.

World War II had an altogether different effect on the club; temporary rules had to be created during the emergency period.

Rationing meant there were shortages in the bar, while in October 1941, hot baths were limited to Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday, although the fire remained lit nightly.

In April 1945, in order to comply with the electricity rationing, a notice was put up that no lights would be allowed in the club before 8pm.

COULD YOU SPARE US A DIME?

The financial struggle experienced by the club in the 1950s prompted a number of fundraisers, including selling tennis balls and renting bath towels to members, as well as club sweepstakes at the rate of five shillings per entry.

Members were also asked to encourage a friend to join the club, and to spend more time in the bar, where prices were lowered in an attempt to increase use of the facility.

Whiskey and gin were available at four pence per glass, beer and stout at one penny per bottle and cigarettes were just two pence per packet, while a 19-inch television was rented for use in the bar in 1963.

In June 1964, another financial problem also loomed as the gable wall on the western side of club house was deemed unsafe, requiring its demolition and reconstruction.

Members were asked which facilities were being used and which need to be tailored, while further attempts to refresh the membership, such as dress dances and '45' nights, were proposed.

However, by 1965 there were just 45 members; the club was down to one steward, and volunteers manned the bar most nights. A new bank account was created with the club's bankers that year, while several members made cash donations towards the running of the club.

OUT WITH THE OLD...

By the 1960s, a radical overhaul of the rules to elect the club committee was introduced, in an attempt to get new faces on board and ensure a regular turnover of personnel.

Up until this time, the club's trustees and bowls and tennis captains were ex-officio committee members, as was the secretary of the fishing club. The other four members were elected at AGMs, and held office for two years, and any committee member who retired was eligible for re-election.

However, in 1965, it was decided that a new eight-member committee would be elected each year, and would retire after they had served their 12-month term.

Should there be a failure to elect eight new committee members, club trustees were empowered to co-opt members, which could not include any of the previous year's committee unless no others were willing to come on board.

Despite these efforts membership continued at an unacceptably low level, and club prospects were far from being bright.

LINK PARAGRAPH NEEDED HERE

STAFF

IT'S A TOUGH JOB, BUT SOMEONE'S GOTTA DO IT

The notion that a club is only as good as those who run it is borne out at Sunday's Well by the staff that have made various positions their own over the years.

One of the first notable staff members was James Hurst, who was elected as honorary secretary at the first AGM in January 1901. Hurst gave 22 years of near-unbroken service to the club, with the club minutes showing he was sick - and therefore unable to carry out his duties - just once during that time.

Hurst's work saw the secretary's wage raised from £30 annually to £2 per week in 1913, and when he vacated the post in 1923, Captain Maurice Reidy filled the breach for a further 27 years until his untimely death in 1950.

In its formative years, a paid steward was charged with looking after the clubhouse and grounds. The club had a preference for a naval pensioner to fill the position, and appointed John Mason in March 1901 – though it was three years before it was agreed to close the club on Christmas Day to allow him spend time with his family!

WHEN GOOD STEWARDS GO BAD

In 1909, the club purchased a plot of land at the rear of the adjoining cricket grounds in order to build a steward's house. While little is known about the construction of the house, club minutes show that the contract for it was accepted at a cost of £320.

Willie Cunningham was appointed as steward in the winter of 1914 with a salary of £1 per week plus use of the house, coal and light, but was taken to task within two years regarding the condition of the house and his timekeeping.

As a result, it was decided in 1918 to start a time book to be signed by the steward, with time shortages to be deducted at committee meetings. Finding that more hands were needed to keep the club in good repair, Hurst advertised in 1919 for a new steward, caretaker and a boy to act as billiard marker and "make himself generally useful".

Staff came and went between the 1920s and late 1940s, but few caused more headaches for the club committee than one-time steward James Good.

Allocated a nearby house which was renovated and made liveable in 1939, the committee instructed the honorary secretary to write to him after it was discovered he had a lodger.

The committee wished to "warn him that the lodger must clear off) at once". Good was dismissed in July 1941 following a series of complaints from members, but reinstated shortly afterwards.

Despite these early bouts of indiscipline, Good went on to serve an incredible total of 38 years in the job until his death in 1962.

CUTBACKS LEAVE STEWARD IN THE DARK

Economic instability in the 1950s and 60s caused problems for the club; one such issue was high turnover of staff and a constant struggle to pay them.

Following Captain Reidy's tragic death in January 1950, Colonel PC O'Connell was appointed in his place on a wage of £16 per month, but he resigned within four years. He ws replaced by George Exshaw, who retired in 1959 and was made an honorary member for his services to the club.

Wage increases for some staff were approved in early 1952, but a shortage of finances prompted the committee to cut back on staff hours later in the same year. The club let one groundsman go in October 1952, while the other was not employed during that winter.

The steward's house had been seriously damaged in early September 1950 by a storm and required rewiring and re-papering. Good had to live with various other cutbacks. From November 1952, he was given an electric torch while electric lighting on the path to his house was turned off, and four years later he was asked to reduce the consmption of gas in the steward's house.

Liam O'Regan

Terry Dunne

Joe Delaney

Good's replacement, Sergeant Joseph Delany, was also restricted in his light and fuel usage, while a suggestion to remove the secretary's payment and designate his tasks to Delany was proposed at committee but not carried.

In August 1963, consideration was given to getting rid of the services of the assistant steward, a proposition which eventually became reality in May 1965.

This in turn caused problems for the club, which was forced to close during the summer of that year to give the steward a week's annual holidays.

Joe Delany proved to be an efficient and hardworking steward whose manner and approach was greatly influenced by his time in the army. Polite to a fault, he was always very careful when answering the phone. If the caller asked for some member, Joe would put his hand over the mouthpiece and enquired of the member "Are you here sir?"

Delany was succeeded by another army man, Sgt Major Terry Dunne. Terry brought all his army training to bear on his job as steward, and his management skills developed in the army mess proved a boon to the Club.

As men of an army background had proved such assets to the club, it was no surprise that when club secretary Liam O'Regan retired in 1999 due to ill-health, the club looked to the army for a replacement.

THE MAN IN POSSESSION

When John Walsh waved goodbye to his post in the Irish army to take up the job as secretary in Sunday's Well in 1998, he couldn't have imagined the challenges that awaited.

Having decided that soldiering was a young man's game, he knew the management skills he'd picked up would come in handy. Little did he know he would oversee one of the most radical periods of change and diversification in the club's history.

For starters, three major developments – the river room, the east block and the regeneration of the western end of the clubhouse – have been completed on his watch. In addition, the huge increase in members and their demands have ensured he is a very busy man.

"You're dealing with all sorts from young kids to people in their 90s," he explains.

"Things you think aren't important turn out to be very important to some people, and things you think would be important - like building a new block for ⇔1 million - is a trifle to others, so you can never tell. Every day is interesting.

"It's like the hospitality industry, you have to deal with everyone as an equal. A kid who comes in wanting change for €5 to put in the can machine is a member, he's entitled to the same priviliges as a man who wants his pint of Beamish pulled in a certain way. They all get the same respect."

Walsh heads up a mixture of full-time and part-time staff of ten, and while each has a distinctive role to play, he says they are all working towards the same goal.

"The club starts every morning at 8.30am, and it doesn't close until midnight seven days a week, 363 days a year. In the ten years I've been here we've only lost one staff member, and that was due to illness rather than dissatisfaction; it's a nice place to work too, a happy place and that's something we try to do here.

"Our members don't come in after a day's work to hear the barman's problems; they come in to relax and chill out. It's supposed to be a happy place and that's the kind of atmosphere we try to create."

gym

Pat Field

As well as ensuring the good vibes keep circulating at Sunday's Well - and ensuring broken court lights and faulty heaters are fixed promptly - Walsh is also charged with the task of planning for the future.

His decade at the club has seen a surge of development, and he admits the scale of the work involved has presented "a fair challenge".

"As we've moved along, the club's needs and the expectations of members have changed. Some of the facilities here were dated; you need to be moving on or you're going backwards."

Walsh is the go-between during the tendering process, with architects, quantity surveyors and club committees all needing to be kept in the loop. The fruits of his labour are dealt with in chapter two, but it is the effect the changes have had on how club members use the facilities that fascinates Walsh.

"We have moved with the times essentially, we have a gym which allows for individual use, plus a raft of gym-associated activities; aerobics, spinning clases, toning classes, salsa dancing - all of these things are another facility that the members can avail of here for the same annual subscription, and have proved to be hugely popular," he says.

"The gym and its associated activities are, after tennis, most popular facet of the club. A lot of people would have been playing tennis who had a gym membership elsewhere; now it's a one-stop shop.

"While it's not a huge gym, and there's no swimming pool, everything else is here. We've managed to get it right; we've never had a queue out the door for it, it's never so crowded that people get frustrated."

Speaking of frustration, Walsh admits that part of his work – which, he jokes, "wasn't in the job description"- is to be a mediator between different sections of the club.

"I often look at it as three clubs – ladies in the morning, kids in the afternoon and the workers at night. Sometimes those groups think no-one else uses the club but them!" he laughs.

"How those groups use the facilities is one of the issues that often causes friction here. If a tournament match for U8 doubles isn't finished at a particular time, you'll have some men coming in at 5.30pm, hopping from one foot to the other trying to get on their court.

"Sometimes the only way is to go out and negotiate a move of the kids, or calm the lads down and tell them to wait 10 minutes; it's just part of it! You do have those little frictions from time to time. But everyone's here because they want to be, no-one is sentenced to be here, and the important thing is for us to make it a happy place to be."

Walsh admits the provision of lights and all-weather surfaces has done wonders for the club, allowing a much bigger window seasonally for tennis to be played. He believes that responding to the needs of the members in such fashion is vital to the club's continued improvement.

