

Charles Burton Barrington (1848-1943) has proved to be the most fertile source of information on the earliest manifestations of rugby in Trinity, and in Ireland.

Barrington came from a distinguished Anglo-Irish family with a seat at Glenstal in Co. Limerick. He succeeded to the family baronetcy in 1890, and became High Sheriff of Limerick.

His family had founded Barrington's Hospital in Limerick in 1829; and Barrington's Pier and Barrington's Bridge are other reminders of his family's long connection with the city. He entered Trinity in January 1867, having been educated at St. Columba's College in Rathfarnham near Dublin, and at Rugby School; captained the football club in 1867-68, 1868-69 and 1869-70 and was to a large extent responsible for the modernisation of the game in Ireland.

Barrington remained fit and vigorous in his later years, driving an ambulance in France during the First World War at the age of sixty-seven. He retained his interest in Trinity football to the end of his life, regularly sending the club captain a congratulatory telegram on the occasion of a notable victory referring to club members in 1930 as "my Rugger great-grandchildren". His only daughter was tragically killed in a republican attack on her car, which was carrying a district inspector of the Auxiliaries when returning from a day's fishing near Newport in Co. Tipperary during the Anglo-Irish conflict in 1921. The Barrington family then moved to England, and Sir Charles offered the family seat to the Free State government as a presidential residence; this offer was not taken up. The house is now a Benedictine priory attached to a school where, as its former owner would have wished, a strong rugby tradition is maintained.

Barrington was eighty-one when he

CHARLES BURTON BARRINGTON AND TRINITY FOOTBALL CLUB

BY TREVOR WEST

corresponded with Edward J. McCartney Watson, the first historian of the rugby club, describing incidents that had occurred on and off the field of play some sixty years before. His letters, which are quoted in the text, show that he had lost none of his passion for the game, his exuberant humour, or his *joie de vivre*. They constitute a remarkable record by an equally remarkable man of the early days of football in Trinity.

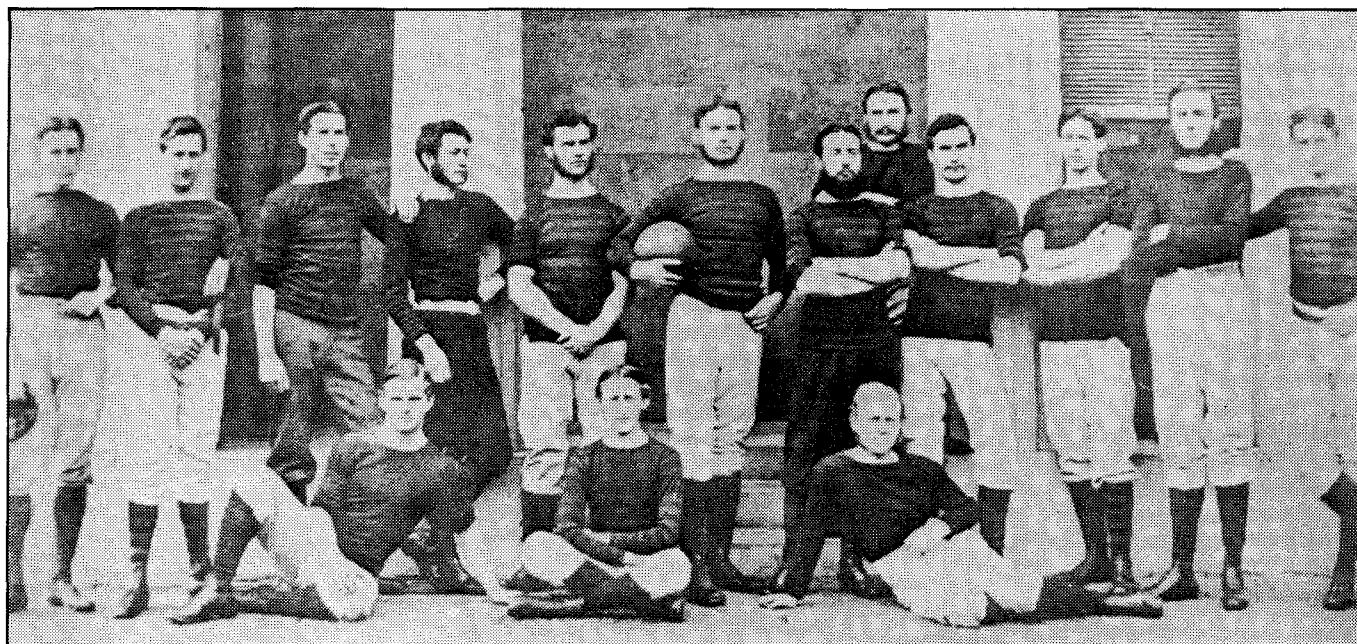
The 1854 foundation date gives Trinity a substantial claim to be the oldest rugby club in continuous existence. Guy's Hospital FC, which was founded in London in 1843 and played its football initially on Kennington Oval, is certainly older, but went into abeyance for some years in the nineteenth century.

