

# Ireland



120 Mr Tim Hyde Jr at a typical Co. Tipperary obstacle. He resurrected the hunt in 1975.

I was generously mounted by a veterinary surgeon, Mr Dennie O'Byrne, who was unable to ride owing to an injury. By the second draw I went down with my horse over some rails, and being covered from head to foot in peaty mud, was asked on every hand with typical Irish glee, whether 'that was very expensive land you bought' (for the uninitiated, a dry fall is 'cheap land', a wet one 'expensive').

Everyone was wondering how long we should wait for a find. Ireland is still suffering from a dire shortage of foxes, and foxes there suffer cruel deaths. The pelt trade thrives (36,000 is the export figure given for the last year), the iniquitous wire snare being the principal instrument used. Mr Higgens, of the 'Tipps', was obliged to put down two of his hounds whose legs were broken in traps earlier this season. Naturally, the foxhunters are in the forefront of the humane movement to curtail this miserable practice which, so I was persuaded, has one redeeming feature: it has brought home to some of those who have been indifferent about the pros and cons of hunting or positively 'anti', that hunting with hounds really is the kindest method of fox control.

Anyhow, the first find that day was just before 2 o'clock at Rathleasty, and as we galloped around the village of Drom and circled back to the woods where the fox was first afoot and then went to ground, I became increasingly aware how much wilder and more enclosed that north end of the Tipperary country is. The farmland being of lower quality than

that over which the 'Tipps' hunt, the properties are a good deal smaller (30 or 40 acres on average, perhaps, in contrast to 100 acres in most of the 'Tipps' country). So the enclosures are that much more diminutive, too, which implies many more difficult places to get your horse over or through; and also more foxholding coverts. As for plough, there is not much to be seen, although arable *is* on the increase owing to the reduction in subsidies, which has prompted many farmers to invest more in corn and less in cattle.

A little after 3 o'clock another huge rambling place of osier beds and reed ponds yielded three foxes, one of which showed hounds the way to Fishmoyne, then across the Borrisoleigh-Drom road in the direction of Bouladuff, where the meet was. He led us over a tributary of the Suir – the fourth we forded that day – all of 20 feet across, and so deep that the swirling water was up to our breeches. It was 4 p.m. now and getting dark, and half the pack found their way into a field that had been fenced off for hare coursing. So Mr Hyde sounded 'home!' from that lively day.

When I said that the stream was up to our breeches, I might add that, in the case of some of the children, it was at waist level; and one of the most impressive features of my Golden Vale afternoon was to witness the courage and zest of the boys and girls who were out. If there is one thing that the sons and daughters of Irish farmers seem to love above all else, it is their hunting.

(21 December 1980)

## The Limerick

FROM FOSBERY TO DARESBUY

Mid-December was a most significant time to visit the Limerick hounds. On the 14th, at a party attended by many well-known foxhunters, from Britain as well as Ireland, Lord Daresbury, who is the creator of this English-bred pack, was honoured with a fine painting of himself by Terence Cuneo. The occasion marked his entry into a fourth decade as Master, the longest reign in the hunt's history. Having commanded the Belvoir, with the Duke of

Rutland, from 1934 to 1947, he has worn a Master's cap for 44 years, and, judging from the style in which he took his banks on my day out with the Limerick, he looks like riding, as a Master, well past the half-century post.

Last year had another relevance for the Limerick in that it brought the hunt to its 150th season. The county's first hunt club appears to have been founded in 1743 and others emerged during the

ensuing century. But as *British Hunts and Huntsmen* (1911), concisely put it: 'In 1828 Mr Croker, of Ballinagard, gave up his hounds, with which he had hunted stag, fox and hare. The sporting gentry of the county thereupon decided to start a regular pack of foxhounds. The first Master of the Limerick Hounds was Mr George Fosbery, of Curragh Bridge (1828-45). . . .'

