

THE SPORTING BARRINGTONS

It is entirely appropriate that a scion of the family which gave Barrington's Hospital to Limerick should also have been prominently involved in the developments which led up to the foundation of the Irish Rugby Football Union in 1874. Rugby – like the famous hospital once did – holds a special place in the hearts and minds of Limerick people; C.B. Barrington was one of those instrumental in the evolution of one of the few international sports which unites all parts of this island.

Dublin University – more simply known as Trinity – is the second oldest (after Blackheath) rugby football club in the world. The year of the club's foundation is 1854, though there can be little doubt that football in some shape or form was played there long before that date. But it was some time before the emerging game was to become standardised; Trinity and Barrington were destined to exert considerable influence on rugby as we know it today.

Charles Burton Barrington – later Sir Charles – was the son of Sir Croker Barrington of Glenstal Castle, now Glenstal Abbey, and, like his brothers, was an outstanding sportsman, rugby, rowing and shooting being among his interests. He had the distinction of being the fourth rugby captain of Trinity College, for the club did not elect a

by Karl Johnston

captain until 1863/64. James A. Whelan, who met Barrington several times late in his life, reported in the *Cork Evening Echo* in 1977 that Barrington led Trinity in 1868, 1869 and 1870, and Edmund Van Esbeck, in his book *The Story of Irish Rugby*, confirms that Barrington's captaincy began in season 1867/68.

Barrington was obviously a man of outstanding administrative ability, as well as his prowess as a player. With another Trinity man, Richard M. Wall, who had been secretary of the club since 1865, he drew up a set of laws to regularise rugby as it was being played at the time. Sean Diffley writes in his book *The Men In Green*: 'They (Barrington and Wall) brought law and order to the game by drawing up rules and having them passed in 1868, six years after Blackheath had done a similar job for England'. The Barrington-Wall preamble to their rules read:

'We have forwarded to the principal leading clubs the rules by which we play, in the hope that for the future we may be able to secure players thoroughly acquainted with the science of the game, a want which has hitherto proved an obstacle to our efficiency on the field'.

Those first Irish rugby rules contained

twenty-three clauses. (Number twenty-one could hardly be more cryptic. 'Holding or throttling is disallowed', it states, matter-of-factly.)

But Barrington's influence on the development of Irish rugby was profound. Six years after the rules he had drawn up with Wall were accepted by Trinity, what is now the Irish Rugby Football Union was formed, and on 15 February, 1875, Ireland played her first international match, against England at Kennington Oval.

Charles Barrington began his association with the evolving game at a young age. James A. Whelan in *Cork Evening Echo* (1 September, 1977) wrote:

'... he remembered how, when a boy of 11 at St. Columba's College, Dublin – in the Michaelmas half of 1859 – O.R. Strickland, a member of the T.C.D. football club, came to St. Columba's to instruct the boys in the game as played at Trinity College. Strickland was collared and lay on the ball and could not be removed by the united efforts of the St. Columba's team and remained lying on the ball until the headmaster intervened'.

During his interviews with James A. Whelan in the *Cork Weekly Examiner*, Barrington recalled that when he returned to Ireland after a few years at Rugby School (where William Webb Ellis



A maul near the line, a feature of rugby in the 19th century.



'took the ball into his arms and ran with it' in 1823), he found a 'sort of game going on, no rules, no clothes and played according to fancy'. Apart from drawing up the standard rules with Wall, Barrington also selected a suitable kit in black and red, 'as it would stand the soot of the College better than any other colour'.

James A. Whelan, in the *Cork Evening Echo*, recalled further reminiscences of Barrington:

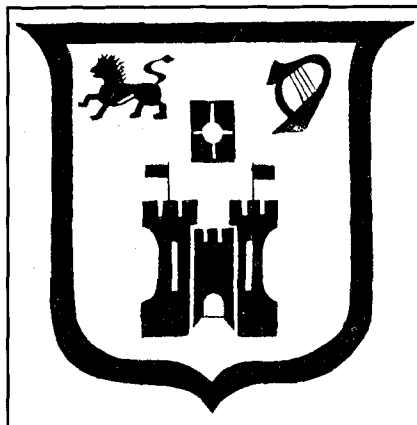
'Wearing the kit for the first time, and naturally feeling proud, he kissed a pretty young aunt at the luncheon table, causing her to burst into tears and to cry out horrified: "Oh, that I should have lived to be kissed by an acrobat". That fine sentiment (concludes Whelan) showed what a strange, weird thing a sports kit was considered in those days!'

