

Between the Wars

With the conclusion of World War 1, sports clubs which had been totally disbanded during the war once more began to play a part in college life. As regards their reorganisation, an obvious need arose for some degree of coordination and to this end, an informed committee was called together in December 1918 by Mr. T. S. Dagg and Mr. J. I. Kelly and upon their proposals, the Board agreed on the 3rd February 1920 to the formation of a central committee to reconstitute the athletic clubs to take charge of the pavilion, and to report to the Board. Thus was born the Dublin University Central Athletic Committee which has since then played such a role in the development of sport in college. The committee made an immediate grant of £100.00 to get College Park in order and it drafted a constitution providing for its own enlargement. Various sports clubs were to have representatives on the committee, the Harriers and the cycling clubs being given two seats between them although at this stage, the Harriers had not yet been reformed.

College Park whose upkeep had been neglected during the War was quickly got back into condition and on Wednesday June 18th, D.U.C.A.C. received the College Races which had not been held for four years. The Races proved a success with a large number of events including several open races being held. The entries were satisfactory and upwards of three thousand spectators attended. Later in the year came the reconstitution of the Harriers although only one member could be found who was in college before the War. A meeting was held in the G.M.B. on Thursday 4th December with Dr. R. J. Rowlette (Vice-President) in the chair, and it was unanimously resolved:

- “1) That this meeting do reconstitute itself D.U.H.
- 2) That the President, Mr. J. W. Fry and the Vice-Presidents of the season 1913/14 do be requested to retain their offices.”

It was decided to carry on the club on the pre-war lines and the chairman gave an account to the meeting of the activities of the Harriers in the past. Cross country runs and paper chases are held weekly in Michaelmas and Hilary Terms and in the summer, handicap flat races are run every Wednesday. Interclub and Intervarsity matches are held throughout the season and senior and junior teams entered for the Irish Cross Country Championships. In the new year, the club was entrusted by D.U.C.A.C. with the control

of the College Races and to mark the extension of its activities on the suggestion of that committee. its name was altered from Dublin University Harriers to Dublin University Harriers and Athletic Club. During this first season, it proved impossible to arrange the customary cross channel matches against Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, London United Hospitals and the Thames Hare and Hounds. However, interclub matches were arranged with the teams best performance being a 3rd place in the Southern Branch of the Cross Country Association Championships.

Despite the enthusiasm of the new committee, the strong tradition of the Harriers and the attractiveness of its fixture list, membership remained low and results poor. Not-only were the Harriers hindered by a general lack of interest in the club on the part of their fellow students and by a lack of talent on the part of those who did participate but they also had their share of misfortune. During February 1921, the cross channel fixtures were revived with D.U.H. travelling to England for a tour which proved less than satisfactory from an athletic viewpoint. The first match was held at Oxford where a little over half-way round the 7.5 mile course, the paper trail led under a railway bridge turning sharply to the right over a hump on the other side. At this stage, the Oxford team had got out of sight of their opponents and on arriving at this point J. S. Glasgow, the leading Trinity man and without doubt the best Harrier of the period, mistook the trail and took a course which had been laid for a steeplechase some time earlier and he was followed by three of his team mates. McKeag who was a good way behind these did not see that they had gone astray and himself took the right course, being the only Trinity man to complete the correct course. Several days later, they fared somewhat better although failing to win against the Thames Hare and Hounds with J. S. Glasgow finishing third. That day wasn't to be without a victory however for in the interval between the run and dinner, they defeated their hosts in a game of skittles which the Irish had never played before. Robinson who Had been forced to retire during the Oxford race was the star performer with "his arm proving stronger than his ankle".