Fosbery's Mastership – at 20 years the longest after Lord Daresbury's – was followed with a number of short regimes, and by 1861 the hunt was in trouble, foxes being very scarce, coverts in bad shape, hounds prone to riot and no one competent to look after them. But the Limerick was fortunate enough that summer to secure the services of Sir David Roche, a popular, if fiercely efficient, Master, who went on to rule for 18 successful seasons. And when he gave notice of his wish to resign in February 1879, the committee recorded in their minute book that 'during his presidency . . . he has by liberal expenditure, by his knowledge and experience as a sportsman and by unwearied personal attention, brought the hounds to a degree of excellence equalled by few packs and surpassed by none; and to his care we are largely indebted for the preservation of one of the best hunting countries in Ireland.'

Sir David's departure coincided ominously with a wave of political unrest. 'About this time,' wrote Col. Wyndham-Quin, author of *The Foxhound in County Limerick*, 'the mischievous power of the Land League . . . was making itself felt throughout Ireland, and nowhere more forcibly than in Co. Limerick.' Despite this hindrance, John Gubbins, formerly Master of the County Stag hounds, took over, on a guarantee of £800, from a 'government by committee', in 1811, and he was followed, five years later, by Robert Nugent Humble, who had had the West Waterford for 15 seasons. But by January 1887 the agitators were giving so much trouble that Nugent Humble decided to stop hunting and close the kennels, his dog-hounds going to the East Essex and the bitches to the Meynell.

It was not for three years that the committee saw fit to revive the County Limerick. With drafts purchased from five famous packs at the Rugby sales, and Capt. Frank Forester installed as Master and huntsman, meet cards were out again for the 1891-92 season. But Capt. Forester (who later made such a name for himself with the Quorn), resigned in 1893 ('owing to an unfortunate difference with the hunt committee' comments Colonel Wyndham-Quin), and after two more short Masterships, Capt. Wise of the 13th Hussars took the helm.

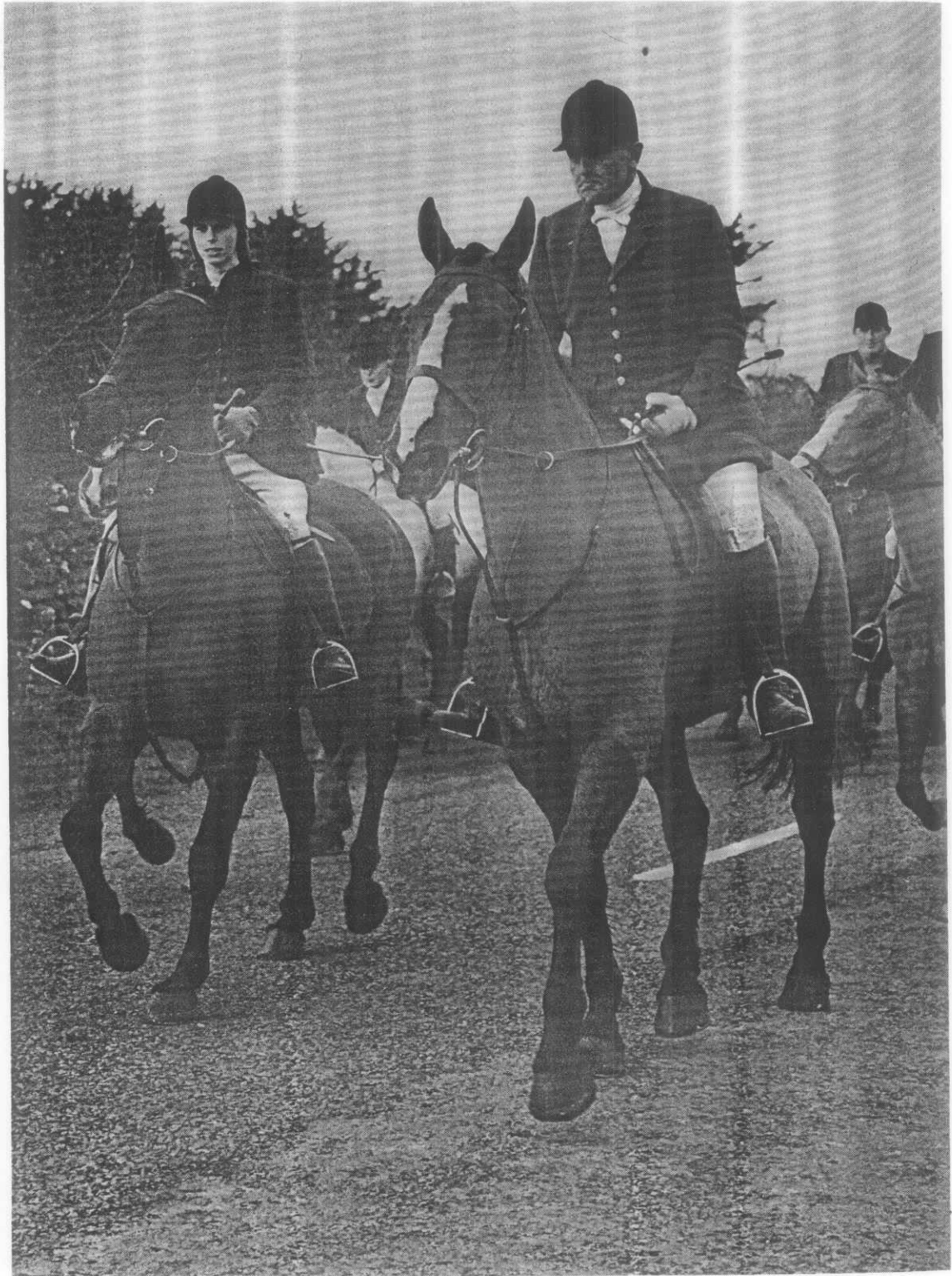
Required with his regiment in South Africa, Wise missed the 1899-1900 season, but returned halfway through the following one; and, although he had been severely wounded, hunted hounds between January and March 1901, when he accounted for 15 brace of foxes. His Mastership was scarcely more peaceful than those of his predecessors. The Land League was making trouble again, in one letter threatening to stop the meets 'unless certain members of the hunt, who are classified as obnoxious, refrain from appearing at the covert side'. In 1902 Wise acquired the lease of Clonshire (where the kennels are today) and there established his hounds and went to live himself.