"I would hope the atmosphere and the ethos would still be the same in 20 years' time, but that we'd continue to improve our facilities and adapt to the times we find ourselves in," he says.

"One of the things the committee is tasked with is keeping an eye to the future. What can we do that's a little different? (At the moment) we have wine-tasting, art classes, a whole range of activites like that, and if there's a demand for it we have to try and cater for it.

"That's what I'd see in 20 years - you don't know what that demand is going to be for, so you need to be in a position to adapt yourself so the club is responding to the needs of the members – that's what it's all about."

PARTY OVER HERE

Pat Field fondly remembers the day he discovered Sunday's Well. Having moved his family from rural north Cork to Ballincollig, the demise of the Tennis Village in Bishopstown meant he was on the lookout for a new club as he began a new life in suburbia.

Some of his old playing buddies recommended Sunday's Well, but it took him 20 minutes to find it. Once inside, he remembers walking through the meeting room and being overwhelmed by the aura of the place – the names of past presidents and captains adorning the walls, and in particular, the trophies won down the years.

It didn't take him long to integrate himself into the club – within a year he was sitting on club committees, as he puts it, to "get the dirt of the club underneath my fingernails".

Yet, when he took on the mantle of tennis captain in 2006, it wasn't success on the court that was to the forefront of his mind.

"When I came into the captaincy in I was greeted by an array of cups and shields won the year before," he explains. "But I didn't come from a tennis background, I didn't play as a junior, so I wanted to support to all sections of the club, particularly the juniors.

"I was nearly always there on junior final days. The feedback I got after that was great, because these kids were delighted that the tennis captain had turned up to see them play.

"But the committees meant I didn't have to worry about the logistics of the playing side so much; I wanted to make sure people enjoyed my year as captain, and I wanted more social events, table quizzes, comedy nights and the like.

"My objective was that tennis would be more fun by the time I'd finished my year as captain; winning is great and all that, the club prestige and so forth, but you need to enjoy the sport first – winning afterwards is a bonus."

Field recognised the changing landscape brought about by different attitudes and tighter drink-driving laws, and realised that a vibrant social scene was vital to the ongoing success and liquidity of the club.

"Things were changing dramatically – the four guys who would normally have their game of tennis on a Tuesday and came in and had a Guinness were now having four coffees," he explains.

"The changing social environment was having an effect on the club. I felt the bar was an extremely important source of finance; I wanted to get people thinking about the club as being a social outlet as well as a sporting one - I felt we could put a foundation there for later on."

He decided to mark his captaincy by holding a midsummer's blacktie ball, replete with outdoor catering; a risky move given the unpredictable Irish weather, but one that, he explains, proved to be worth its weight in gold.

"One thing I wanted to do throughout the year was to market some event that hadn't taken place in the club before," he says. "I felt that with the list of events we go through in a year, one more isn't going to be a big deal.

"I wanted to mark my captaincy with something different, but I also felt that with the club's location, we should put an event together and pray for the weather.

"It turned out to be the best summer's evening we had throughout 2006 weather-wise. We didn't want to give people the feel they were coming into a tennis club, so we'd a string quartet playing on court four, with a champagne reception on the balcony, and a flautist and a harpist playing during dinner, while (singer) Sharon Crosbie played afterwards. Everyone realised that this club has a lot more going for it."

Field says that since then, the social side of things has continued to prosper, with members holding increased numbers of private functions, while they have also pioneered a successful jazz evening on the Friday of the Guinness Jazz Festival every October.

"Most clubs will tell you their bar intake has minimised at this point, so it's brilliant that our members are helping the club to survive," he points out. "People must realise that the subscription we pay is one thing, but the club needs to breathe and live too."

Field adds that while there is an external perception that Sunday's Well is a snobby club, he has found it "one of the most low-key" clubs he's ever been involved with.

"I think this club is going to progress year by year, because the people in the club love it for what it is. Everyone you approach to get something done is on board straight away."

FEMALE MEMBERSHIP

LITTLE BY LITTLE

Evolving social norms clashed spectacularly with protectionist conservatism for the best part of a century at Sunday's Well, as debate raged over the issue of female membership.

The club's minute books record April 1901 as the first time the issue was tackled by a club committee, but it would be 93 years before the matter was fully resolved with the advent of full female membership.

At the time, it was deemed that members' significant others were entitled to use the grounds in order to chat to their partners. However, proposals from 18 members to allow women to avail of the clubhouse and play on the tennis and croquet courts at certain times were met with howling derision, and prompted numerous committee members to resign.

It was finally decided, nearly three months later by a new committee, to admit female players on allocated days and under certain by-laws. However, it wasn't until 1916 that they were granted the use of the tennis courts on Friday afternoons as well as their usual Monday afternoon slot.

Allocated court time increased gradually over the following decades, and by 1952, female players could play at any time they wished during the hard court season, provided they were sponsored by a club member. Despite these advancements, the clubhouse remained a bastion of male exclusivity, and Des Scannell remembers that this had an obvious practical drawback when one introduced a female guest to play at the club.

"Protocol at the club at that time was very formal, and a little intimidating for young members," he recalls.

"Ladies could play tennis as guests, but could not enter the clubhouse. The changing facilities for ladies were situated next to the steward's house, and were very Spartan. There were no showering facilities there.

"Having played with a lady guest, one could have a drink. However, it had to be consumed outside on the veranda. This was not too bad in summer, but in winter, it was not so pleasant. Very often, in the afternoon, the two players were the only people in the club."

Mossie Flynn, who joined the club in 1952 while in his late 20s, sings from the same hymn sheet as Scannell: "One could play mixed tennis but girls were not allowed into the clubhouse. During the open championships, girls changed in the steward's house, and we handed the drinks out the window to the ladies on the veranda."

Some of the ladies who played at Sunday's Well challenged such restrictions. As Marie Kirwan points out, the club counted numerous female tournament winners in its playing ranks, even if they were not members themselves.

"There were five girls in our family and they were all good tennis players. I remember Dr Jim Young signing in my sisters and me in the early 60s," she says.

"The eldest of us was Ann Delaney, who was number one in Munster. With little coaching, she won several Rushbrooke and Sunday's Well tournaments. In the under-16 Munster Tournament, we played against Heather Thompson, Kay Browne, Mary Curran and Sally Phelan, all very good players in their own right."

DESPERATE TIMES, DESPERATE MEASURES

Nonetheless, allowing female participation continued to rankle with some conservative elements of the club membership, and the issue came to the fore during a downturn in the club's economic fortunes in the 1950s and 60s.

At the 52nd club AGM in February 1952, then-chairman JD Blair noted that associate membership of the club would be advantageous in attracting new members who might be interested in tennis, but would not be entitled to vote.

Inevitably, this led to the question of permitting ladies to avail of associate membership, something Blair argued vehemently against. He claimed such a move would lead to complications, if full privileges of the club membership were available to the ladies.

He re-iterated that Sunday's Well was a "men's club" and felt it would be a retrograde step to admit ladies. Furthermore, he argued that even if facilities for female members were limited, it would lead to an undesirable demand for use of bar facilities.

JD Blair

Des Scannell

The chairman's argument won the day, but this did not resolve the issue and it was re-visited again a decade later.

By 1966, the issue of female membership was no longer solely a matter of opinion; amid dwindling membership subscriptions, financial pressures were now weighing heavily on the minds of the committee men.

A proposal to create associated female membership was carried in April 1966, primarily to raise money. The fee of three guineas covered the season from May to October, with the proviso that female members were to be of "good tournament standard".

Female members were excluded from the grounds on Sunday mornings and they were still denied admittance to the interior of the club premises, except on Saturdays and Sunday afternoons. It was also decided that an over-18 age restriction be set on associate membership.

However, in a notable changing of the old guard, club members or associate female members could now introduce female visitors.

Des Scannell was tennis captain when the far-reaching decision was taken. He reckons opposition to this development had been born out of sexism, rather than the fear that there were too many perks to be lost.

"While the decision was partly financial, the climate for change was in the air, everywhere," he says. "Some of the wives and girlfriends of the younger members were beginning to voice their displeasure at the lack of status accorded to women in the club.

"By this time, several of the smaller clubs in Cork had closed, and there was no place for ladies to play. Also, it was felt that it would make for much more enjoyable social tennis.

"In general, the non-tennis playing members were against the idea. There were reasons for this. Many of the older members were doctors, bankers and prominent businessmen in the city, and they were very conservative. "To them, the club was an oasis of peace and tranquillity. Of course, many a member went home to his wife at 2am or 3am - not always from Sunday's Well - and when asked by his wife where he was, he replied that he was "at Sunday's Well". Knowing he was in male company only, his wife was usually forgiving.

"To them, their opposition was not an anti-woman thing – it was just that 'nothing could be better than the status quo'."

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Despite the scepticism, the new plan yielded immediate dividends for the club – within three months, 29 associate female members had signed up. To assuage the fears of some full members that they might not always get a court at their chosen time, one of the courts in front of the club-house carried a discreet notice stating, "Reserved for full members".

By 1971, ladies were permitted to play squash up to 5pm on weekdays, with 20 selected members permitted to play in the evenings.

Reflecting the popularity of squash among female players at the time, a Munster branch of the Irish Ladies Squash Racquets Association was set up at the club, while bookings by ladies at the club had to be limited to three sessions per night.

Such was the success of attracting new associate female members that booking tennis courts had become a problem, so a cap was placed on membership in March 1973.

Around this time, some associate female members considered having a request for full membership brought before an AGM, but it never came to fruition, and restrictions remained in place.

By 1978, associate members had to be proposed and seconded, but were not balloted. Daughters and wives of club members were not necessarily automatically accepted for associate membership.

