

## The Westmeath Hunt



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### Historical Background

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

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



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

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

*Mr Hugh Morgan Tuite*

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

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

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



**Knockdrin Castle**



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

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

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

### **Masters of the Westmeath Hunt 1850-1900**

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



***Sir Richard Levinge***

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



***Mr Gerald Richard Dease***



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

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



***Lord Greville***

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

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

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



***Clonhugh House***

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

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

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

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



*Earl of Longford*



*Hon Edward Michael Pakenham*

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

#### **Masters of the Hunt 1900 -1960**



*Westmeath Hunt Meeting circa 1920*

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

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

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

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*Mr Edmund Dease*

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