As a huntsman, Nigel Baring, who followed, was much on a par with Forester and Wise. He arrived in 1908, having kept bloodhounds at Oxford, founded a pack of foxhounds in Wiltshire, carried the Duhallow horn since 1896 and acquired a reputation as 'one of the most effective breeders of hounds in Ireland'. With 14 seasons to his credit he enjoyed the Limerick's fourth longest tenure. Among the hunt's other notable twentieth-century Masters have been the celebrated trainer, Atty Persse, who shared the command between 1928 and 1930 with Arthur Pollock; that most brilliant of houndsmen, Joe Pickersgill; Lady Helen McCalmont, mother of the Kilkenny's reigning Master; and her joint-Master Major John Alexander (founder, in 1931, of the North Kilkenny), who was officially in command until 1946, although his wife – a direct descendant of Sir David Roche – kept the country open and hunted hounds when he was abroad on active service between 1939-45.

Lord Daresbury knew the Limerick foxhunting scene long before he took the Master's cap. His father (the first Baron – the great Sir Gilbert Greenall, of the Belvoir) had owned a stud in the county, and he himself was blooded to the Limerick hounds at the age of seven. Beginning in 1947, his Mastership was an immediate success, the names Daresbury and Limerick were soon synonymous, and it was not until 1970 that he took on his first joint-Master, Mr A.R. Tarry, while the Earl of Harrington (a name famously associated with the South Notts) made up a triumvirate two years later. Now, with Lord Harrington as the overall co-ordinator and Lord Daresbury concentrating on the hounds, the joint-Mastership also includes Lord Harrington's son, Viscount Petersham, and Lady Melissa Brooke.

A daughter of the late Earl of Dunraven (who was a very influential hunt chairman) Lady Melissa is

also  
Wyn  
of S  
Kild  
chilc  
man  
bein  
in a  
30 a  
Lor  
relat  
O  
cour  
of h  
Wec  
Sha  
natu  
tow  
whc



122 The Earl and Countess of Harrington. Lord Harrington has been a joint-Master since 1972.

Soon after 2.00 p.m. a straight, fast one, found at Knockaderry, led them over the Newcastle West road, through the gardens at Rathfreedy, over the Kilmallock road to Kilmeeedy and on to the river Owenshaw, by Main, where he found an earth, having delivered a very fast point of nearly four miles. There were up to 40 children out, and perhaps

the most impressive sight of the day was the gallant manner in which they and their ponies scaled the great banks and burst through the scrub and thorn which topped them. And that is one of several good omens for the Limerick's next century and a half.

