

# LIMERICK CHRONICLE

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DOWN MEMORY LANE WITH THE COUNTRY'S OLDEST TITLE



A photo of Markets Field recently submitted to the newspaper by Pat O'Sullivan Limerick FC owner. Note the goals posts were from the GAA era and in 1896 the hurling championship was played there

## Markets Field Past Present and Future

Updated from a Limerick Leader article on December 7, 1974, written at a time when it appeared that the future of the Markets Field was in doubt as both a soccer and a greyhound stadium

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**I**n 1886 the Limerick Chronicle wrote that the Irish Cycling Association and the Gaelic Athletic Association paid £8 per day for the use of the Markets Field.

They were the first organisations to use the Markets Field as a sporting venue and their activities in those far off days heralded the beginnings of a ground that has since assumed a very special place in the hearts of all Limerick sports lovers.

The Markets Field was leased to a number of citizens in the 1880s for the purposes of building artisan dwellings.

They, in turn, re-let the ground to an employee of the trustees.

The city branch of the Irish National League protested vigorously against public property of this description being devoted to the private interest and profit.

Steps were taken by the Market Trustees to know what was being done to have the houses erected.

The prospective builders formed a company and applied to the Board of Works to sanction a loan, but the board decided after investigating title that the Market Trustees had no power to make a lease.

Accordingly, the building programme was abandoned.

### The GAA and Irish Cycling Association

In 1886 the organisers of the GAA and ICA sports paid £8 a day for the use of the field.

So with what appears to have been an exceptionally heavy daily tariff of £8 per day for the use of the field sporting proceedings got underway at the Markets Field.

The first Gaelic Sports held under the rules of the GAA, and the ICA in Limerick commenced there on Sunday, September 19, 1886.

The sports were continued on Sunday, September 26 and con-

cluded on October 2 with the first great Band Contest ever held in the city.

The events attracted Ireland's cream of Athletic Talent including such sporting giants as Mitchell of Emly and the great RIC cyclist Lowry.

Many records were broken at the events, and the city was thronged with visitors from points as distant as Waterford and Tuam.

The third class return fare to Waterford was 3/- and the trip took just three and a half hours.

Sometime earlier a dispute had existed between the GAA and ICA, but this through the medium of Charles Gubbins, W.L. Stokes, A.W. Shaw, and other personalities was settled with the result that the men of both societies were enabled to compete in each other's sports.

The Markets Field got off to a most prosperous start and for close to 40 years remained one of the most popular athletic venues in Ireland.

On July 24, 1908, PJ Leahy of Co. Limerick leaped 6 feet and 5 and a half inches, a world record that he, for some peculiar reason, never claimed.

In 1920, one of Limerick's most famous sons Jack O'Grady, who's exploits are now remembered by the monument at the top of Mulgrave Street, excelled himself there.

The Garda Sports at Markets Field were very popular for many years.

In earlier years the GAA played their more important fixtures at the Grocers Field (now Lansdowne Park) and also as Corcanree, but on November 22nd, 1896, the Limerick County Hurling Championship was played at the Markets Field for the first time.

The contestants were Caherline and Ballingarry and the County Final continued in the Markets Field until 1916.

The final was held in Pallaskenry the following year before returning to Markets Field.

In the late 1920s, the move to the Gaelic Grounds was made although tournament games continued in the Markets Field up to about 1932.

The Markets Field was a famous inter-county venue.

The then-record figure of £1,321 was paid by a tremendous crowd at the Cork-Tipperary Munster Senior Hurling Final of 1926.

The controversial replay of 1922 involving Limerick and Tipperary was also played at the Markets Field, along with many other Munster Championship matches.

### Rugby

Young Ireland trained at and played all their matches at Markets Field alongside Garryowen Rugby Club.

Rugby was first played there in 1886 and ceased in 1947 when Garryowen sold their rights and moved to Dooradoyle.

The Munster Cup Final was played there in 1888 when Queens College (UCC) beat Garryowen by a try to nil.

The following year, Garryowen beat Limerick County by two drop goals and one try to nil to win the trophy for the first time.

This was, of course, the first of innumerable Garryowen triumphs at Markets Field but as Young Munster

and Bohemians came into existence in the 1920s, so too did their shot at glory.

It was in the '20s, and 30's that a major change began to take shape at Markets Field.

The ground that had housed Limerick's top GAA and Rugby matches had become the centre for carnivals, circuses, and even wrestling matches.

The GAA at the time were at the time in the process of moving to the Gaelic Grounds, and the Rugby Union had purchased Thomond Park.

The Markets Field, for all its availability, had neither player nor spectator comforts sufficient to meet the needs of the two sporting organisations, who wished to become masters of their own domains.

Limerick AFC was formed in 1937, and straight away found the Markets Field to be a convenient and suitable home.

Greyhound racing was also inaugurated there in 1932, and with the advent of the Frost Family's involvement, this continued until its recent move to the Dock Road.

But for a whole generation of Limerick people, the Markets Field will always be associated with the heady days of football in the '70s and '80s.

Names like Finucane, Nolan, Fitzpatrick, Kennedy, O'Mahoney, Hand and Ward still make the hair stand up on end 30 years on.

The future of the grounds as a sporting facility for the city of Limerick was secured by the purchase of the Markets Field in 2011 with funds provided to LEDP by the JP McManus Charitable Foundation.

Once the current phase of the development of The Markets Field is completed, the stadium should have a capacity of 3,000, including 1,500 spectators seated in covered stands.