

**CASE  
STUDY**

*Vincent Foley*

# Teaching *The GAA to 1891*



*Source: Clare Co. Library*

## **Introduction - Approaching the Documents-Based Study**

### **General Guidelines**

Before examining the specific case study of the foundation of the GAA 1884-1891, one should firstly examine some general principles of documents-based work.

The topic chosen for the documents based study should be taught in the same manner as the other subjects. More time however should be devoted to the use of primary sources and therefore this section will require more time over the 2-year span of the course.

When choosing material for the documents based study, keep in mind the following:

❑ **Reading level** - if students are to engage with suitable material, certain difficulties with documentary evidence may have to be addressed. A detailed and 'heavy' official document may require a glossary of terms and notes to explain the context.

❑ **Suitable Material** - The first step as teacher will be to choose sources with our class that will enhance students learning and understanding of the prescribed topic. These sources may include; documents, letters, posters, Internet website material, oral history, audio-visual etc. When using a source for a case study, teachers must be sure why they are using this source and be sure what they hope to achieve by using this source. There may be a temptation to bring anything and everything into a class for this section based solely on the fact that it's a 'source', yet this must have a purpose.

❑ **Classroom activity** - similarly, we must be sure on how we are going to use this source in the classroom. Would it be better to vary sources in different groups? Will sources be used as the basis for role-playing etc?

❑ **Assessment** - what modes of assessment will be deployed to ensure that proper use and understanding has been made of the particular source material?

❑ **Using Transition Year for a Documents-based study** - Students will have experience of working with documents to some degree since Junior Cert. Perhaps the transition year should be used to try and build on this experi-

ence by getting students more used to working with documentary evidence. This does not mean turning the transition year into a three-year Leaving Cert examination, but taking certain areas of history (outside of the new LC Syllabus) and making it more documents based. Areas like local history would be ideal for this, as students will have a strong personal interest in areas of history close to them. Perhaps a family member may have been involved in events (e.g. the struggle for independence), they might have materials at home (be it a flag, a letter, a photograph collection etc.), which they can share with the other students. Letting students have a **'hands on approach'** with various primary sources will hopefully **stir excitement in the subject** and surely get the potential history student in good training if they decide to keep on history as a leaving cert subject.

❑ **Teachers working together** - The new History Syllabus will provide all teachers with a number of challenges; be it working with new texts, stimulating interest in the subject in school, attracting new students to the subject and perhaps most of all collecting new material. The change in the syllabus will have many of us wondering how and where we will get suitable material that would work for this particular module of the course. In my experience alone with just this section, I have been very pleased by the willingness of people to help in whatever way they can. Colleagues have been able to lend me books, photos etc. which may be of assistance. Because of the widespread appeal of the GAA there should be a wealth of material to sift through in locating such material. However I think we as teachers can be of the greatest support. The HTAI provides us with a forum to discuss these matters but perhaps also a place where we may be able to pool resources and share such documents etc.

## *Case Study: The GAA to 1891*

### **General Approach**

Maybe a good way to get to grips with this case study is a 'left-to-right' approach, dealing firstly with perspective, then looking at elements and then moving into the actual case study for examination.

Once the groundwork of understanding perspectives and studying the elements of this topic are done, I would now begin work on the Case Study, the GAA up to 1891.

### **Documentary Sources**

A careful explanation of what documentary evidence is may be necessary again. The concept of Primary Sources is very important to coming to grips with this module. Ideally a selection of such sources would be of great benefit.

These would include:

**Letters** – (e.g. Croke's Letter)

**Newspaper reports** – (early meetings, matches etc.)

**Minutes** of GAA meetings – (outcomes, decisions etc.)

A draft of the GAA **rules** – (match rules etc.)

Selection of **photos** (Key personalities, GAA teams)

**Poetry and Literature** (e.g. 'Our Matchless Hurling Men' by Rev James Dollard)

Newspaper **Articles** – from the time itself

## **Case Study Themes**

The IRB Infiltration

The Role of Michael Cusack

The GAA and the Parnellite split

The Ban

The GAA contribution to late 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalism

The Political role of the GAA

The impact of the GAA on Irish Society

### **Looking beyond the textbook**

As this is a documents area, I would:

❑ **Encourage students to bring in material** they may have at home, be it a book, commemorative poster of the GAA etc.

❑ **Trying to move away from just textbook** study will only broaden their minds on discovering history and looking beyond sometimes bland textbooks. Of course the need to start looking elsewhere for history will be of vital importance when they approach the Research Study section.

### **Bias/Objectivity**

When dealing with a document source it is important to:

1. Develop the student's analytical skills.
2. Like any source, each piece can be questioned and not taken as mere fact.
3. Here the idea of bias/objectivity comes into play.

### **Class work**

When actually dealing with the documents section I would perhaps begin with the first few during class time. After giving a background to the piece, I would then look at the actual document to try and gauge a first impression from the students on what they think the document is dealing with.

Only then would I start to look at the questions that follow the documents. With the sample papers, (and presumably a documents pack for this section) we will have a better understanding of these kinds of questions.

In the initial stages of documentary work, it may be an idea to put the class into small groups, (perhaps 2 or 3) and this will try and stimulate group interest. This has worked well for me in the past when looking at unprescribed material in English class, particularly with weaker students as it got them more actively involved.

With the questions then discussed I would ask the students to once again look at the documents with these questions in mind.