However, the following year, it was agreed that the wives of members were allowed play squash at any time, within the limits of the booking arrangements.

During the 1980s, a sub-committee was appointed to examine the regulations governing the rights of associate female members in 1985-86.

The issue came to the forefront of a heated EGM three years later, but it was not until January 6, 1994 that associate female members were granted the option of full membership on payment of an entrance fee.

The impact of establishing full female membership has had numerous positive benefits for the club, according to club secretary John Walsh.

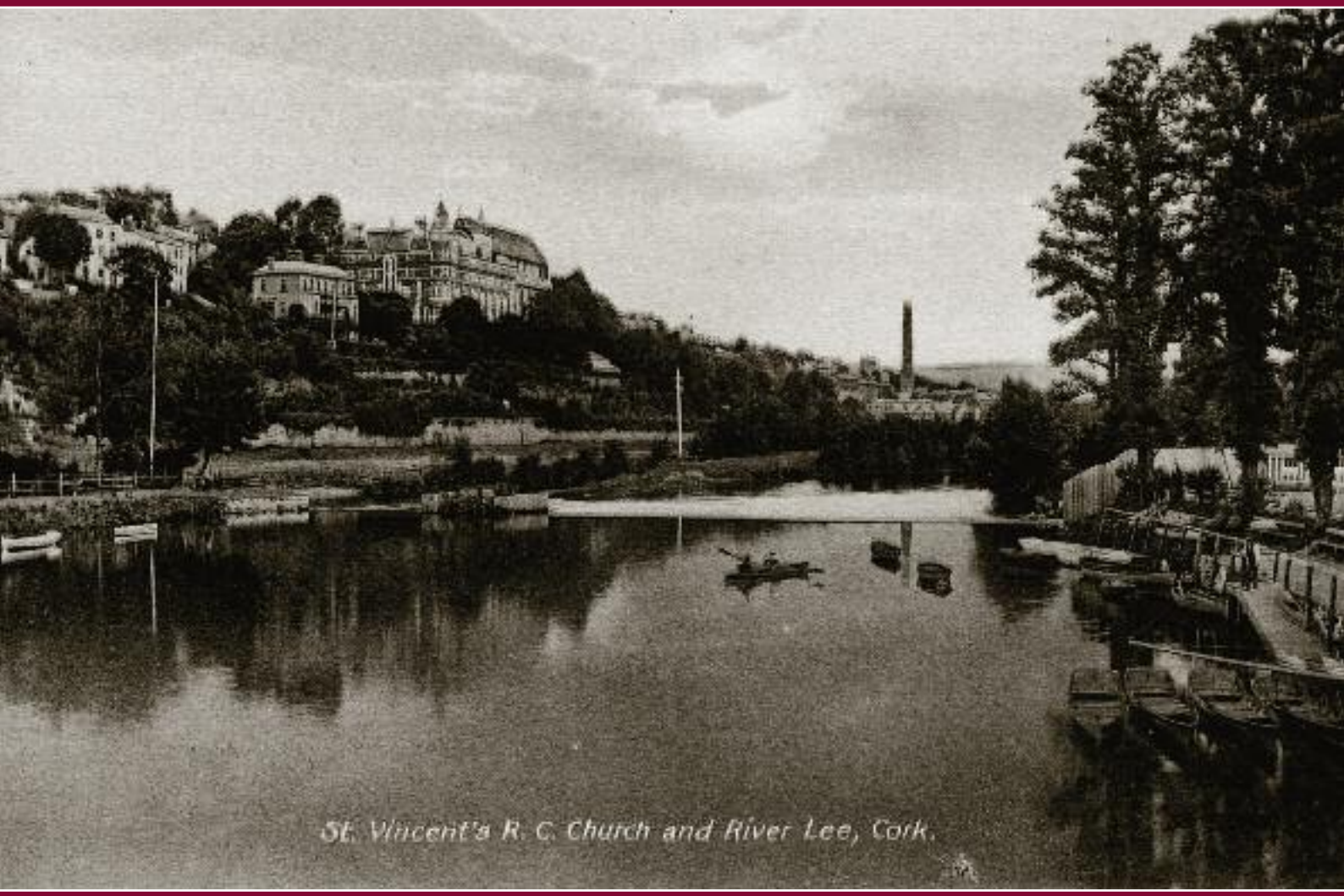
"The bigger impact – and it probably hasn't been realised by most members here – was ladies being able to serve on club committees and to be office holders such as tennis captain," he says.

"In the past 12 years we've had some magnificent lady captains who brought a different dimension to the role. It's no harm to have people coming from different backgrounds if you had clone captains nothing would be happening.

"Some would have a totally competitive emphasis; male captains tend to have that and they want to go through their year winning as much as possible. So do the lady captains, don't get me wrong, but they would generally be better from a social point of view, organising events generally associated with tennis, they've brought that to the role.

"Their contribution on the general committee has been immense too; the chairperson of the development committee for two of the bigger developments projects was Mary Jane Kenefick, she had a great way of accommodating the different views fed into the committee.

"Some people were appalled at the proposal to build the river room, they didn't want any change, but she had a great way of managing it, and was able to persuade the membership that this was the way to go. I often wondered if it had been a male chairperson standing up, would he have had that success?"


St. Vincent's R. C. Church and River Lee, Cork.

BOATING

A WHERRY GOOD TIME

Boating as a sport and a pastime may be almost redundant at Sunday's Well in modern times, but its presence in the club's name is a necessary reminder of the club's roots on the banks of the Lee.

During the early days of the club in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, each of the large houses on the north side of the river opposite the club had slipways, which are now overgrown and unused.

Many of the club's first members were residents of those houses, and would either row across the river to the club or whistle for the steward to ferry them across.

The need for such watery journeys arose out of the fact that at the time, Daly's Bridge – more popularly known as the Shaky Bridge – had not been built, and the walk to the club via Wellington Bridge (now Thomas Davis Bridge) was considerable.

In June 1900, the club committee opted to rent a plot of land from Cork Corporation member Cornelius Desmond for £10 a year, with a view to building a boathouse at a cost of £300.

Later that year, it was agreed that club members could store their boats there for the winter, and an inside dressing room was built in response to demand. Under the guidance of William Bullen, Sunday's Well's first captain of boating, the lower portion of the grounds was filled in and developed. The piling and building of another 100 feet of retaining wall on the river frontage also got underway at this time, while the existing slipway was extended to the west by eight feet, bringing it to the level of the water at low tide.

The club had also purchased four wherries – shallow, light boats that were sharp at both ends for speed - from Oxford-based Messrs Salter Bros for use by its members, which remained in use until 1924 until they were sold in favour of purchasing pleasure boats. There was also a 'club boat', which remained in operation until the 1970s.

Under the official boating bye-laws, passed in January 1902, members wishing to use a wherry had to book a week in advance. Wherries couldn't be taken below either of the nearby weirs, except within an hour of high water at spring tides, and use of them was forbidden past Wellington Bridge. Members using the gigs also had to dress in appropriate attire - a jersey, singlet and breeches.

A MAJOR WEIR-Y

While the Lee was an important amenity during the early stages of the club's development, it was also the subject of many problems. It was essential to monitor and maintain the flow and depth of the river to avert flooding, but naturally, not all of this was within the club's control.

Francis Wyse of the Cork Distillery Company had constructed a weir on the Lee in 1796, but Cork Corporation had no say in the erection or maintenance of it, as it was outside their remit until the city boundary was extended in 1850.

The club expressed its fears about the weir in a letter to Lord Mayor Thomas Donovan in 1908, noting that the floodgates had been removed on the weir, causing the river to drop to two feet below its normal height.

In addition, the letter claimed the drains leading into the river were exposed and therefore a danger to public health, and that the lower weir, owned by Beamish and Crawford, was also in disrepair.

Nearly 20 years later, concerns had yet to be alleviated, prompting the club to invite a city engineer to investigate the possibility of strengthening their section of the river-bank in 1925.

Despite the expense of constructing a wall from Fitzgerald's Park to the club's slip, the proposal was carried. However, further work was needed the following year, and the saga was far from over.

In January 1934, the club's solicitor HPF Donegan was instructed to point out to the Cork Distillery Company the danger posed to the Sunday's Well premises by the weir, and the effects of flooding as the river bank continued to be eroded.

It was suggested that the wall be extended to cover the parts affected, but the weir was still an on-going and unresolved problem by 1950, when boating was in decline due to the advent of the car.

Due to the ongoing issue of the weir in the first half of the 20th century, there are only scattered references in the minutes to boating at the club. The timber posts on the river bank were stripped and dressed with carbolinoleum in 1921, while the steward was also instructed to keep the Sunday's Well punt on the club side of the river.

Little repair work was carried out on the boathouse until 1950, when it was replaced by a prefabricated structure. However, the death knell had already sounded for boating at the club, though the subsequent deterioration of the slipway continued to cause concern.

Several of the sleepers had been washed away by heavy flood tides, and the 12 replacements bought in 1963 had deteriorated within five years. Despite the committee noting in late 1977 that the slipway needed major renovation, funds weren't available to do so until 1991.

CAUGHT IN A FLAP

Despite the fact that interest in boating had dwindled, a hardcore of Sunday's Well members were determined not to let a brilliant natural resource on the club's doorstep go to waste.

Matt Murphy and John Kenneally attempted to resurrect boating in the club in the late 1970s, and often made their way from the Angler's Rest past the club to the bus station in a double canoe.

Jim O'Donoghue and Dick Byrne joined them on their canoeing adventures, but the concept failed to catch on. Nonetheless, one such trip gave Matt and John a great story to tell.