The 1921–22 season saw the visit of Edinburgh University shortly before Christmas and another defeat for D.U.H. who now in their third season since the war had not yet won a race. So seriously disheartened were the small group of Harriers at their performances that early in Trinity term, they held a meeting to discuss their future. After three hours debate, it was unanimously agreed that:

- “1) Unless cross country running received greatly increased support in Trinity, it could not be continued with any prospect of success.
- 2) It was not fair to bring Oxford over to Dublin to meet a team unable to put up a reasonably good show against them.
- 3) It would be deplorable that the oldest cross country club in Ireland should cease to exist but that the meeting felt it their duty to advise the committee of D.U.H.A.C. to suspend the cross country branch of the club until such



Figure 4: D.U.H.A.C. Team, 1928

Back Row (l-r): J. B. Eustace, D. M. Mitchell, V. J. Pike, M. E. Cussen, T. Maguire (coach), F. B. Moynihan, T. G. Mallagh, I. T. Wylie, D. T. MacDermot,

Middle Row (l-r): S. Radcliffe, J. C. Hewat, D. C. Cusack, H. S. Smithwick, T. McD. Stewart, E. I. Johnston, R. B. Pike,

Front Row (l-r): J. W. Cusack, N. S. Price, J. G. Cherry (Captain), T. R. F. Cox, D. A. Wallis.

time as reasonable support should be forthcoming.”

At a subsequent committee meeting of D.U.H.A.C., it was decided to give Oxford the opportunity to withdraw from their fixture but at the request of the other Dublin clubs, it was decided to honour all other fixtures and so the Harriers survived. The 1923–24 season did not prove any more encouraging for the Harriers with a victory still eluding them and they had to wait until the start of their fifth season since the war for their first victory when on December 4th 1924, they defeated Edinburgh University with W.N.C. Steele (D.U.H.) the first man home.

If the cross country scene was less than satisfactory, the opposite was the case with the track team. Trinity’s reputation for producing superb sprinters was well and truly maintained by Denis J. Cussen who in 1921 was instrumental in helping the team to the Irish Intervarsity Championship with a narrow win over U.C.D. by 13.5 points to 12. Cussen won three events, the 100 yards, 220 yards and long jump, Trinity’s other victory coming in the shot from J. V. Druten. 1921 was notable for several other reasons. It saw the holding of the first club championship and the first Trinity Interclub Relays which has proven to be the most enduring and popular of D.U.H.A.C.’s promotions. This event was to prove an annual struggle between the promoting club and the Dublin Metropolitan Garda Club with the laurels being evenly divided until the mid-thirties. The strength of the 1921 team was underlined when they defeated the rest of Leinster in a representative match. Not surprisingly, four members of the team, D. J. Cussen (100/220/long jump), T. S. Broderick (100/220), D. A. Quinlan (high jump/120 yards hurdles) and H. E. Worthington-Eyre (440 yards) gained international honours. The latter had been a member of the British Olympic team at the Antwerp Olympics the previous August.

The club was to regain the Intervarsity title in 1922 and again in 1923. In 1922, they won four of the ten events gaining maximum points in two with Cussen and Woods in the 100 yards and McKeag and Glasgow in the 880 yards coming home first and second respectively. The 1923 championship was a particularly close event with Trinity winning by a single point having five wins and five seconds to U.C.D.’s five wins and four seconds. This win was all the more impressive as D. J. Cussen was unable to compete due to injury. R. R. Woods filled his shoes admirably winning the 100 and 220 yards. The 1922–23 season saw the arrival of Tan Maguire in College Park who was to be the club coach for the next 35 years. 1923 also saw the fusing of the G.A.A. and I.A.A.A. into the N.A.C.A. — a move which was welcomed by D.U.H.A.C. as “providing wider competition for both the club and the individual” and they immediately entered teams in both the Co. Dublin Junior and Senior Leagues which were to involve four matches against the various Dublin clubs.

Despite the near invisibility of the track team over this three year period and their bevy of international athletes, their premier promotion of the year — the College Races

— was struggling to find support from their fellow students or public. After an encouraging start in 1918, the event was again held annually with the single exception of 1921 when due to the unfortunate shooting dead of a woman student in College Park which she was attending an athletic event, it was decided to abandon the Races. The bullet was a stray which came from outside the college grounds. In 1923, when D.U.H.A.C. was at its strongest, so poor was the support for the Races and the events of Trinity week in general that the chairman of D.U.C.A.C. in his report referred to attendances as “nothing short of disgraceful” and went on “It would seem that a large proportion of our undergraduates today are lacking in that zest for athleticism and social events which was characteristic of Trinity some time ago”.