Edmund Van Esbeck in *The Story of the Irish Rugby* has commented:

'The re-organisation of the Trinity Club in 1867-68 ensured that proper records were kept from the year 1867. It was in 1868 that the club colours of red and black were officially adopted and they still survive. Honour caps were first awarded in 1868, an innovation that was, apparently, also decided at that momentous meeting at which the (Barrington-Wall) rules were passed. The caps were red and black, quartered, with a gold shamrock embroidered on the front.'

As he confirmed in an interview in the *Hampshire Telegraph* (13 March, 1942), Charles Barrington also designed those caps. But, undoubtedly, he made a major contribution to Irish rugby in the rules he and Wall drew up. Commented Van Esbeck in *The Story of Irish Rugby*:

'In a letter written in 1931 to Dr. Edward Watson, a Trinity stalwart to the day he died in 1947, Barrington vividly recalled working on the laws with Wall in 1867, though they were not, of course, presented until the annual general meeting of the club in



The Dublin University (Trinity) rugby crest. The club was founded in 1854, but the game was played in the college from 1848. The laws of the game were drawn up by Blackheath in 1862, and later by Trinity in 1868 by C.B. Barrington and R.M. Wall. These laws and rules closely resemble the rules that govern the game today.

October 1868 ... rugby football was beginning to spread in Ireland and the laws passed at that meeting in 1868 had important repercussions on the expansion of the game within the next six years. Clubs began to emerge that were to contribute handsomely to Irish rugby; indeed, many of them are still contributing over a century later'.

Despite their significant role in drawing up those rules, neither Barrington nor Wall ever played rugby for Ireland. But Barrington, who graduated with an M.A., D.L. from Trinity in 1872, was destined to continue to make a name for himself in another – and, if anything, more gruelling – sport, namely rowing.

Although the Barringtons are usually associated with the Trinity Club, they also made a contribution to Limerick rowing, before their departure from their native Glenstal. Two of them were members of

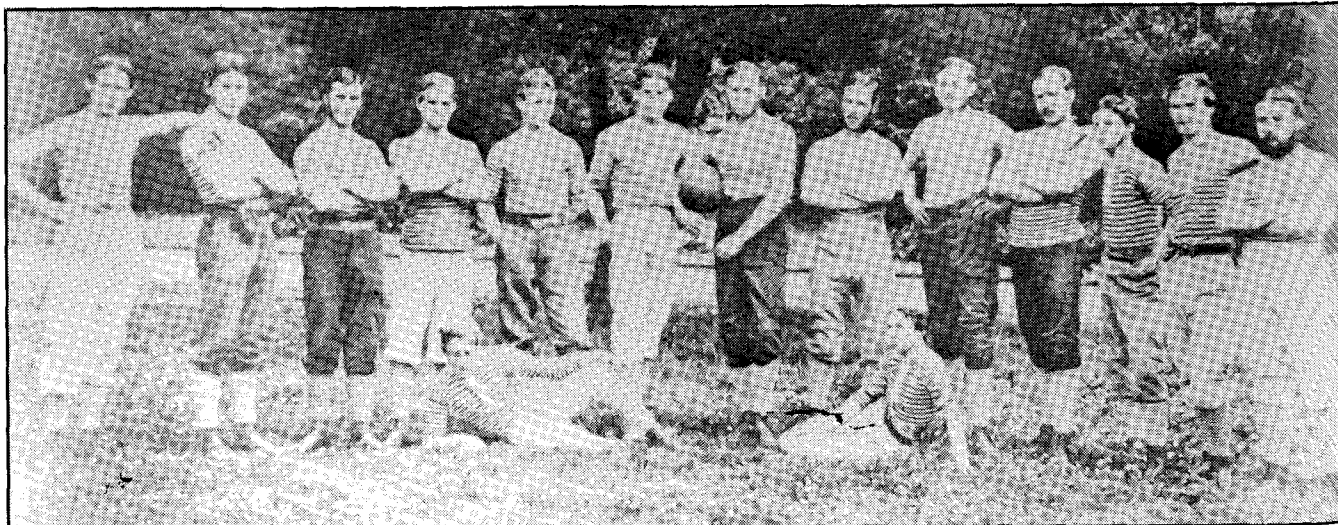
Limerick Boat Club at the turn of the century, and one of the club's proudest possessions is an oar presented to it by Charles Barrington in June, 1896. From the start, of course, Charles had been an oarsman of exceptional ability.