As they careered downstream towards the city centre, a group of about 50 swans travelling in front of them suddenly turned without warning near the Mercy Hospital and took off upstream.

The duo considered capsizing the boat to avoid a collision, but they grimly hung on as swans flying a few feet above the water sped past. Trepidation turned to awe for Matt and John, but unfortunately, in a bizarre situation where a picture would have been worth a thousand words, the event wasn't captured on film.

Perhaps partly due to the growing concern that insurance issues might arise, their enthusiasm for canoeing wasn't matched by other club members.

Nonetheless, the riverfront has greatly improved and the slipway repaired in recent years, and the Lee continues to be a major feature of the club, if only from an aesthetic point of view.

NEW BEGINNINGS AND FAMILY TIES

Tennis has been a mainstay of the club since 1901, though the bylaws set out back then may seem alien to the players of today. No members could play more than one set, and the advantage game wasn't played where other members were waiting for a court.

Having finished their set, players would walk off the court and remain off it for four minutes, signalling to waiting members that the court was vacant.

The success of the club's first annual tournament in 1906 saw a cement court laid down, and affiliation with the Lawn Tennis Association followed a year later, along with the creation of a perpetual tennis championship trophy for the club.

Oddly, the emergence of tennis as an important sport at the club occurred on the watch of a chairman who never played it. George Crosbie, who was at the helm from 1906-16, did however play snooker, and the then-chairman of the Cork Examiner was also keen to see the growth of tennis at the club.

"The club is in a very prosperous condition and is becoming solidified, and it is certainly one of the institutions of Cork," he said in his chairman's address at the 1908 AGM. "Its grounds are in first-class order, and afford its members good tennis."

While Crosbie was the man behind the scenes, Frederick Lyons was the club's fulcrum on the court in his role as tennis captain from 1907-21. Both men's influence on tennis at Sunday's Well lives on today, as their great granddaughter Mary Jane Kenefick is a current member, notable in her own right as the club's first lady captain.

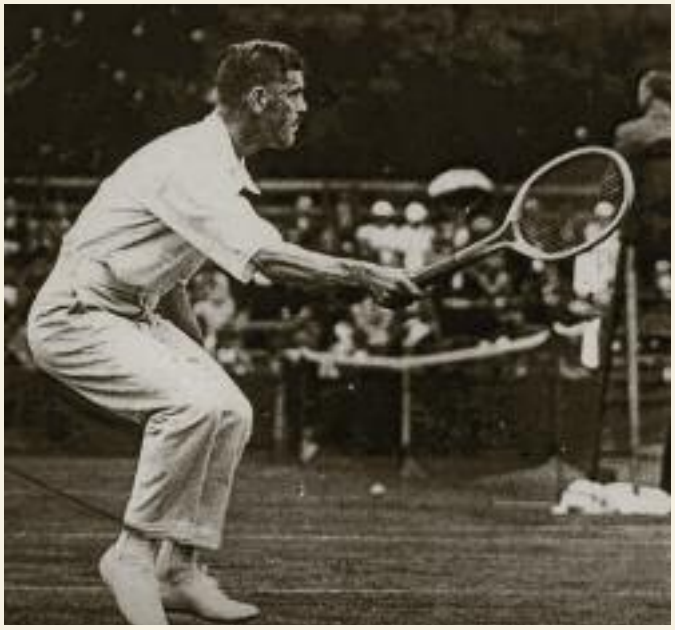
Lyons' daughter Maureen also left a significant footprint at the club. Married to George the Commander, who was in charge of the Irish Navy at Rushbrooke for the duration of World War II, Maureen shared her sister Anita's sporting talent - having three children before the age of 27 proved no burden to her representing Munster at tennis and hockey.

Only when she won the Munster Championship in 1931 was she allowed to play in front of the Sunday's Well clubhouse – but of course she was not permitted into the actual clubhouse to celebrate her win!

Commander??

Mary Jane Kennefick

Majorie Haughton



As the popularity of tennis grew, in particular the Championship of Cork tournament, won by Marjorie Haughton (sister of Ben Haughton and aunt of Alan Haughton) three times in a row in the late 1920s, so did the need to improve the facilities.

The club grounds and the five grass courts were landscaped during the 1920s, with two red En-Tout-Cas hard tennis courts laid down at the sites of courts four and five in 1929, at a cost of £220 18s.

The improvements also brought the need for a scale of charges, which were outlined in the minute books in the early 1930s. For example, the cost for singles was one shilling per player per hour or part of, but the maximum charge per day was two shillings per player.

The purchase of two tennis nets and six centre bands followed in the 1940s, while a ten-foot pole with a wire basket at its end was also purchased in 1944 – an unusual acquisition on the face of it, but a necessary one, used to fetch tennis balls from the river after the odd wayward forehand.

PROFILE: THE HAUGHTON FAMILY

No history of tennis in Cork in the early 20th century is complete without mention of Ben Haughton, his sister Marjorie and Ben's son Alan. Ben was elected a member of Sunday's Well on May 12, 1925, and played Davis Cup for Ireland against South Africa in 1927.Alan continued the tradition by playing against Germany in 1955.

In the early years, the club did not enter inter-club competition in part due to ladies not being members. However, Ben and Marjorie played for Blackrock Tennis Club and Ben won Munster Cup trophies eight times between 1911 and 1936. Marjorie had similar success, winning nine times over the same time span. Ben's son Alan won Munster Cup trophies 12 times between 1937 and 1955.

In 1922, Ben reached the Wimbledon men's doubles quarter-finals in 1922 with LA Meldon, and the mixed doubles quarter-finals with his sister Marjorie. Ben and Meldon were Irish doubles champions in 1923 and Ben and Marjorie were mixed doubles champions in 1921 and

1923. Alan was Irish under-18 Champion in 1934, and won a total of 123 open events between 1934 and 1966, a career spanning 32 years.

TAPPING INTO THE YOUTH MOVEMENT

Piecemeal repairs and the excessive use of top dressing led to serious deterioration of the grass courts, and proposals for floodlighting were not carried due to a lack of finance.

Mossie Flynn

Recalling the low ebb of tennis in the early 1950s, Mossie Flynn says: "On many a summer evening, there were empty tennis courts; one didn't have to book."

With the use of the courts dwindling even in the summer months, it was no surprise that the grass season closed from September to early spring, while financial constraints also prevented the re-surfacing of the En-Tout-Cas courts until 1972.

Furthermore, while the finals of inter-club competitions were held in Sunday's Well, the club could not enter these competitions, as it did not have female members! The club thus found itself on the periphery of the tennis world nursing an unhealthy balance sheet.

Des Scannell remembers the 1950s in particular as a time when the decline of the club mirrored the mood of the country at the time.

"During the 1950s the club was in decline. The age profile of the members was old, and many of the young tennis players, having completed their education, were more or less forced to emigrate. The economy of Cork was depressed and emigration, usually to England, was the only option," he says.

"At that time, it was usual for people in their mid-to-late 30s to retire from all outdoor sporting activity. As a result, little tennis was played in the club compared to the present day; it was very easy to get a court at any time."

Eamonn Smith

With finances stagnant, the club could not afford to stand still in its efforts to boost its coffers. With many of the smaller clubs, particularly those in the Boreenmanna Road area, producing some excellent junior players, Sunday's Well knew it could rely on its superior facilities to help bring some of these promising players into the club.

The first juveniles stepped onto the courts in the summer of 1946, under the guidance of a tennis pro overseen by the Irish Lawn Tennis Association (ILTA), and five years later, it was agreed that members' children could play daily up to 5pm during the grass court season, except on weekends.

The club also offered its facilities in the summer months to a maximum of 12 promising boys up to the age of 18, at a cost of one guinea per annum.

Nonetheless, the boys were not permitted to encroach too much on the regular members' haven; they were not allowed use of the club, and left by the dressing room's outer door.

Progress was swift from then on, however, with number three of the club rules amended in March 1952 to allow the admission of junior members under the age of 30 at a subscription of three guineas a year.

Eamonn Smith joined the club as a junior member the following year, and he fondly remembers participating in junior competitions at the time.

"There was a general atmosphere of no money in the club, but the facilities were very good in Sunday's Well compared to other clubs," he recalls.

"There were three of us involved in tennis; the eldest was Emmett, I was second and Sarsfield was the youngest. Sars played in the under-15s in Sunday's Well in the junior tennis competitions, and later on in the under-18 tournaments.

"I remember going to tournaments around the county such as Fermoy, Mallow, Youghal and Argideen Vale in Timoleague. There were great write-ups in the Evening Echo and Cork Examiner. A journalist was sent to report on events, and my grandfather Edmund Lyons kept many clippings involving any of our wins in a scrapbook."

The club's junior ranks swelled during the following decades, a fact reflected in the increasing popularity the annual junior tournament, which in 1983 attracted record numbers of more than 300 entrants.

INTERNATIONAL FLAVOURS SPARK RENEWED VIBRANCY

Despite the monetary worries of the mid-20th century, the club continued to strive for high standards. Parents of juniors were encouraged to become members, while the annual tournament survived the economic downturn; a ladies' sub-committee agreed to provide teas in 1953, and ball-boys were still used for the semi-finals and finals.

International fixtures also became a regular occurrence during the 1950s with the club staging an international between Ireland and Wales in August 1952. Both teams were made honorary

members during their stay, and the club paid for the bar extension fee, and half the barman's overtime pay to ensure fun was had off the court as well as on it.

The club's junior tournament was moved to St Michael's in Blackrock the following year, to ensure the courts were in good nick to host Ireland's clash with England, while Wales came calling once more in 1956 and 1960. Hosting such high-profile matches brought punters through the gates, and such was the volume of visitors that in 1962, an insurance policy was taken out to cover damage to the grounds and premises. A third party insurance policy was also purchased against injury to people on club grounds attending events.