William Traill was an early stalwart of the football club, as were Arthur Palmer, a fellow and distinguished Latinist; the mathematician and Celtic scholar Charles Graves, a fellow until consecrated Bishop of Limerick in 1866, and Graves's three sons, Alfred, Arnold, and Charles. Alfred was a collector of Irish music and the composer of "Father O'Flynn", while

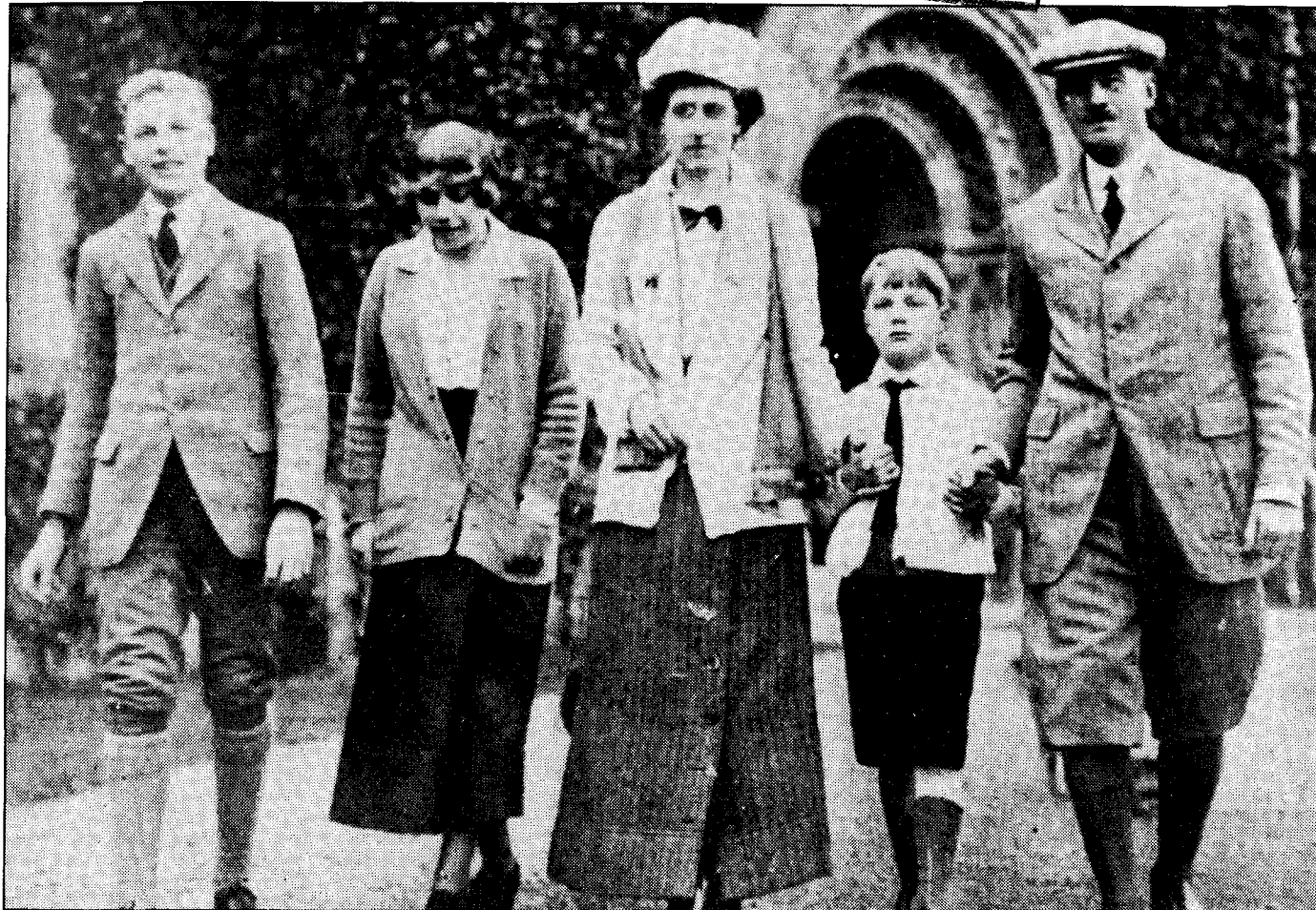
Arnold was an international cricketer, a champion hurdler, and a leading proponent of technical education in Ireland. But the most remarkable of the pioneers, and the one who deserves to be known as the father of Irish rugby, was Charles Burton Barrington, who captained the club for three years from 1867 to 1870.