Though by then his university days were four years behind him, and he was aged 28, we learn from the *New York Herald* that he arrived on board the Cunard steamer *Scythia* at Jersey City Wharf at 7 p.m. on the evening of 15 August, 1876, as captain of the fours crew which was to represent Ireland and Trinity College in the international rowing races at Philadelphia. This international regatta was staged to mark the centenary of the American Declaration of Independence.

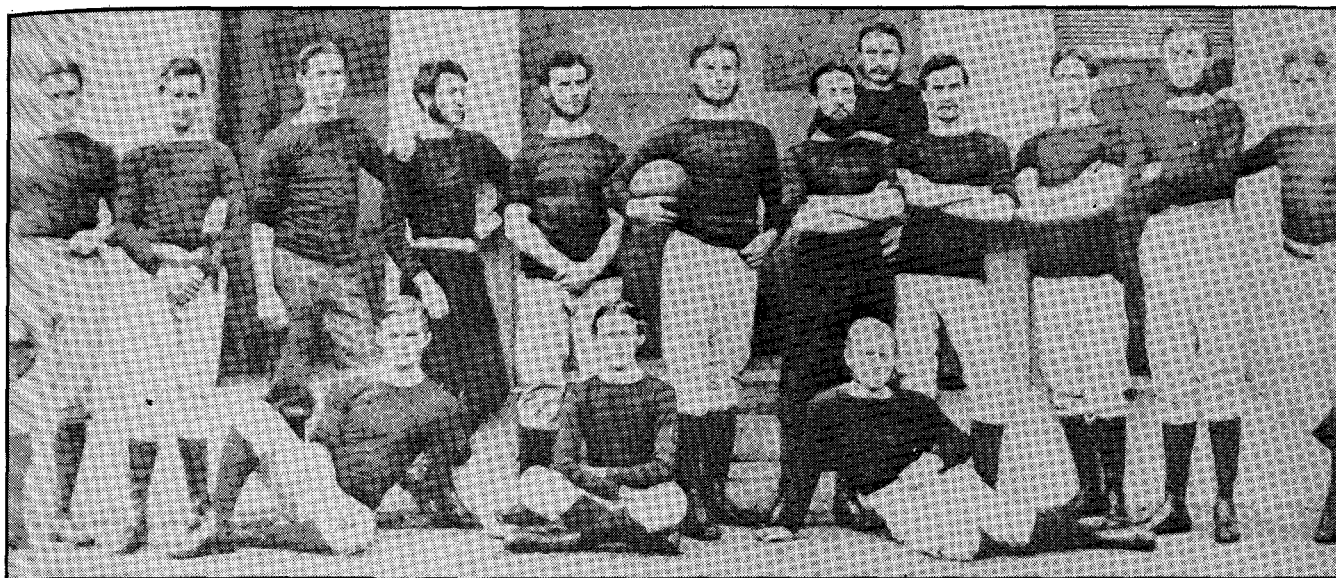
Charles (occasionally referred to as Charlie) was accompanied by two of his brothers, Croker and William. Croker was stroke, William an extra man; the other members of the crew were G.N. Ferguson, and G.A.E. Hickson, and the coach was E.D. Brickwood, former amateur champion of England, who had been in charge of rowing affairs at Trinity for some time. Reported the *New York Herald*:

'The crew arrived in excellent health and overflowing spirits. "Get ready for the Fenians!" shouted one of them from the steamer, as she drew into dock. This was answered by a party of gentlemen on the wharf, who were there to receive them, including Commodore Ferguson of the Schuylkill Navy; Mr. H.C. Miller of the Bachelor Barge Club, Philadelphia, and Mr. Blatic, the referee in the inter-collegiate races at Saratoga'.