Denis Cussen was undoubtedly the star performer of the time. In addition to his victories as a member of the University team, he was both Irish sprint titleholder in 1921 and showed his great versatility as an athlete by also winning the shot, discus and long jump, thereby taking five titles at the one championship — no mean feat by any standards. In 1922, he regained his national 100 yards and long jump titles. He won his third 100 yards title in 1925 when he clocked even time for the “dah”. He then moved to England and was out of athletics for a while but early in 1928, he ran a ten second 100 at an English meeting and forwarded his entry for the Irish championships where he turned in a marvellous performance to win by four yards in $9\frac{4}{5}$ seconds, thus being the first Irishman to break ten seconds, and creating a record which was to stand for many years. Later, in 1928, Cussen represented Ireland in the Olympics reaching semi-final stage where he finished third, unfortunately only two qualified for the final.

Although he was somewhat over-shadowed by Cussen, R. R. Woods was also a superb sprinter winning the national 220 yards title in 1922 and both the sprint titles in 1923. 1922 was a tremendous year at the National championships for Trinity — not only did Cussen win the 100 yards and long jump and Woods the 220 yards but the 440 yards and 880 yards also fell to Trinity athletes, R. McKeag and C. B. Mein respectively. Cussen’s departure saw the arrival of G. B. Eustace, another fine sprinter who had been Schools and Colleges Champion in 1925. He produced a major surprise in 1926 by dead-heating Irish Olympian Sean Lavan for the National 100 yards title. He won two more 100 yard titles in 1929 and 1930 and the 220 yards in 1930 and 1932. His 1930 220 was an Irish record of 22.2. Eustace was a colourful character not noted for his dedication to training and yet was probably the only Irish sprinter of the time to gain any international success when in 1932, he defeated the British Champion, Robin Murdoch, over 220 yards.

Thus over the ten year period 1921–30, eight of the ten Irish 100 yard sprint titles fell to Trinity athletes which is testimony to their dominance in this event. Despite this, they were not to win another Intervarsity championship in the twenties after 1923 due to a large degree to their failure to produce field event athletes of any calibre. The exception to this was the long jump where R. J. Cussen and Moynihan both jumped over

22 feet in the late twenties. However, this period is noted for the return to prominence of the Races which once more became a major event in the social calendar and an occasion for exotic fashion among the ladies, morning coats and top hats for the men and strawberries and cream and tea parties all round.

Having survived the depressing state of affairs which existed in the early Twenties, the Harriers began to grow in strength and developed their annual fixture list to include fixtures against the five cross channel clubs which had been the feature of the pre-war days. The Edinburgh match which had provided them with their first victory since the war in December 1924 became the premier event of the season. This fixture and the Glasgow match were considered "two of our hardest fixtures and the two we particularly like to win". Membership in the club began to increase dramatically and during the 1926/27 season, the Harriers which several years previously had struggled to field a single team were able to enter a full "B" team for the Co. Dublin Novice Cross Country while the "A" team were on their Scottish tour which took place every second year and alternated with the London trip. This tour was the most successful since the war. N. S. Price won both races and set a course record.

The team were victorious in Edinburgh and supplied the first four finishers: Price, Thompson, Wallis, Johnston. Despite having four runners in the first six at Glasgow, they were narrowly beaten.

N. S. Price was without doubt the star performer of the period. He filled first place in the matches against Oxford and Edinburgh in 1925, against Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1926 and completed a hat trick of victories against Edinburgh in 1927. He was also club champion in 1926/27/28. Price was succeeded equally successfully by J.W. Craig who also won the Edinburgh race for three years in succession, 1929/30/31. He faced stiff competition from his team mates including his twin brother and R. A. French who deprived him of the club championship in 1931.

During this period, the Harriers as a team also enjoyed a large degree of success. For five seasons, 1928-33, they were to maintain an unbeaten home record and in 1930/31, they were unbeaten in all six matches. The following season started well with a victory over Edinburgh early in the season followed by a first place in the Co. Dublin Novices defeating eleven other teams and a second place in the Co. Dublin Juniors where nine teams competed. No doubt encouraged by their recent successes, it was decided to contest the British Intervarsity Cross Country Championships for the first time which were held at Port Sunlight on the 25th February 1932. Unfortunately for Trinity, the race was spoilt by a badly laid trail which caused the majority of the runners to lose their way and to run eleven instead of the prescribed seven miles. At the six mile stage, the race had developed into a struggle between D.U.H. and London University with J. W. Craig leading the field of over 100 runners. Standards continued to rise and the 1933/34 team was considered at the time to have been the best Harrier team ever.