(16 December 1978)

## The Meath

WHERE THE GREAT JOHN WATSON RULED

How many people hunting in Ireland today have ever been helped out of a rhine by a 'wrecker'? Not many; yet in Meath, that most famous of all ditch countries, the older generation remember the 'wreckers' well, positioning themselves with their hooked poles, ready to catch up the bridle of a 'wreck', a horse floundering at the bottom of some miry ditch, 12 feet deep and black as hell. And if the foxhunter had forgotten to put a half-crown tip in his waistcoat pocket, he would have been lucky if the 'wrecker' did not give the recovered horse a surreptitious clout on the quarters to show him his flying heels.

The fact that Meath followers are less frequently ditched now than a century ago, when Bay Middleton, the Viceregal ADC, piloting the Empress of Austria, was among the only three or four up with hounds at the end of a long run, may imply as much comment on the generally higher quality of hunters as on the dimension of the ditches. Anyhow, on 4 March, my recent day, we were crossing chasms seven feet wide and ten deep, and none of them found a real victim. But in one respect the appearance of most of these rhines has entirely changed in the last half-century: for, if you look at old paintings of the Meath, you comment straight away on the heathy, furzeland openness of the country, the ditches acting as enclosures as well as drainage, whereas now they are mostly overgrown with hedges as hairy as only the Irish know how to grow them. And when you find a gap, it is usually necessary, as you jump, to hold up your whip to shield your face from the bramble and thorn.

The Meathites take all this in their stride. It is not the obstacles but the increasing sensitivity of the land that worries them. Mr Gene Kruger, who first went to hunt there from Canada in 1961 and who became Master ten years later, told me that land was

£300 an acre when he took the Rathaldron Castle estate on the Blackwater 15 years ago, and today is valued somewhere between £1500-£2000 an acre. This precious country, once owned by a few foxhunting grandees, is now largely divided into 30-to-150-acre plots, parcelled out by the Land Commission, mostly to men who went there with nothing, many of them from the non-sporting West, where there is no hunting tradition, and who therefore have little sympathy with galloping, mud-churning hooves.

The first ploughed fields to appear in the country were looked upon by the Meathites as a gross impertinence, and now - although a great deal more grazing than arable remains - with potatoes and wheat more economical than stock, those ominous areas of brown can be picked out in any Meath landscape, while the big grass expanses are often stud farms, whose owners are likely to be somewhat alarmed at having their mares disturbed. Another detriment is the spread of Dublin, resulting in the loss of three good meets; and another (the value of land being so high) is the reclamation of woodland, which is proving the loss of good coverts at the rate of at least one a year.

How about all those fine furze plantations that were put down in the 1850s? Well, there are some patches left, but not many of the great tracts with which Sam Reynell gained the reputation of having 'made the Dublin (or eastern) country'. The county pack had been going for 35 years when, in 1851, Reynell came in from Westmeath (which he is said to have 'hunted so thoroughly that he left no foxes behind'). For it was in 1816 that the first county subscription hunt, the Clongill, was formed from a combination of the family packs run by the Nicholsons, Wallers, Pollocks and Gerrards, and not

was a vixen and while they left her to swim the Dee, we rode up to Shanlis crossroads to find a third in a heap of sticks bulldozed into the side of a stubble-field next to a garden spinney. It was his death that was marked by three cheers for the Master. And Chimer, one of Mr Filgate's favourite stallion hounds, as though appreciating the golden moment, carried the mask jubilantly all the way to the next draw.

More alert, our fourth quarry got clean away after circling from Footstown to Braystown and back to Murtaghs. But the straight-necked fifth provided 20 minutes of Irish hunting at its best. Mr Filgate, a staunch conservative in the world of hound-breeding, co-operates closely and actively with Lord Daresbury (the Limerick's Master since 1947); so it was the hard-driving strains and resounding melody of Belvoir and Brocklesby and Braes of Derwent that showed when they sped from the long-planting at Mooretown and turned swiftly to Corballis, past the sand-holes, with Creedagh Cross on the right, through Meades, and up the big grassy rise at Greenhills, presenting us all the way with barrier after barrier of thorn-tangled ditches and banks to jump, and not an inch of plough in sight.