According to that particular press report, Charles Barrington was five feet eleven inches tall and weighed 182 lbs. (14 stones). He was the oldest graduate of the crew, and had for many years been prominent 'in the Irish University races and the English inter-collegiate contests'. He was a member of the Trinity College crews which had won the Visitors' Cup at Henley in 1870, 1873 and 1874, and had



The earliest known picture of a Trinity rugby team, 1866-67. C.B. Barrington is second from the left.



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

also rowed in the fours and eights for the Grand Challenge Cup at Marlowe in 1876. The *Herald* declared: 'His reputation is almost world-wide'.

Croker was then aged twenty three. He was five feet ten inches and weighed 170 lbs. (just over 12 stones). He had graduated from Trinity in 1874, and had rowed stroke in the Trinity crews which had won at Henley in 1873 and 1874, thus sharing in two Visitors' Cup successes with elder brother Charles. And, according to the *Herald* report, Croker also had been a member of 'two winning crews for the Dublin Cup'. Unhappily, we learn little about the third brother, the extra man William, except that he was 'the youngest of the party, but appears capable of doing good work if called upon'.

Charles Barrington and his crew travelled by train to Philadelphia, where for the duration of the regatta they were the personal guests of Commodore Ferguson. The *Herald* report tells us:

'The crew bring but one boat with them, which is forty feet six inches in length. They are ready and anxious to participate in as many races as possible while here, and expressed great gratification when informed that there would be twenty-four entries in two great amateur fours races.'

In his *History of Boat-Racing in Ireland*, Forde Hall quotes from the old Match Book of Dublin University Rowing Club which provides a fascinating insight into the experiences of Charles Barrington and his crew in Philadelphia. Hall tells us that though the writer of the relevant piece in the Match Book is not identified, 'he is likely to have been one of the party which made the long journey to the United States'. The Match Book gives an account of the international regatta, held on the Schuylkill River at Philadelphia, on 28 August, 1876:

'We were represented at this regatta

by the same crew which competed at Henley in June, with the exception of G.H. Pentland, whose place (bow) was occupied by G.N. Ferguson. After the last-named regatta the crew had broken up and did not get together again until after the Castleconnell regatta on July 22. They then began to practice on the Mulcair river near Glenstal Castle, the home of Sir Croker Barrington, Bart., where the crew were staying. The practice was carried on in an old boat purchased from Kingstown R.H.B.C. and brought down there for the purpose. This was varied by an occasional row on the Shannon in one of the new fours built by Biffin for the Limerick B.C. and these rows were of great service in getting the men together'.

From the Match Book we learn that Barrington and his crew landed at New York on 15 August and '... proceeded next day to Philadelphia, having their racing craft fastened in the usual manner on the top of the train'. They practiced on the Schuylkill River twice a day from 18 to 29 August, when the international races began. The Match Book records:

'The heat ... interfered greatly with the health and therefore the performance of the crew, the thermometer marking over 100 in the shade during the greater part of their stay at Philadelphia ... The heat and drinking water were the principal enemies of the oarsmen and to these two sources may, I think, be traced the want of success of the Dubliners, who on their first appearance on the Schuylkill were considered to be second only, if second, to London.'

The report in the Match Book is extremely critical of the course ('not by any means as straight as we supposed from the description sent to us'), the competence of the umpires, the siting of

the judge's box ('at least 30 feet above the level of the river which was about 300 yards wide at the finish'), and the general staging and management of the regatta, though graciously going on to note the committee's good intentions and to '... ascribe the defects more to their ignorance of the management of large regattas than to any unworthy motives'.