Although defeated at home by Edinburgh, the race was reckoned “probably one of the best races the club has every been involved in”. Trinity supplied the first man home in M. G. Heuston who broke the course record by 78 seconds. The next five runners were all inside the old record, only one of them however — B. Ball — in fifth place, was from Trinity.

Unfortunately for the Harriers, their attractive fixture list which had been built up over several years was now to be severely upset by circumstances totally beyond their control. The first sign of trouble dated indeed from the start of the 1932/33 season when the Harriers received a letter from Queens declaring their intention of joining a Northern Ireland athletic body if such was formed. Trinity replied asking Queens to ensure that the Intervarsity fixtures would not suffer as a result. In the event they did, and the following summer the N.A.C.A. declined permission for the track team to contest the Londonderry Trophy and all subsequent matches with Queens were ruled out. The N.A.C.A.I. were later suspended by the International Board and all five fixtures outside of the Free State had to be cancelled for the 1934/35 season. The action of the International Board provoked much discussion at committee meetings of the time but the club decided to stand by the N.A.C.A. “as long as that body considered the best interests of the young athletes of the country”. Although good competition was to be found at home, it was inevitable that both the morale and attractiveness of the Harriers would suffer. The five fixtures against English and Scottish clubs had been the backbone of the season and had been the races which generated the keenest interest and competition.

Nevertheless, standards were maintained and with the formation of the A.A.U. and D.U.H.A.C.’s affiliation to that body, the fixtures were renewed. The 1937/38 season saw the first away tour for five years to Scotland. Both races were lost. D. McNeil was the first man home for Trinity in both being second in Glasgow and third in Edinburgh. Any hope of revenge the following year was well and truly dashed. Glasgow arrived in December 1938 being the first cross channel visitors in six years and crushed Trinity with their six runners among the first seven places. They were split by the Trinity campaign H. D. Chomne who was fourth. Edinburgh provided a similar beating the following February. The newly revived cross channel fixtures yet again fell by the wayside the following season with the outbreak of the 2nd World War. This, together with the disruption at home led to a period of inactivity in the Harriers in the early 40’s which ended in December 1942 when the “newly revived” cross country section entered the Leinster Novices. The team quickly improved and several months later were placed fourth in the Irish Juniors. The fixture against Queens was resumed the following season and in December 1945, the cross channel fixtures were once again revived with a narrow win over Glasgow in the Phoenix Park.

The middle and later thirties saw Trinity track and field athletics on the crest of a



Figure 5: The start of the 1934 Club Championship Mile featuring from left to right: Polden, Mumford, McNeill, Walker, Hewson, Doogan, Gwen and Pakenham-Browne.



Figure 6: Irish Intervarsity Championships, 1935 with H. A. Doogan in the lead and S. Polden running here in third place. They were to finish first and third respectively. This was D.U.H.A.C.'s first Inter-Varsity victory for eleven years.

wave. In 1935 they won the Irish Intervarsity championships after a gap of eleven years, beating U.C.D. by eighteen points to nine. They won seven of the events and took maximum points in four of these. The individual honours of the day went to the Trinity captain R. H. Wallace who completed a double by winning the 440 yards flat and 120 yards hurdles. Strange as it may seem, Trinity with such a tradition for producing high quality sprinters failed to gain a single point in the 100 yards and 220 yards although in fairness, both Commiskey and Moran were freshmen. Essentially the same team was to regain the I.V. title in 1936 and 1937 to repeat the hat-trick performed in the early twenties. Only 17 men were to represent Trinity over these three years in the ten events held at the Intervarsity championships. R. H. Wallace was in a class of his own in the hurdles and he along with L. H. Braddell and R. N. Coote were all to win Irish championships in this event. Having won the club 120 yards hurdles championship in 1933 by ten clear yards, Wallace came into the spotlight the following year when he erased the forty-three year old record of Dan Bulger at the College Races clocking $16\frac{1}{5}$ seconds. Later in 1934, he competed in the British 440 hurdles championships where he rose first to the last hurdle, but hit it hard, fell and recovered to finish second. Although he won a host of Intervarsity titles both over the hurdles and on the flat, the 'athletic war' prevented him from taking any further part in athletic competition outside the country during the next few years and he undoubtedly failed to reach his full potential. On the resumption of International athletics, he returned to the A.A.A. championships and was placed third in 1937 and 1938.