By 1964, the senior tennis tournament, held annually at the club, was classified as the Irish National Championships. To help with the expenses borne by participants, a hospitality fund was established to help those travelling to the tournament.

With the growth of squash, vibrancy had fully returned to the club by the 1970s. While the introduction of junior membership had helped revive the club 20 years earlier, the relaxing of its bylaws was the catalyst this time around.

The visitors' charge was discontinued from March 1971 to encourage new members, though one week's notice had to be given to the secretary and approved by the tennis sub-committee before the court was loaned to visitors. At least one court was reserved for club members, and all new members had to pay an entrance fee of £10.

At this time, around 30 people actively played tennis, and the tennis sub-committee worked hard to field teams in the Munster Cup, Day Cup, Riordan Cup and Civil Service Cup, the latter of which was won in 1975 by a team captained by Alice McCarthy and comprising Monica O'Mahony, Ronnie Keane, Kay Duane, Ursula Duggan and Catherine O'Regan.

As well as progressing on the court, Sunday's Well also made great strides off it, with the establishment of the Mockler Cup in July 1978, to commemorate Frank and Peter Mockler. Frank was a very good tennis player and former president of the Irish Lawn Tennis Association (ILTA), while his son Peter player Davis Cup for Ireland and died at the early age of 34.

.The club provided the memorial trophy, to be presented by Mrs Mockler at the September tournament, which featured 20 teams from prominent clubs, comprising eight players each.

The following summer, 160 competitors fought it out at the Senior Open Tournament, which was attracting sponsorship from the likes of Cash's Ltd, Michel Jewellers, Northern Bank Finance, Guinness Mahon and Mathews Ltd.

Success came at a price, however, as the grass courts were now too expensive to maintain. Porous concrete replaced grass on the lower three courts during Jim O'Neill's tenure as tennis captain in 1977/78, and these "tennis quick" courts were were officially opened during Jack Leahy's tenure as chairman.

By January 1985, all-weather courts were proposed as essential, as it was noted that hard courts were absorbing £4,000 per year in maintenance costs, and were too hard on the limbs.

Four months previously, a delegation comprising Aylmer Barrett, Finbarr Gavin, Eamonn Smith, Greg O'Sullivan and Tom Murray had travelled to the David Lloyd Centre in London, as well as clubs in Bristol and Cardiff, on a fact-finding mission, with the development of new courts in mind.

Over three days, they inspected and played on courts of differing surfaces, and upon returning and presenting their findings to the club. An omni-turf surface was agreed upon. This was a fully porous, artificial turf, filled-on with sand. The court, which required minimum maintenance and was repairable, could facilitate year-round play, and had a fast time bounce.

Three courts were estimated at £50,000 each, with an additional £20,000 needed for surround netting and floodlights. The construction of new all-weather courts were passed by members, and were completed for the summer tournament of 1986.

Tennis became a year-round sport in the club, and it coincided with a boom in the number of veterans playing at the club that contributed to its regeneration in the 1980s and 1990s. Up until then, many players had given up the game at the age of 30, but now the club featured players who were taking up the game for the first time at that age. Reflecting this trend of older players continuing to play well into middle age, a prestigious American veteran group, People to People Sports, visited Sunday's Well in 1983.

Membership fees increased significantly over the 1980s, rising from £80 for a full membership in 1981 to £140 in 1988, helping to finance various projects, and the dawn of the 1990s found a vibrant club with thriving junior and veteran sections.

In 1991 alone, the club hosted the Munster Junior Open, the under-12 Tournament, the Father and Son tournament, the Junior Close Tournament, the Open Veterans' Tournament and a friendly against St Michael's Blackrock.

Two extremely successful major tournaments were also held at the club in the early 90s – the under-35 American tournament, sponsored by Ford & Son, attracted 120 members, while 1992's Munster Senior Open was the largest tournament ever run in the province, boasting 367 entries, 340 matches and 18 events.

During this time, the wearing of white clothing and footwear was insisted upon, while a number of improvements were also made off the courts. These included the resurfacing of the courts, insulating the squash courts, the planting of new trees on the river bank, improving the security between the club and Fitzgerald's Park, purchasing a new tennis machine and replacing the tarmacadam on the car park. An extensive proposal to purchase the Tennis Village was explored in 1992, but was not carried out.

AGE IS NO BARRIER

Sport is allegedly a young person's game, but as the Sunday's Well coaches will tell you, in reality it's something you can take anywhere and play for the rest of your life.

Reflecting a worldwide resurgence in veterans' tennis, the game's popularity snowballed in Sunday's Well in the 1980s. One of the club members heavily involved in this burgeoning facet of the club, Marie Kirwan, believes a number of factors contributed to this.

"It may be explained by changing lifestyles and the use of modern technology with improved

all-weather court surfaces and floodlit courts," she says.

"These advances encouraged people to take up the game, particularly those adults who never had the opportunity to play in their youth."

The first significant boost to veteran tennis in the club came in October 1983, with the visit of

People To People Sports. The success of the weekend highlighted the benefits veteran tennis could provide, both on the court in terms of healthy exercise, and off it in terms of new friendships.

The club held its inaugural veterans' tennis tournament two years later, with almost 200 competitors across a range of categories. To be classed as a veteran, ladies had to be over 40 years of age, while men had to be over 45.

"Reading the programme for the first night of play, which was published in the Cork Examiner, will arouse nostalgic memories, particularly in those who no longer play," says Kirwan.

Sunday's Well hosted the first veteran interprovincial championships in 1986, with ex-Davis Cup player Alan Haughton presenting a trophy in his name for the winning province. Haughton, Eamonn Smith and Matt Murphy played for Munster in the inaugural event.

Munster put up a gallant fight on home turf that year, narrowly missing out on the title to Leinster, but got revenge in Galway the following year to take their first title.

The comfortable surroundings and ambiance of the club have made it one of the most popular choices for veteran players around Cork, and Sunday's Well got a chance to show itself off on a wider scale in 1997, when it hosted the Four Nations Veteran Championship.

Given its popularity among players, it is little surprise that the club has dominated many of the competitions in Munster, and produced a number of representative players.

Alice McCarthy became the first Sunday's Well veteran to represent Ireland in 1991, and she has been followed by a number of top players from both the men's and women's games.

In addition, Kay Stanton, a mainstay of veterans tennis in the club, has had a distinguished career in tennis administration, serving two terms as Munster branch president and one as Irish president. Stanton was also a key figure in overseeing the growth of the game in the club in the 1980s.

In response to demand for veteran competition, age groups have been modified to span five years rather than ten. This necessitated the splitting of the interprovincial into junior and senior veteran competitions.

Veteran tennis continues to prosper at Sunday's Well, with the annual tournament attracting around 200 players every year.

THE COACHING CONUNDRUM

These days, Sunday's Well boasts one of the most comprehensive and renowned junior coaching programmes in the country. But despite the burgeoning junior participation at the club, coaching in Sunday's Well had extremely humble beginnings.

When club member Dr Jim O'Neill decided his children should receive coaching, he turned to fellow player Greg Morris. Morris remembers that O'Neill would "come up to the club from the Mercy Hospital, have his ball of malt and ask 'How are they getting on?'". O'Neill was sufficiently impressed with Morris' efforts to start making all the right noises about regular juvenile coaching in the club.

Despite being limited to the hard courts as the grass ones were closed during the winter, word soon spread of Morris' abilities. O'Neill's desire to see regular juvenile coaching was echoed by Niall Coffey in his year as tennis captain in 1981, and by Marie Kirwan, who both rowed in alongside Morris to cater for increasing demand.

However, there was little in the way of support for juvenile coaching from the conservative elements within the club, who weren't of the opinion that juniors represented the future of Sunday's Well.

"In the 1970s, 80s and right into the early 90s, it was a seniors club," explains Coffey. "You had members who were into their 60s at that stage, and they didn't really want to know about any juniors.

"Having been on the general committee, I remember that when you looked for something, you were always told that the seniors were paying, not the juniors, and that they were keeping the club going.

"That's what you were running into for a long time. They have woken up to it now, but it took them a long time to come around to the notion that the juniors were the future."

Even though the club's constitution had the provision for junior membership, which could help Coffey, Kirwan and Morris put formal structures in place, nothing had been done about it.

As a result, the 1980s were spent keeping the coaching going under their own steam, which frustrated the coaches, who also included Kay Stanton and Ger Flynn, as young players couldn't be groomed properly to fill any gaps that were about to emerge in the club's senior teams. But gradually, club members began to buy into their way of thinking.

"We started getting permission for some things," says Coffey. "They didn't want to give us too much, but I think we broke them down. They began to see that the club needed juniors."

Permission was also given for 10 junior members to play with the seniors, which helped open the eyes of many to the potential lurking in the junior ranks.

An ally arrived in the mid-1990s in the form of Marie Duffy, who these days is the club's junior coordinator. Coincidentally, the Munster branch of Tennis Ireland were, at the same time, encouraging clubs to appoint their own coaches to ensure they had practical coach/pupil ratios, and to nurture the future of tennis in the province.

The club eventually provided for junior membership in the late 1990s under the tennis captaincy of George O'Sullivan, and the coaches immediately put their heads together to formulate a programme. Duffy says that the club's decision to formally take over the coaching element was vital for its progression.

"I felt that unless the club took charge of it and organised it for all their playing junior members, it could go radically wrong," she says. "The club had to put in a proper structure that was going to work, and it has worked."

Less than a decade later, Morris and Duffy admit there are ongoing challenges; for instance, the club has had to extend its underage groups as far as under-6 to cater for increasing demand at that level.