Barrington's uncle, Charles West, was a footballer, and it is possible that he influenced the game in the university. "Charley West", wrote Barrington, "was at Rugby and is the "East" in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. He might have had a hand in it, but he would have been before 1850".⁽¹⁾ Giving his own early reactions to football in Trinity, Barrington remarked: "When this Rugbean went out to play in the [College] Park for the first time the game may have seemed to him peculiar but it never occurred to him that it was anything else than Rugby of sorts".⁽²⁾ He retained this impression although "the whole thing was very loose, two fellows were made heads. Tossed for first choice and then picked their team from the bystanders who happened to turn up".⁽³⁾

Barrington had been introduced to



Trinity, 1868-69, with C.B. Barrington as captain (centre back row).



The Barrington family, Glenstal, 1917. From left: Charles (15), Winifred (19), Mary-Rose, Fitzwilliam (8) and Sir Charles.

football at St. Columba's College, where we played a sort of soccer game. On one afternoon a man called Strickland appeared and played in our game. He belonged to the T.C.D. football club, we heard, but who brought him the boys did not know. He played as we did. On making a catch, though, he ran with the ball, but when collared and downed would not let the ball go. Our big boys had difficulty in getting from him. This incident would show that T.C.D. did run with the ball in 1859. Anyhow our Masters made him drop it ...⁽⁴⁾

While on holiday from his English public school in 1863, Barrington had played a match in Merrion Square with several other Rugbeans who were in Dublin, but it was not a success.⁽⁵⁾ Having completed his schooling he entered Trinity in January 1867, where, he discovered, things were not as they should have been, for there were "no cycles, no golf, no hockey, no anything", only card-playing, billiards, whiskey-drinking, and a stilted social life. There was, however,

A little desultory football, with no particular rules to speak [of], or kit. A good little chap called Wall was running this show. I started away and pulled things together, made a good club out of it with the rules of Rugby School, and we were very successful for it caught on at once. I have a photo of our First XV by me, and we are a queer-looking lot judged by modern ideas. We had caps made in

Rugby too, but there was no-one in those far-off times to play against. The match of the year was against the Medical School. Sometimes too the Dublin Garrison boiled up a team to play us ... We played matches among ourselves, 'pick up' twice or three times a week ... The Club was really a great success and did introduce the Rucker game into Ireland.⁽⁶⁾

Barrington goes on to describe how he and the secretary, R.M. Wall (whose father, Rev. F.H. Wall, was headmaster of another early rugby nursery, Arlington School, Portarlinton), tackled the problems of dress and rules:

The club had no rules, written or unwritten. The[re] just played and ran with the ball, no touch line, no goal lines, our only parpanalia [sic] being the Rugby goal posts. These were all sufficient for the simple tastes of those days in Dublin Football. A rugbean brought in the new idea of Rules. Rugby [School] itself though had no written rules! ... They were traditional, like the British Constitution or the Secrets of Free Masonry.⁽⁷⁾