The international races began on Monday, 28 August, and the Match Book tells us:

'... the International Fours, with their names and stations, were as follows: Station 1: Eureka B.C.; Station 2: Argonauta B.C.; Station 3: D.U.R.C. (G.N. Ferguson, Croker Barrington, C.B. Barrington, G.A.E. Hickson (stroke), Dublin started very badly, allowing the two American crews to get right away from them and were two lengths behind at the first quarter of a mile after which they began to draw up slowly on the leaders. At the mile mark (half-a-mile from the start), the Eurekas, hugging the shore round the bend, were half-a-length ahead of the Argonautas, who were three-quarters of a length in front of Dublin. The latter were now rowing well, having settled down to 38 strokes a minute, at which they seemed to go best. Here the Argonautas bored Dublin out, and the Eurekas, taking full advantage of the bend, added a length to their lead. Shortly after this, Dublin rowed past the Argonauta crew and went on in pursuit of the leaders but failed to catch them, Eureka winning by a length-and-a-half'.

According to the Match Book, Barrington's crew entered for one other race - the International Graduates' Prize. They were the only crew to enter, and on the fourth day they took the prize, simply by rowing over the course. The Match Book records:



Trinity, 1869-70. C.B. Barrington (centre back row) again captained the team.

'A crew composed of three graduates and one non-university man wanted to enter against Dublin, but the Committee, on D.U.R.C. objecting on the ground that they were not all graduates of a university, refused

their entry. D.U.R.C. expressed their willingness to race this crew after the regatta but the offer was not accepted'.

Forde Hall's suggestion that the writer of the Match Book was one of Barrington's

crew is borne out by the following personalised comments:

'The boat which we brought out was the same as we rowed in at Henley this year, and was built by Biffin's. I think, however, that the action of the damp sea air, followed by the extremely hot weather, caused her to warp slightly and had the effect of making her very uncomfortable to row after we got to the States. In fact, she got a twist which made her be down on the bow and stroke oars at the same time'.

After the Philadelphia regatta, the crew were invited to Washington, D.C., by Analostan B.C., and a race was staged on the Potomac River between the following two crews: Inside Station: W.M. Barrington (bow), 2. C.B. Barrington, 3. Croker Barrington, G.N. Ferguson (stroke); Outside Station: J.J. Penrose (bow), 2. A. Jameson, 3. G.N.L. Munn, G.A.E. Hickson (stroke). But a foul occurred some distance into the race; the umpire decided that both crews were at fault, and declared the contest a dead-heat. The Match Book tells us: 'A prize of a flag (according to American custom) was awarded to each crew and these were presented to them by General Sherman, Commander-in-Chief of the United States Army, in the course of the evening and in the presence of a large and fashionable audience'.

So the extra man, William Barrington, was indeed called upon to compete, though admittedly not in the main event at Philadelphia. Racing over, the crew visited Niagara Falls, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec and lakes Champlain and George, before returning to New York, which they left on 27 September, on board the *Scythia*, and arrived back at Queenstown (Cobh), on 6 October.



The Trinity 1st senior IV rowing team, 1873, winners of the Visitors' Senior Cup, Henley Regatta, 1873. C.B. Barrington (3) and his brother, Croker (stroke) are at the back.



Michael Johnston, rowing correspondent of the *Evening Press*, gives some further details about the Barrington oarsmen:

'They were also involved in the first Irish crews to row at Henley, and in the start of eights' rowing in Ireland, which they brought back with them from Henley in 1870. Charles Barrington rowed for Trinity (which was Dublin University Boat Club) in eight and four at Henley in 1870 and 1871; from 1872, he and Croker Barrington both rowed there in eight and four up to 1874. And, in 1876, they were both there again in four, but this time in the colours of the other club in Trinity, the Dublin University Rowing Club – it was also under the auspices of the rowing club that they went to America. In this period, they won the top prize in Ireland three if not four times. This was the event known as the Metropolitan Grand Challenge Cup at Dublin Metropolitan Regatta, known popularly as the Blue Riband of Irish rowing. Both won it together in 1874; Charles Barrington certainly won it in 1871 and 1872, when the club took the honours, though the individual names of the winners are not known.'