They thought they had marked their fox to ground at Mentrim. But he found the earth too

small, and, in racing on, somehow broke the thread of his scent. This exhilarating three-mile point in cold sparkling sunlight was the climax of the day. For the sixth fox, found in the quarries at Kilpatrick, soon ran to ground in nearby Cusacks. And at 4.30 Mr Filgate took them home to Lisrenny.

There can be few seats of foxhunting that have changed so little as Lisrenny. House and stables and stone-flagged kennels stand much as they stood when Col. Filgate hunted his harriers at the end of the eighteenth century. For most of the last 200 years, three days and more a week during winter months, hounds have trotted (and later been driven) down the drive from tall Lisrenny and, at the end of the day, returned tired and well-contented to the big stone kennels. There was always a sporting Filgate at their head, which makes it doubly sad that William Filgate retires at the end of this season with no Filgate to follow him in command of the Louth. But now he has led his hounds to a thousand kills and he has loved every moment of his 33 years as their Master and huntsman.

(4 March 1972)

*Mr R.W. McKeever joined the Mastership in 1973.*

*Mr R. Filgate has turned hounds to Michael McKeever since 1974.*

## *The Scarteen Black-and-Tans*

FROM GASCONY TO LIMERICK

'My boy, they were always there', young John Ryan was told in the 1890s on enquiring of his uncle when the Black-and-Tans came into his family. Made in an offhand way, that was a fair answer. For it is believed that the Ryans kept hounds of the native strains as far as the family history can be traced, and no one knows when they first owned Kerry beagles.

But what are these hounds? How did they come to Scarteen? They are of Gascon-Ariègeois stock, that much is certain. Still to be seen in south-west France, small and light-boned, with rather long ears, some black-and-tan, others black-and-white and blue mottled, the Ariègeois are small bloodhound types, prized by the old *veneurs* for their great hunting qualities and more especially for their deep resounding cry, which no less an authority than Sir John

Buchanan-Jardine, who put voice above all other virtues, described as 'absolutely the finest music of any hounds in the world'. Their advent in Ireland is popularly attributed to the 'Wild Geese', those persecuted Catholics who were rallied by King Louis to fight the English on Continental soil. Some of those veterans, soldiers, and sportsmen too, are said to have heard, and been so delighted by, the Ariègeois voice, that they took some home and called them Kerry beagles.

But why Kerry? Mr Thady Ryan, the present owner, joint-Master and huntsman of the Black-and-Tans, proposes a different theory. He believes the Gascon-Ariègeois were also bred in neighbouring Aragon, Catalonia and Navarre, for hounds of that colour and type were remarked upon by Irish



136 Thaddeus ('Tha') Ryan, Master, 1781-1820. He moved the Black-and-Tans from Ballyvistea to Scarteen in 1798.

travellers in Spain and by Irishmen who fought up to the Pyrenees with Franco's army. And Mr Ryan recently saw hound statues in the Canary Islands at Las Palmas, showing identical conformation to his own. He believes they came to Ireland, long before the days of the 'Wild Geese', via the great Spanish-Irish trading island of Valentia, off Kerry.

When crossed with the native Talbot type, the qualities of the dominant Ariègeois blood shone through, albeit in a somewhat taller hound. As for

Kerry 'beagle', in those days the term simply referred to any light-boned hunting dog. The breed were kept, trencher-fed, as they are today, by cliques of farmers over most of south-west Ireland. The Chutes and the O'Connells, the Butlers of Waterville fame, and the Ryans of Co. Limerick, whose eldest sons have alternated through history between a John and a Thaddeus, kept packs of them. But only the Ryans's packs have survived.

John Ryan had them till 1781, then 'Tha', who moved house from Ballyvistea to Scarteen in 1798, so giving the hunt its principal name. Following a Ryan financial collapse, the failure of Sadleir's bank of Tipperary, John Franks, of Ballyscadane, took the family pack on trust for seven years. Then Clement, whose elder brother, Thaddeus, was constantly abroad soldiering, kennelled them at nearby Emly. He got the pick of the Chute and the O'Connell packs, when they broke up, and carried on until 1904, when his nephew, John, whose burning question opens my account, took over.