In fact Rugby School had produced written rules in 1846, and a further set had been drawn up by Blackheath FC, one of the earliest of English clubs, founded in 1862. But when Barrington and Wall met to draw up rules in the secretary's rooms in Botany Bay early in 1868, the Rugby School tradition was paramount: "Wall sat gravely at his little

table. A small dark wiry hardy chap with a short black beard and kindly dark eyes. He wrote and I dictated. Gradually and gradually as one could remember them the unwritten laws that govern the immortal Rugby game were put on paper".⁽⁸⁾ It is interesting to observe how the pattern of the modern game was already established by 1868:

D.U. LAWS OF FOOTBALL

- (1) *The kick-off from the middle must be a place-kick.*
- (2) *Kick-out must be from 25 yards out of goal, not a place-kick.*
- (3) *Charging is fair in case of a place-kick, as soon as the ball has touched the ground; in case of a kick from a catch as soon as the player offers to kick, but he may always draw back, unless he has touched the ball with his foot.*
- (4) *If a player makes a Fair Catch, he shall be entitled to a free kick, provided he claims it, by making a mark with his heel at once; and in order to take such kick he may go back as far as he pleases, and no player on the opposite side shall advance beyond his mark until he has kicked.*
- (5) *A Fair Catch cannot be made from Touch.*
- (6) *A Player is off side when the ball has been kicked, or thrown or knocked on, or is being run with by one of his own side behind him.*
- (7) *A Player off side may impede the game*

by standing close to the ball; but he may not, in any case, kick or touch it, charge or put over.

- (8) A Player is on side when the ball is kicked or thrown or knocked on, or when it has rebounded from the body of any player of the opposite side.
- (9) It is not lawful to take up the ball when not in touch, except in an evident hop. Lifting the ball is strictly prohibited.
- (10) Running in is allowed to any player on side, provided he does not run through touch.
- (11) If in case of a run in, the ball is held in a maul, it shall not be lawful for any other player on his own side to take it from the runner and run with it.
- (12) It shall be lawful for any player to call upon any other player, holding the ball in a maul, to put it down, when evidently unable to get away.
- (13) A Player, if he wishes to enter a maul, must do so on side.
- (14) No Player, out of a maul, may be held or pulled over, unless he himself is holding the ball.
- (15) No hacking, as distinct from Tripping, is fair.
- (16) Try at Goal. A ball touched between the goal posts may be brought up to either of them, but not between.
- (17) When the ball has been touched down behind the goal, the player who touched it down is entitled to walk out straight 25 yards, and any one of his side may take a place-kick, but as soon as the ball has been placed, the opposite side may charge.
- (18) It shall be a goal if the ball be dropped, but not if punted, hit or thrown, between the posts or posts produced at any height over horizontal bar, whether it touch it or not.
- (19) No goal may be kicked from touch.
- (20) A Ball in Touch is dead; consequently, the first player on his side must, in any case, touch it down, bring it to the side of touch, and throw it straight out.
- (21) Holding and throttling is disallowed.
- (22) Sneaking in opponents' goal is discountenanced.
- (23) The Captains of sides, or any two deputed by them, shall be the sole arbiters of all disputes.

No law may be altered or made unless at least a week's notice be given of a meeting, and such meeting shall consist of at least 20 members or more.

Drawn Up by C.B. Barrington and R.M. Wall, 16 T.C.D., Jan. 1868.

Rule 15, prohibiting hacking, represented in important difference between the football played in Rugby School and at Trinity College. Barrington described the hacking practised in the school:

In those days no-one was allowed to put his head down in the scrum, if he did it was immediately pulled up again by the others. The forwards all stood straight up hacking away for all they were worth at the opposite side. All standing straight up, packed close together and wearing very heavy boots. The only swing in their kicks being made with their jerking heads.

This may seem a bit of an Irish way of putting it. Before my time they had what was called a Hallelujah at the end of a House Match ... The ball was then taken away. All the players went into the scrum and hacked each other away dutifully for five minutes. That was the finish and all went to their houses to hot water, footpans, tea and baked potatoes. The latter being a treat in a House Match always.⁽⁹⁾

Writing to Watson in 1930, Barrington remarked that the front of his tibia even then had a "saw-like edge" from this practice.