Michael Johnston's observation about the Barrington brothers being responsible for the introduction of eights' rowing to Ireland is an interesting one. Clearly, at the time eights' rowing was an innovation, something new and something of a novelty. Long since, of course, eights have become the top attraction in rowing, the major event in every regatta.

Thus the Barringtons made major contributions in two disciplines in Irish sport – rugby football and rowing. The commemorative pictorial record, published by Dublin University Football Club in 1972, acknowledges the debt which Irish rugby owes to the Limerick sportsman: 'The laws of rugby were drawn up by Blackheath and later by



The two Barrington brothers also rowed in this Trinity VIII, 1873.

Dublin University in 1868 by C.B. Barrington and R.M. Wall. These laws and rules closely resemble the rules that govern the game today'.

And, it is fair to say, Irish rowing owes a similar debt to Charles Barrington and his brothers for the part which they played in the evolution of competitive boat racing in this country.

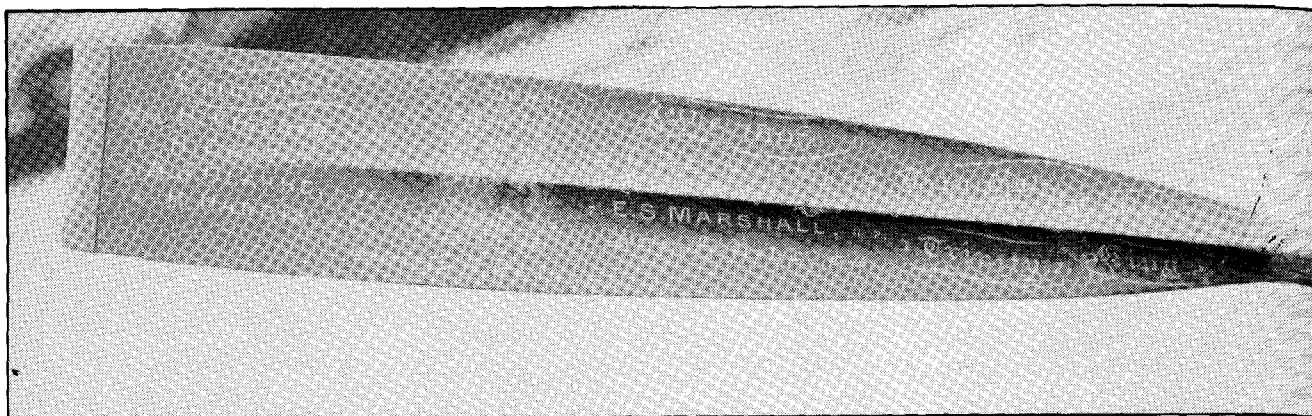
According to contemporary accounts, the three Barrington brothers – as well as Master John B. Barrington, included, it seems, for good measure – received a tumultuous reception at the family home in Glenstal early in 1877, to mark their endeavours in Philadelphia. In its issue of Tuesday, 9 January, of that year, the

Limerick Chronicle reported at length the proceedings of the day before, when various presentations were made to all four brothers by a deputation from subscribers to the 'Barrington Memorial Fund'. The *Chronicle* stated:

'The illumination of the address was entrusted to Mr. Henry O'Shea of this city ... it was the theme of general admiration yesterday at the Castle (Glenstal), as was also the shield, embossed with allegorical figures from Milton's Paradise Lost, salvers and tea services, manufactured by the well-known establishment of Mr. L.E. Ryan of George's Street. The deputation which arrived at the Castle shortly after one o'clock, was introduced to Sir Croker Barrington by Mr. Andrew Harte, P.L.G., and then conducted to the picture gallery by Mr. C.B. Barrington, where luncheon was served in the most recherche style. Among those present were: Sir Croker Barrington, presiding, and having on his right the Rev. T. Duggan, C.C., Murroe; Mr. Henry O'Shea and Dr. O'Connor, Murroe. To the left of the chairman sat the Rev. W.F. Seymour, Rector of Abington; Mr. Croker Barrington etc. Mr. C.B. Barrington occupied the vice-chair, and the general company included Mr. John Ryan, solicitor; Mr. Joseph Gubbins, Mr. Denis Ryan, Mr. Daniel Ryan, Mr. Patrick Egan, Mr. Patrick Cooke, Mr. Michael Meehan, Mr. James Humphreys, Mr. Thomas Fitz-gerald, Mr. C.K. Powell, Mr.