"They're talent searching at under-5 now for the Munster branch," says Morris. "They figure if they don't get them playing tennis at that age they'll end up playing soccer, rugby or GAA."

However, the most intriguing factor that has altered coaching in recent years is the knock-on effect of a more dangerous and inactive society, where children can't roam as freely as they used to.

Duffy believes that "today's kids are so inactive, they don't run around, climb and cycle like they used to.

"In the past, these activities would have given a certain level of balance, speeding, running and jumping, but they don't have that now, so we have to get them in at an earlier age to train them."

There is also the inevitable cyclical interest in tennis to deal with, which usually peaks at 14 and drops off as players leave school, before they pick up a racquet again in their 20s.

Nonetheless, Morris says he continues to get a kick out of the coaching gig, more than 30 years after he first gave words of wisdom to Jim O'Neill's children.

"Someone put it well to me recently: 'This job of yours, you're out in the air, you're enjoying it and you're not stuck in a dingy office'," he offers.

"You're getting paid to do what you like doing. You get great satisfaction out of seeing the people you put through your hands reach their potential – the Eric Crottys, the Ger Keanes, the Elsa O'Riains and the Jean Hylands.

"It's the same at this stage, years later with the new gang. The kids keep you on your toes. The programme can continue in the morning, and we can replace the people in it. That's the best compliment to the whole thing."

CARDS, BOWLS AND BILLIARDS

PASSIONATE HEARTS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

While most of the sports associated with Sunday's Well can be considered dignified, things invariably got a bit heated during late-night card games in the clubhouse.

Thought not initially permitted on the premises, card playing quickly became popular among members who used the bar regularly. The issue was finally raised at committee level in August 1900, when it was noted that the premises were unsuitable and that card rules could not be enforced without a reliable steward.

Despite fears that abuses would follow, the rule was amended after much discussion. The acceptance of card playing into the lifeblood of Sunday's Well had positive and negative consequences for the club. In the plus column, there was obvious camaraderie to be engendered, and the introduction of a fine system in 1905 for members wishing to play late generated money for the club.

However, the right to playing card-games such as 45s and verbal abuse towards members and the steward were recurring themes of discussion at committee meetings.

There were also problems associated with the late-night opening hours. In December 1906, the club secretary James Hurst reported that the premises had been broken into on a Saturday night. The steward on duty, who had not fastened the windows of the clubhouse properly, was given a verbal warning to fulfil his duties correctly, and money was sanctioned to buy a safe.

Such was the extent of card playing at the club that extra space was required. From December 1909, members were permitted to use the ladies' room in the winter months, but had to pay for the additional fire and light, and had to close the room at midnight.

A bridge tournament was proposed and carried by the club committee in 1910, but problems remained. Verbal abuse of the steward was a feature of life in the card room, and on one occasion, fisticuffs ensued. All concerned were reprimanded, and several lost their membership, with the situation prompting the club to place a notice in the card room that read 'silence is requested'.

The playing of cards continued to be a source of finance to the club and entertainment for many, save for the poor steward who wanted to close up as games routinely continued into the early hours of the morning.

Increased card and billiard fees were introduced in 1951 – a ten shilling fine was levied on anyone who continued to play after 12.15am, which doubled if they continued until 1.30am, or rose to £1 per player up until the cut-off point of 2.30am.

The proceeds were divided down the middle – half went to the club, the rest to the long-suffering steward.

Within a year, the fine system was extended to the reading room, while in the billiard room, the charge for late hours in the billiard room for more than four players was five shillings per head, or 20 shillings per table for fewer players.

BRIDGING THE GAP

In the 1960s, the club looked to tap into the popularity of bridge as a game played by mixed clubs around the city, so Saturdays and Wednesdays were designated as a bridge night at the club to attract new members.

Two years later, mixed bridge tournaments were a regular fixture on Saturday nights in the clubhouse, with founder members comprising Stuart Musgrave, Gerry Guy, Walter Murphy, Dr Charles Cantillon and Craig McKechnie. Ladies present were Betty Ryan, Eileen Murphy and Mary McKechnie.

By 1968, bridge games had moved to Wednesdays in the clubhouse reading room. Annual membership was £10, with space constraints limiting the number of participants to 50.

Table money of £2 was halved into prize money and the annual capitation fee to the Irish Bridge Association (IBA). Membership of the IBA kept members up-to-date with rule changes and international bridge events.

However, affiliation ceased in the 1980s, and several players went elsewhere. Nonetheless, there were still 36 regular players in 1994, and today there is a waiting list to join. There is no play in June, July and August, but bridge continues to thrive through the winter in Sunday's Well.

Remarkably, founder members Betty Ryan, who combined the roles of honorary secretary, honorary treasurer and general organiser on the first bridge committee in the 1960s, is still heavily involved with the bridge club in a tournament directing capacity.

BOWLS AT DDDS ON AN UNLEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Bowls became an integral part of the club from 1910 onwards when a bowling green was developed, and the game's popularity in Sunday's Well was reflected in the introduction of two cups for the sport. The bowling green occupied the present location of courts six, seven and eight.

The McKechnie Cup, a challenge cup to be won three times in succession or four times overall to be won out, was presented to the club in 1917, while a smaller cup for handicap competition was given to the bowling committee in 1921.

As its popularity increased over the following decade, so too did the worries over the quality of the playing surface. One tennis court was set aside for bowls during the 1927 season amid these problems, and the issue of levelling the green remained prominent throughout the 1930s.

That decade also saw a visit from the Irish Touring Bowlers, while the bowling section of the club affiliated with the Irish Free State Bowling Association in 1937. It also subscribed to the Board of Greenkeeping Research for almost three years.

Charles Olden then donated a cup for the annual pairs bowling competition in 1942, and when the final stage of the Munster Schools Cup was held at the club in 1945, all the grass courts were reserved for bowls, highlighting the ever-increasing status of the sport in club life.

The sport continued to progress through the 1950s in terms of members, and an affiliation fee of one guinea was given annually to the Bowling League of Ireland. The East Cardiff Bowling

Club made the trip to Cork to play at Sunday's Well on July 6, 1951, and were made honorary members for the evening.

Vouchers to the sum of £4 were given to the bowls committee for prizes at their annual bowling tournament in 1956, and when the bowling green was reopened with five greens in May 1961, the future was looking good.

However, within 18 months, a terminal blow had been struck. Amid spiralling costs, declining membership and a lack of interest in the sport, the bowling green was converted into two tennis courts in November 1962.

There were various attempts to revive the sport over the following five years, and a couple of local games were played against Blackrock and Church of Ireland. But despite the efforts of a small contingent of members to re-establish the bowls section, a proposal to sell off the silver cups was carried in August 1968, and Sunday's Well said goodbye to the sport.

BAIZE OF GLORY

Billiards won its first formal recognition as a sport within the club in October 1925, with the appointment of a committee for the inauguration of billiard and snooker tournaments.

WFJ Mayne was appointed honorary secretary of the billiard and snooker handicap tournament, which was set in motion with the purchase of two perpetual cups.

By the time the snooker handicap tournament in November 1928 came around, snooker players had equal rights along with billiard players to the club's tables.

The Cork Sportsman Club Trophy was allocated to snooker in February 1932, and by the end of the decade, the charge to pay billiards was six pence per half hour.

Snooker remained an active sport in the club throughout the 20th century, and the 1950s and 60s saw a number of initiatives undertaken to attract new members.

A special prize for the highest break of the season was awarded from 1952 onwards, and two years later the billiard committee decided that a bottle of whiskey be awarded to the member making the highest break for snooker on a connected handicap.

In 1962 a sealed cap, entry-free 'American-style' snooker competition was pioneered. Each match consisting of just a single frame of no more than 40 minutes in length, promoting a faster, offensive brand of snooker and more fun for those competing.

Trivial matters, such as cues going missing and the need for new billiard and snooker balls, were frequent issues brought up at committee level. At one stage, members complained that the table was playing slowly and claimed the cloth required stretching.

PJ Loop was asked to inspect the table, and found that while one cushion needed attention, the cause of the problem was a 10-day stretch of damp, foggy weather, no doubt exaggerated by the proximity of the club to the river.

WITH BAITED BREATH

Fishing has long been a favoured pastime at Sunday's Well – and not just because you could feasibly play billiards and fish at the same time at the club.

Anecdotal evidence suggests a few members have hung a rod out the window of the billiard room in the hope of catching some dinner mid-frame, but the sport also has significant roots in a competitive sense at the club.

The Sunday's Well Fishing Club came into existance in 1933, when it was authorised as a subsidiary of the main club. In the same year, the Hardy Challenge Cup was presented to the club by renowned fishing tackle manufacturers, Hardy Bros of Alnwick.

The Muckross Cup was first presented the previous year by a Mrs Ross, who was believed to be the proprietor of Muckross Hotel, near the Killarney Lakes, where competitions were held. Anglers from Sunday's Well pitched up here and in the nearby Lake Hotel when competing.

Both cups provide evidence of the fishing club's existance prior to 1941, when its written records commence. They were fished for on the same day up until 1949, when it was decided to experiment with holding separate competitions for each. This custom remained until the 1990s, when dwindling numbers dictated that the competitions should be held on the same day.

Reflecting the niche fishing had found at Sunday's Well, the club decided in 1962 to purchase a boat for use on the River Lee. However, this decision was deferred to allow the club's honorary secretary to enquire of the ESB regarding permission for members to fish above and below the clubhouse, and there is no subsequent reference to the project.

Nonetheless, many members have recollections of fly-fishing from the bank at the rear of the clubhouse; Gordon Exshaw recalls that when he was a new member, he and other young and agile members were recruited to untangle flies and lines caught in the clubhouse gutter behind the senior anglers.