This John Ryan owned the Black-and-Tans for over 50 years. He hunted them up to the First World War, during which, in rest periods from the front line, he carried the horn for the 'Flanders' hunt. Buried alive for three hours when the Germans mined his regiment's trenches in 1915, Ryan was officially reported killed, but he survived a prisoner-of-war camp to take the Scarteen horn again until 1929 - the year in which they ceased to hunt the carted stag - after which his joint-Masters acted as huntsmen up to the Second World War. These were: Dr McLoughlin and Sir Cecil Walker between 1929 and 1931, Joseph Pickersgill in 1931-32, Capt. Barker for the next two seasons, and then D.E.C. Price from 1934 up to 1938, when John Ryan hunted hounds for one more season before the war. Capt. C.C. Thompson joined him for the duration.

In 1946 Thady Ryan, then aged 23, took the horn; he divided the Mastership with his father until the latter's death in 1955, and was then on his own up to 1971. Since then, while still owning the hounds, he has shared the command with Mrs Dermot McCalmont, widow of the Kilkenny's celebrated Master. She and Thady Ryan are now supported by his sister, Mrs Pearson, a veteran Scarteen hand - who used to whip in to her father, and who went on there from her Suffolk joint-Mastership - and by Mr Percy Harris, as joint-secretaries. Also by Sir Brian Warren, the field Master. Tommy O'Dwyer, who turns hounds to Mr Ryan, has served as kennel-huntsman since 1954, when he succeeded his father, Jack, who held that post for 30 years.



137 The Scarteen hounds in their kennels at the time of the author's visit in December 1973.

Resulting from such solid continuity at the helm and in the kennels, the character of the Black-and-Tan has changed very little. His white markings were bred out long ago; he is jet across the back and flank with head and legs of rich deep tan. He remains a pure Kerry Beagle, possessing the very independent and engaging character of that breed, but with a temperament that is easily upset by insensitive handling.

His conformation, too, is different from FKSB hounds: his shoulder is rather vertical, yet permitting a great stride; he drops away a little on the quarter, but is sufficiently strong at that point to

carry it; he compensates for a long back by showing great muscle over the spine and loin; he carries his long-toed feet full on the ground under lengthy pasterns and well let-down hocks; his 'neckcloth' bears evidence of his rich voice, while his French ears reach across amber eyes to the tip of his nose. The dog-hound stands 22–23 inches at the shoulder, the bitch nearly two inches shorter.

How have the Ryans kept the strain pure, and at the same time avoided inbreeding? Mr Ryan once tried a Dumfriesshire cross, but perhaps because the ancestry was so separated the experiment failed. So he goes back for his outcrosses, as his ancestors went, to those Kerry trencher-fed packs that are congregated after Sunday Mass to hunt hare and drag, whose owners revel in the famous song and drive.





138 Mr Thady Ryan. He has been Master or joint-Master, and huntsman since 1946.

South-west Ireland was in flood at the time of my visit earlier this month, and as hunting was cancelled I never heard their famous wild music nor witnessed their unique manner of casting; but other visitors to Scarteen tell me that Joseph Pickersgill's description is as good as any: 'When the leaders are at fault the tail hounds fan round them to left and right, driving on at the same time. If they are still at fault, they will make a big cast all the way round, as a pack - not as individuals, as most fell-hounds do - and most of this at the gallop. . . . I don't think I have ever seen another pack of foxhounds do a really big "all-round-your-hat cast" quite on their own.'

As regards the country, certainly there are hazards and hindrances in the Scarteen's 28 miles by 23: the Cork-Dublin and Waterford-Limerick railway lines, for example, and the great tracts planted by the Forestry Department; but otherwise almost every inch is grass, and where there is wire in the hedge-topped doubles, Limerick and Tipperary horses know how to tackle it. The fame of the Scarteen goes further beyond the shores of Ireland, perhaps, than any other pack in the British Isles. Every year the Masters welcome American and Continental visitors as well as English, and it must be quite a fillip for Thady Ryan to see Frenchmen flocking to south-west Ireland to hear and watch his hounds that stem from Old Gascony.

(1 December 1973)