Trinity also had strength in depth in the middle distance in particular H. A. Dougan, R. G. Walker and D. McNeil. The latter had an unusual double in 1937 when in addition to winning the mile, he tied for first place in the high jump. Without a doubt however, the difference between this Trinity team and those of the past which had contained many fine sprinters, jumpers and middle distance runners lay in the events where the coaching of Tom Maguire began to pay handsome dividends. L. N. Horan was the star performer and in addition to his numerous Intervarsity titles in shot and discus, he proved to be the most prolific winner of National titles to be produced by Trinity since Dan Bulger. In all, he won thirteen Irish Championships (1 decathlon, 3 javelin and 9 shot) and also placed third in the British A.A.A. Championships. His best putt of 49'2" compares very favourably with the Olympic qualifying standard which remained at 45 feet until after 1948 and together with R. H. Wallace, he can consider himself to have been deprived of Olympic competition due to the political situation at the time.

One might be forgiven for thinking that 1938 should have been a quiet year for D.U.H.A.C. with their exclusion from the Irish University Championships. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The international recognition gained by the I.A.A.U. saw D.U.H.A.C.'s involvement in several old fixtures once again and the high standards of their athletes ensured them international competition. Early in May, they

entertained Edinburgh University to a track match in College Park and two weeks later, presumably to compensate for the lack of a true Irish Intervarsity contest, they travelled to Whyte City, London for the British Intervarsities where they placed fourth out of twenty-one teams. N. F. DeVere was the star performer winning the 880 yards in one minute fifty-seven and a half seconds and coming second in the 440 yards with a sub fifty second run. Other noteworthy performances came from D. H. McNeil who was second in the mile and G. W. Craigie who was second in the 220 yards. As a result of his fine performance, N. F. DeVere was selected for the British Universities team to tour South Africa.

Before the end of the month, the team travelled to Belfast for the Londonderry Trophy for the first time in four years and succeeded in winning, something they had not done since 1925 — the inaugural year of the event. The Relays held in July saw no D.M.G. team for the first time in the history of the event thus bringing to an end the fierce rivalry that had existed between themselves and the host club since the beginning of the competition. July also saw an Irish University team consisting entirely of Trinity and Queens athletes travelling to Scotland for a match against the Scottish Universities. On the 23rd July 1938, the first Triangular match between Ireland, England and Scotland to be held in Ireland for ten years took place at Lansdowne Road. Trinity provided six members of the Irish team: G. W. Craigie, N. F. DeVere, R. H. Wallace, D. H. McNeil, R. N. Coote and L. N. Horan. The latter was to provide one of Ireland's two victories when he tied for first place in the shot. The above six plus H. Dougan were also selected to represent Ireland in the European championships in September.

Athletics survived during the war years with the various inter-club matches including the Londonderry Trophy being held each year. Trinity was also strongly represented on I.A.A.U. teams which held annual matches against the N.I.A.A.A. and Hermes club. The latter which was formed in the late thirties catered for Irish university graduates and having its headquarters in College Park not surprisingly consisted almost entirely of ex-Trinity men.

It would be impossible to end an account of this period without reference to Tom Maguire who was club coach throughout. Tom first appeared in College Park in 1910 while running for Clonliffe. He was Irish long jump champion and frequently came to the Park to train. He became a P.T. instructor and was with the R.I.C. for some time before the first World War. He gained Olympic trials in the triple jump. His athletic career was interrupted by the war in which he served with distinction winning the Military Medal at Passchendaele. After the war, he returned to the R.I.C. as a drill instructor and when the R.I.C. was disbanded in 1922, he came to College Park to stay and where for the next thirty years he was to be coach, masseur and friend to generations of Trinity athletes. Nor can one omit to mention Dr. R. J. Rowlette whose interest was maintained in the club from his first appearance on the committee of the Dublin University Athletic

Sports in 1896 until his death in 1944 and who was constantly in attendance as a judge at the Races and other athletic events.

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