Competitions were usually held on Lough Leane and the prowess of female guests was noted at the 1965 AGM, and it was suggested that a special competition, "which should prove popular with our members, to include wives and lady friends, many of whom are very good anglers" be held.

There is no mention of this again until 1974, when it was noted that a "lady's prize" was won by Helen Whelton, who, along with Vera Kelly, was among the more accomplished female anglers who fished regularly in the main competitions.

Fishing club members who were not also members of the Lough Leane Anglers' Association were asked for a contribution of one shilling and six pence to compete in 1969, but around that time the competitions were occasionally fished elsewhere. In 1968 the Hardy Cup was fished on Cloonee Lake, as, according to the club minutes, "Killarney was so poor".

It was reported that Dr Andrew Whelton won it with 15 small trout, but dissatisfaction was expressed at the small size of trout and the very "slow" fishing, leading to a decision not to fish there again. The following year, the cup was fished for on Inniscarra Lake, when Dr CJ Cantillon's haul of two trout was the best of nine boats.

FALLEN ANGLERS

Despite the occasional change of venue, the regularity with which the competitions were held over a 73-year period is remarkable. The Hardy Cup was not fished for in 1965 and 66, after a number of clubs pulled out in response to the increase of boatman's charges to £3. No competitions were held in 1983 due to algae blooms on Lough Leane or in 1988 and 89 due to the rod license dispute.

Occasionally a salmon was caught during a competition, but never considered for a prize, as the outings were deemed to be trout fishing competitions.

In 1971, a club member noticed that the Hardy Bros were celebrating their centenary, and at his suggestions, the clubs honorary secretary, Clem Barter, wrote to them expressing Sunday's Well's congratulations.

Rumours flew around prior to the following year's tournament that there was a secret prize for the winner. A beautiful, split cane, eight feet poacher's fly rod, presented by Hardy Bros, was won by Michael Lane.

However, the 1970s also marked the period when fishing's popularity had subsided significantly within the club, as evidenced by the 1971 AGM, when the five members who attended considered closing down the club, as only six people had fished the Hardy Cup the previous year.

Furthermore, the fact that Michael Lane and Jas Kirby, who were elected as honorary secretary and honorary treasurer in 1974, have now held the positions for more than 30 years, suggests the fishing club needs an injection of young blood.

There has been the occasional attempt at a revival; in 1987, a sea angling competition arranged by Billy Joyce and Jack Stanley attracted 20 anglers in two cruiser-boats, but the competition had ceased within two years.

A social fishing event was arranged with the Cork Kingdom Anglers' Club on Lough Currane in Waterville in 1991, but brilliant sunshine and near-flat calm induced many anglers to forsake the lake for the Skelligs.

MONEY'S TOO TIGHT TO MENTION

Introducing squash to the club in the 1960s proved to be a pivotal point in the history of the club; given the role it played in helping to attract new members in barren times.

The possibility of erecting squash courts at the club was first visited in 1931, with the club minutes noting the wish to acquire a plot of land from the adjacent cricket grounds to build two courts.

Land negotiations began with Cork Corporation in 1936, with city manager Philip Monahan prepared to lease the plot of land for 31 years at £3 per annum, provided the club paid £50 towards the re-erection of a stable on the land.

The club acquired the land, but when only £1,200 of the £2,000 loan requested from Hibernian bank towards building the courts was sanctioned in 1938, the courts were not built.

Squash remained off the agenda for 30 years, but the sport experienced an upsurge in popularity in the Cork area in the 1960s, resulting in its return to the Sunday's Well agenda.

Then-chairman Walter Murphy, who was also a noted supporter of Dolphin RFC, didn't play the game himself but was in favour of its introduction, but financial fears at committee level ensured his initial proposal was turned down.

However, several committee members noted the demand for squash courts at the time, and felt building them could attract new members and help replenish the club's ailing finances.

The Cork Squash Association approached the club with a proposal to build courts on their car park in 1965, while at the same time, 57 people, not all members, had registered their interest in playing squash at Sunday's Well. But once again, money proved to be an insurmountable stumbling block.

That was until Frank Mockler offered the club an interest-free loan of £1,000 in 1967, as a gift in consideration of building a squash court on the premises.

Suddenly, club members were queuing up to put their money where their mouth was, with 16 following suit by putting up £100 each. The club was quoted £3,000 for one court, and negotiated a £2,000 loan at 7% interest.

In December 1967, the Cork Squash Association donated a further £1,000, as the clamour for courts reached fever pitch. There were more than 500 squash players in the city by this stage, and while clubs were being established all around the county to cater for demand, the only courts in the city at the time were at Collins Barracks.

At an EGM held in August 1970, more loans amounting to £3,000 were forthcoming from various members, plus a very generous loan from an undisclosed member. The decision was taken to construct two courts, at an estimated cost of £10,000.

Tidal problems became a problem shortly after construction began, prompting the club to request that architect John O'Donoghue install raft foundations at a cost of an extra £1,800. But despite this setback, the courts were soon to yield great dividends.

A RISING TIDE LIFTS ALL BOATS

It was no coincidence that club membership sky-rocketed over the first few years of the 1970s. A total of 125 were accepted in the first seven months of 1970, with 21 more that December. Barely a year later, a waiting list had to be re-established, and ordinary membership had more than tripled to 450 by February 1973.

The squash courts were completed in May 1971 and opened by Peter Barry, Lord Mayor of Cork, who, upon observing their riverside location infamously remarked: "My God, who gave planning permission for those?"

Beamish and Crawford also presented a perpetual cup for a squash championship that year, which was won three times in a row over the first five years by Des Scannell.

Recognition of the Sunday's Well facilities coincided with the Irish Squash Racquets Association's decision to hold a meeting at the club in March 1972.

Squash was enjoyed regularly in Sunday's Well on both a competitive and social basis as the decade progressed. Friendly matches and social evenings were held on a monthly basis, and teams were entered in all major competitions, the finals of which - including the 1973 Cork Squash Championships and the 1974 Cork Examiner Shield - were played at the club.

Such was the demand for the courts that visitors were barred during peak hours, and there was a 50p fine for bookings not taken up or cancelled.

"If they hadn't been built at that stage I don't think the club would be here now," explains Tom Murray, who was squash captain in 1978/79. "Such was the demand that you'd need to book a week in advance, it was really booming.

"It was a vibrant time. There was a rush of popularity for the game – guys came to the club even on their lunch break, and fun squash sessions and social nights were developed on Fridays.

"Those were successful attempts at getting members to come to the club. The great social atmosphere fostered the development of a close-knit club."

The mid-1970s saw the club enjoy unprecedented success in squash. At a time when squash wasn't as strong in Munster as it once was, Sunday's Well and Collins Barracks contested an all-Cork final in the All-Ireland Intermediate Kinnard Cup. The Sunday's Well team of Joe Murphy, Tim Murphy, Peter Ahern, Ken Stanton and Paddy Tynan emerged victorious.

In between visits to high-profile squash club such as Rosario in Belfast and Fitzwilliam in Dublin, the club was fielding teams in all six divisions of the Cork Senior League, and they claimed victory in the top tier in 1977 with a team captained by Joe Murphy and featuring Sars Smith, Sonny Cummins, Des Scannell and Paddy Tynan.

Internally, Jim O'Donoghue founded the Tribes leagues, which saw 20 teams of five players named after Indian tribes, which attracted more members to the club and helped foster a vibrant social scene.

"I came across the Tribes leagues in another world – tennis in Rushbrooke" explains O'Donoghue. "We used to have great craic there, and introducing it to the squash in Sunday's Well would encourage fellas who were not on teams, as such, to play."

O'Donoghue was keen to offset some of the less inclusive elements of squash, and offers a keen insight into the social make-up of the game at the time.

"It's not the kind of game where you'd come in with your bat in your hand and fall in with other people, like tennis," he says.

"You'd never play without having your game arranged, and you'd usually have your small circle (of players). So from that point of view it was a bit of an unsociable sport.

"You'd come off the squash court, have your shower…but the real "squashies" would never go into the bar and start pucking down pints.

"The Tribes leagues therefore produced more fun and real competition. Fellas got to know each other and broadened out a bit."

With plenty of sportsmen with experience in other sports requiring good hand-eye co-ordination taking up the game, O'Donoghue remembers that competition could nonetheless be fierce.

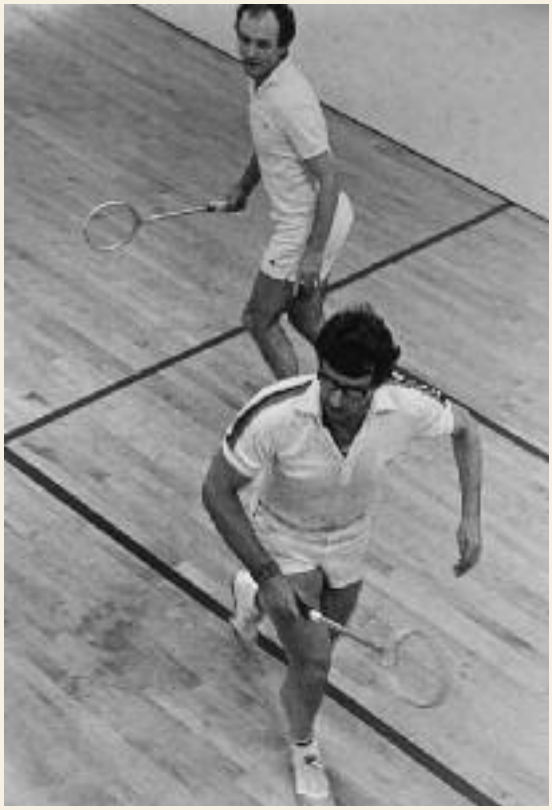
"You could write a book about some of the funny instances on the court. For example, Ronnie Moore, who was a handy enough rugby player was playing a match against Frank Daly. Frank was about 6'5" and was an ex-Glen hurler.