Dress, too, was selected by captain and secretary, as Barrington later explained:

Little Wall and myself sat in conclave in his rooms in Botany Bay and on the lines of Rugby custom drew up the schemes. We introduced, however, knickerbockers in lieu of flannels - this was done out of respect for the black earth of our College Park. We decided on the colour being Red and Black for the very same reason.⁽¹⁰⁾

The committee accepted these proposals without demur, and the arrival of the new kit, which had been ordered from Rugby, caused quite a stir in the college, as formal uniforms for football were a novel idea in Ireland. Highly delighted with his new outfit, Barrington dressed and proceeded to Fitzwilliam Square,

to let my dear mother see her son in this resplendent appurtenance. She was at luncheon and Aunt Josephine was with her - a very pretty lady, daughter of Sir Matthew Barrington. Her back was towards me as she sat at table. I stooped down and kissed her. "Look at this, Aunt Jo". She turned round and seeing the red and black and huge rough-looking person gave a terrified scream and then began to sob and cry. "Oh, that I should have lived to be kissed by an acrobat!" ... This was the dress of all playing members, and the fifteen wore "caps" as a mark of distinction.⁽¹¹⁾

In reply to a query from Watson, Barrington explained that the start of the game was more or less as it is today:

The ball was nicely placed on the ground exactly mid-way between the two goals. The forwards lined up each side a respectable distance from the ball. Then at the word of the captain the best kicker he had ran forward and kicked off towards the opponent's goal. If it went into touch the ball was brought back, replaced and kicked off again. Directly the ball was in the air both sides started on their job.⁽¹²⁾

In reply to another question concerning the method of scoring, Barrington explained that a "touch down" meant touching down the ball in one's own goal in defence:

There were no points in those days ... A "goal", a "try", a "touch down" were the points we went by ... A goal off a try and a goal dropped were the only two kinds of goals we had. There was no such thing as a "penalty goal". When a misdemeanour was committed the ball was brought back to the spot of the crime, placed on the ground and a scrum formed round it and

on again. A goal off a fair catch was the same as a goal dropped. A goal or a try were the real deciding factors. A "touch down" was only a deciding factor when there was nothing else, but that was not looked upon as a real victory.⁽¹³⁾

Barrington recalled that when he played his first match in Trinity in 1867 there was no distinction between forwards or backs, the players all running after the ball. He introduced a full-back and two half-backs, one on either side of the scrum, as at Rugby School.

Further light was thrown on the early manifestations of rugby in Trinity by Barrington's contemporary Arnold Graves:

Some of the rules I remember, hacking was barred but tripping was allowed. Passing was against the rules - it was called hand ball. We played without a referee. There was offside of course. The scrummages were interminable and lasted until the man holding the ball expressed his willingness to put it down, and that was only when his side was losing ground. I have seen a scrummage travel half way down the ground ... and as there was no passing one often saw very fine long runs - sometimes even three-quarters of the length of the ground, with wonderful swerves and dodges ... in every respect the game was more individual and scientific than it is today.⁽¹⁴⁾

Football was such a novelty that on match days Nassau Street railings were lined with spectators, and the bow windows of the Kildare Street Club, known to rumbustious undergraduates as "cod bank", or, the "seat of the scornful", were filled with admirers.

The invention of the pneumatic bladder greatly assisted the handling game, and in November 1872 the club adopted an "essential change" whereby the ball might be picked up if it were in motion, whether hopping or not; up to this point, as in Gaelic football, the ball could not be picked up off the ground.⁽¹⁵⁾ This furthered the distinction between forwards and backs, who were now divided into quarter-backs, half-backs, threequarter-backs, and a full-back.

In 1870, the Boat Club became the first Irish club to compete in the Henley Regatta. A four including the Barrington brothers won the Visitors' Cup in 1870 and 1873, and further boat club victories came in the Ladies' Plate in 1875 and the Wyfold in 1881; in 1903, the Thames Cup went to a boat club eight. The rowing club became the first Trinity club to compete in America when a crew was dispatched to take part in the Philadelphia Centennial Regatta in 1876. The four, with the Barrington brothers (who, on graduation, had transferred their allegiance), found the centennial temperatures too much of a handicap, but were successful in a competition restricted to graduates in which they emerged as the only eligible crew!

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