The Centennial Regatta, Philadelphia, Graduates' Race Cup, 1876.



This oar was presented to Limerick Boat Club by Charles Barrington, June, 1896.

William Keays, Mr. Malachy O'Connor, Mr. M. Duhy, etc.'.

From the report of the proceedings at Glenstal that day, it is clear that the Trinity fours were not successful in the Philadelphia regatta. Said Mr. Gubbins in his speech, typically fulsome of its time perhaps, though not necessarily any the more so than may be heard on similar occasions today:

'And though they were not the winners, still, they were not ingloriously defeated – though they were not the victors in the great international regatta, they were victors to a certain extent in proving that Irish gentlemen are the equals, if not the superiors, to any other gentlemen in the world'.

But it must be noted that in his *Cork Evening Echo* feature of 1 September, 1977, James A. Whelan says that Charles Barrington 'brought back the Philadelphia Graduate Cup', and this is confirmed in the *Hampshire Telegraph* interview. No reference to this achievement, however, is made in the *Chronicle* report of the festivities at Glenstal. But that report *does* tell us what the brothers received from their band of admirers that January day: Said Fr. Duggan in the course of his speech: 'I have had no greater pleasure than I have in presenting these testimonials. I now present this silver salver ... to Mr. Charles B. Barrington, Mr. Croker Barrington and Mr. William Barrington conjointly'.

'The report continued: 'The Rev. Mr. Duggan then formally presented the shield, a silver oak leaf and goblet to Mr. C.B. Barrington, a tea service to Mr. Croker Barrington, a tea service to Mr. William Barrington, and a gold chronometer and chain to Master John B. Barrington'.

All the brothers replied suitably, and at some length, Charles remarking that the presentations he had been given 'should

remain in Glenstal as long as he had life, and until the hand that received them had moulded into dust'. Referring to the tea service he had received, Croker



Sir Charles Barrington and his son, Charles Bacon Barrington, pictured at Glenstal, c. 1916.

Barrington commented that it might be more use to his older brother Charles, 'who before long, in all probability, would be rowing in a pair-oared boat! (laughter and applause)'.

In fact, Charles Barrington remained unmarried for another eighteen years. He succeeded to the title when his father died in 1890, and five years later married Mary Rose Bacon, daughter of Sir Henry Hickman Bacon. The tenants of his

10,000 acre Glenstal estate gave the newly-weds a gift of £240, then a considerable sum. They had two sons and a daughter, and James A. Whelan says that it was the daughter's tragic death which caused them to move to Botley, near Southampton.

Apparently, Charles was for years one of the oldest inhabitants in that part of Hampshire, and remained very active to the end. He and his wife took long daily walks on the beach at nearby Netley, and he continued rowing into his seventies on the Botley River, adjoining his estate. He died at Botley on 12 August, 1943, aged 95.

Such are the principle details of one sporting life. Clearly, Charles' love for and ability at sport were shared at least by some members of his family, and it is fitting that their family home, since it became a school, has produced many fine performers in athletics, cricket and rugby, among them John Blayney, capped for Ireland against Scotland in 1950. The sporting Barringtons would surely have approved!

It has been claimed that Jonah Barrington, former world champion squash player, is related to the Limerick Barringtons. The present writer has been unable to prove that claim, though coincidentally, Jonah, sportsman of almost frightening determination and dedication, was a Trinity man, just like his Limerick namesakes.

Whatever about that claim, on 2 February, 1985, there was a very happy rugby link with the Ireland team of the day and Charles Burton Barrington, who did so much for the evolution of the game as we now know it. On that day at Murrayfield, Ireland took the first step towards the Triple Crown, with a vintage victory over Scotland.

One of the two newly-capped players in the side was the number eight, a young Limerick-based doctor. His name? Brian Spillane. And his place of employment was Barrington's Hospital.