"I was umpiring, and it was a pantomime. They literally got entangled in each other after every second shot. At one stage they started wrestling – the kind of thing you'd see in an All-Ireland final. So I said "Ah go on, kiss and make up" and it brought the house down."

Smith recalls how club members got an insight into the competitive edge of world number one Jonah Barrington, when he visited the club to play an exhibition against Australian amateur world champion Cam Nancarrow.

Barrington, an English-born Irishman who won six British Open titles in seven years between 1967 and 1973, was one of the first squash players to take up the game up full time, upping his stamina levels with his fitness regime.

However, the squash phenomenon began to fade in the 1980s, as players found their heads turned by new floodlit tennis courts. Though Sars Smith, Sonny Cummins and Owen Dawson played veteran squash for Ireland at this time, the sport's popularity within the club declined to an all-time low in 1985. Today, just 25 players play during the week, and the club finds it difficult to field a team.



"I saw both sides of it, the rise and the fall," offers Sean Flynn, a former chairman of the Collins club, who subsequently filled the squash captain's role twice at Sunday's Well as well as serving as club chairman.

"It just began to taper off. Squash is not really a spectator game as such. When I joined the club here you couldn't get a squash booking, you had to limit people to three times a week.

"Now we have no ladies playing and there's no run on the courts. Squash has really deteriorated. It still has its' devotees, it's a smashing game, I still play every Tuesday night. It gives you an adrenaline rush and a terrific lift."

Murray admits he "can't quite put his finger on" the reasons for squash's downfall, he and Flynn have a couple of hypotheses, and both maintain the game's lack of appeal to spectators is at the root of the problem.

While more than 100 competitors across four grades competed in the Munster Veterans Open at Sunday's Well in January 2009, the balcony that once thronged with spectators was largely unoccupied.

"Lit tennis courts took a lot of people, and golf was a big factor," says Flynn. "There has also been a greater emphasis on young people in schools to play team sports rather than individual ones.

"Plus, before you had some very good Irish squash players who competed internationally; once you had a profile like that young people would take it up. But of late, we haven't had anyone with a world profile.

"They were all contributory factors, but the biggest thing is it's not a spectator sport. I believe there's a revival in Dublin though, so it might be cyclical."

Flynn adds that while the provision of doubles courts has helped squash become one of the fastest-growing sports in New York, no such facility currently exists in Ireland.

Nonetheless, he retains hope that such a revival may occur on these shores: "This club nearly went to the wall, but squash saved it. Tennis was at a low ebb at that stage, but then we got all-weather courts and floodlights, and tennis took over again. I'm hoping squash will come back up again too."

PROFILE: SONNY CUMMINS, 'PROFESSOR OF SQUASH'

New York-born and Waterford-bred before his job as a Guinness rep took him to Cork and Sunday's Well, Sonny Cummins was one of the best squash players Ireland has ever produced.

Long before Roy Keane and Keith Wood challenged to Irish sporting tendency to accept the 'gallant loser' tag, Cummins was on a personal quest to win a world title in squash. He was never satisfied with making the last four – he wanted to be the best.

Cummins didn't take up squash until 1966 at the age of 36, when amateur jockey and horse trainer Harry de Bromhead introduced him to it at the Downes Club.

Having reached the 1968 Munster final, where he lost to Fintan O'Brien, Cummins became a regular on the interprovincial side, and captained it in 1974, when he took the Cork title.

He reeled off four Munster Veterans Open titles and competed in the veteran internationals alongside noted all-rounder Cecil Pedlow, winning all his games against Scotland and Wales before defeating then-world champion Trevor Milliken of Australia in 1980.

Following defeat in the semi-final of the Irish Veterans' Championship, Cummins was advised by Australian coach Aubrey Amos to set his sights on winning the vintage title in five years' time.

Amos convinced Cummins he could be the first Irish-born player to take a squash world title, provided he put in the hours in training.

Soon he was reaching the latter stages of world championships, and came face-to-face with eight-time world champion Hashim Khan of Pakistan in a memorable semi-final at Wembley. The Sunday's Well man led 2/1 and 6/1, but eventually lost.

They met again in the 1985 World Vintage Championship, and Cummins came even closer this time around. Leading by two sets to one, he lost a 7/3 lead in the fourth and was edged out in the decider.

To compound his misery, that victory proved to be Khan's swansong, as he put up a tired performance when losing to Gloucester professional Bob Griffin in the decider.

This experience led Cummins to retire from his job with Arthur Guinness and Co. as his intense determination to win a world title took hold.

The 1986 world championship saw him pitched into a quarter-final against Gordon Paterson that went the distance; sadly, Cummins subsequently lacked the stamina to take on eventual winner Griffin the next morning.

Cummins was one of many outstanding sportsmen in Sunday's Well – he was a noted all-rounder who also excelled at tennis and snooker - and his talent, commitment and courage will always be a source of great pride and encouragement to all club members.

WHEN TAVERNER'S WAS BORN IN A TAVERN

Cricket has a brief but chequered history in Sunday's Well, as summed up neatly by the circumstances surrounding its beginnings in the club. Dan Murphy and Brian Gibson were enjoying a post-tennis match chat over a drink on a Friday night in June 1990, when Brian's eyes lit up at a throwaway utterance from Dan about a cricket game.

Rather than dismiss the notion as pub talk, Dan posted a note on the club's notice board seeking further interest in cricket. Support at first was not great, although verbal requests to help to make up a team were more promising. Eventually, with a commitment from maybe twelve or thirteen members, the club went in search of a fixture.

Dan's passion for taverner's cricket, which originated in the UK, was thanks to annual matches organised between the Church of Ireland club and rugby referees from the area.

C of I's John Wolfe and Paddy Wharton had introduced the game to Cork in the 1970s with admirable fervour – a game intended for retired cricketers, or those with an interest in the game who had never had the chance to play it. It was not unusual for some younger players, who had never played the game competitively, to supplement the numbers.

Around 12 teams participating regularly in the area at the time Dan and Brian were looking to make their idea a reality. However, fixture lists had been drawn up for all these teams in April and May, meaning none of the clubs had free dates to take on the emerging Sunday's Well outfit.

Fortunately, UCC were also attempting to develop a taverner's team at the time, and were available for a game. They also had their own spacious grounds at Curraheen – their field, though on the small side for a big hitter, was almost circular and contained in a wonderful setting.

Eglantine Motors, owned by the O'Sullivan family, made a generous contribution to the cricket team, which enabled them to acquire an adequate supply of bats, pads, gloves and balls.

The team that took to the field when the fixture was held in July 1990 was notable for the collective achievements of its members. Three students, including one who is now a Senior Counsel in Dublin, two medical doctors, a former Irish rugby international, a computer science lecturer and the chief executive of the Cork Chamber of Commerce all helped Sunday's Well to a comfortable 'maiden' cricket victory over UCC.

CORK CRICKET'S VERY OWN RULE 42

So-called 'international' and 'interprovincial' matches were a regular feature of taverner's cricket during the 1990s, usually comprising a combination of players from the regular Cork teams. Sunday's Well had the unusual distinction of participating in one of these, against a Welsh selection, on a GAA pitch.

The match was initially slated for the soccer pitch at the Tower Community Complex in Ballyangley, but midway through the second innings, soccer teams claimed the use of the pitch, forcing a move to an adjacent GAA pitch.

A meal was arranged back at the Sunday's Well clubhouse after the game, and this was a notable occasion too, according to Gus McKernan, who was on bar duty that night, for the sheer volume of stout consumed that night!

The presence of Sunday's Well's Dan Murphy, Ray Walsh and Dave Lucey in a one-off game comprising former interprovincial and international players at the Mardyke was a great honour for those involved, while there was also an annual fixture between a combined Cork clubs selection and the Evening Herald.

Sunday's Well also participated in a regular end-of-season softball tournament held by Church of Ireland during the height of taverner's cricket's popularity. The team consisted of notable players such as Aylmer Barrett, JB Murphy, Jimmy O'Brien and John Donovan, but they could not match the talents of a Ballincollig outfit that included five Pakistani medics from Cork University Hospital.

OLD RIVALRIES DIE HARD

Schoolboy rivalries that had been learned on the rugby fields of Sidney Hill, Wilton and Musgrave Park were revived on the cricket pitch during this period, in games staged between alumni of Presentation Brothers College and Christian Brothers College.

"Such games – sadly only three of them if memory serves me right – put taverner's cricket on a new level," recalls Dan Murphy. "In the nicest way possible, they embodied all the ingredients of a schools rugby match between the two institutions.

"Umpiring decisions were never correct in those matches, but not surprisingly, the local talent in Sunday's Well came to the fore in them. Many considered it their duty to participate in such games."

To complete the numbers at such intense encounters, the Pres and Christians stalwarts invoked a version of Irish soccer's infamous 'granny rule', roping in sons and other relatives. Indeed, father and son combinations were a regular feature on the club cricket teams.

As with many of the minor sports played in Sunday's Well, the future of cricket in the club is at a crossroads, according to Dan Murphy.

"No one knows if taverner's cricket can ever be resurrected," he says. "Cricket does not appear to be as strong in general in Cork as it was in the 1950s/60s – for example, Church of Ireland no longer has a cricket pitch. Many more people now have holiday homes, somewhere or other, and golf has become a huge sport, all at the expense of cricket, and indeed possibly also for tennis.

"Even so, it is remarkable how many people were aware of the very closely-contested Ashes Series in the summer of 2006 in England, so interest still is strong for the game, and on that basis, one must never give up hope."