Hopefully after the initial attempts will confidence be there by the students so by they could examine and analyse a document on their own, either for a homework assignment or a class test.

### **Homework**

With increased confidence from class work and more famil-

ilarity with the documents-based study, I would then give a piece for homework.

Initially with some general and basic examples, with increased experience, I would then assign more complex materials for homework.

## Questions on the Documents-based Study

According to the new syllabus, it is envisaged that this section will, *'involve the use of a number of short, thematically-linked and 'pointed' extracts that will test candidates' ability to interrogate, correlate and evaluate a particular body of evidence.'*

Maybe taking this example in smaller sections would therefore be desirable, rather than the full letter in one study. In the additional material provided, there are a number of smaller and suitable extracts included. As outlined in the actual Leaving Certificate History Syllabus (p. 14), the format of the documents-based question will be as follows:

Section 1: **Comprehension**

Section 2: **Comparison**

Section 3: **Criticism**

Section 4: **Contextualisation**

### Section 1: Comprehension

This question requires students to extract relevant data from documents to answer questions that are designed to test their understanding of the passage. I would get students to examine the main points in each paragraph in trying to gauge an understanding of the text. Reference or quotation to the text would be of significant importance here. Maybe a similar approach to an LC English Comprehension Text is suitable here. According to the syllabus, the comprehension style question will be geared more towards Ordinary Level candidates.

### Section 2: Comparison

As this is one of the key questions in the case study it is vital that students be experienced with comparing documents. Here students are required to compare two or more accounts of historical experience and to note similarities and contrasts. For instance, compare two reports of an early GAA meeting, or early match. Compare the aims of the GAA by nationalists with those views from the authorities of the day. *Where are the discrepancies? What differing opinions do we get here? Which is accurate or inaccurate?*

### Section 3: Criticism

Students may be asked to critique the document for its various strong points and weaknesses. They will be asked to recognise bias and propaganda; to note viewpoint; to identify contradictions; to make judgements about the reliability of various sources. *Does the document reflect the situation at the time? Is it biased? Inaccurate?*

### Section 4: Contextualisation

Students will be asked to place the subject matter of the documents in their historical context; to show understanding of issues and events associated with that period as outlined in the elements of the topic. At Higher Level, this will involve most work as marks are weighted more towards this type of question.

Once again, with the coming of sample papers and textbooks, one will have a better understanding of the kind of questions asked in this section.

## GAA Assistance

Perhaps the best way of getting material for this section as well as getting the students involved in the study of this is the GAA itself. While preparing for this I got in contact with the GAA in Croke Park. On hearing about this new part of the History course, they were more than willing to assist and sent on various material and details of the Croke Park Museum.

At present, the GAA are still putting together a comprehensive archive which no doubt will have a tremendous amount of source material. This source should be available shortly, and the interest they had in this case study will surely be reflected in availability of material. The Croke Park tour is two hours long and has an interactive museum. The Croke Park Museum will also send on an educational pack which has a selection of material (not all useful for this particular module) but enclosed in it is a student's question section. Maybe not the level of leaving certificate, but no doubt helpful for revision of the topics.

Perhaps the most helpful was locally, from a GAA historian in Pairc Ui Rinn in Cork. Here I was given access to a number of sources from books, pictures and other materials. In all three instances, the genuine interest in this part of our subject was welcomed and they were all very helpful in locating information. Perhaps this case study will be easier to locate suitable documents due to the widespread appeal for the GAA.

Another helpful way of approaching this section might be taking a class group to visit the GAA museum which does special student rates.

GAA Museum,  
Tel: 01 855 8176  
New Stand,  
Croke Park,  
Dublin 2  
Email: museum@gaa.ie

### Further Reading

Cronin, Mike, **Sport and nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic games, soccer and Irish identity since 1884**, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999  
de Burca, Marcus, **Michael Cusack and the GAA**, Dublin: Anvil Books, 1989  
de Burca, Marcus, **The GAA: a history**, Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1999.  
Griffin, Pádraig, **The politics of Irish athletics 1850-1990**, Co Leitrim: Marathon Publications, 1991  
Mandle, W.F., **The Gaelic Athletic Association and Irish nationalist politics, 1884-1924**, Christopher Helm, 1987  
Ó'Riain, Seamus, **Maurice Davin, (1842-1927): First President of the GAA**, Geography Publications, 1994  
Puirseal, Pádraig, **The G.A.A. in its time**, Dublin: Ward River, 1984

*Vincent Foley teaches History in the Cork Leaving Certificate College.*

## Document Sample - extract from Archbishop Croke's Letter

### DR. CROKE'S LETTER

At the founding of the Association the following letter was received from the most Rev. T. W. Croke, Archbishop of Cashel and Emily:

The Palace Thurles,

December 18th, 1884

*My Dear Sir;*

*'...One of the most painful, let me assure you, and at the same time, one of the most frequently recurring reflections that, as an Irishman, I am compelled to make in connection with the present aspect of things in this country, is derived from the ugly and irritating fact, that we are daily importing from England, not only her manufacturing goods, which we cannot help doing, since she has practically strangled our own manufacturing appliances, but, together with her fashions, her accents, her vicious literature, her music, her dances and her modified mannerisms, her games also, to the utter discredit of our own grand national sports, and to the sore humiliation, as I believe, of every genuine son and daughter of the old land. Ball-playing, hurling, football-kicking according to Irish rules, "casting", leaping in various ways, wrestling, handy-grips, top-pegging, leap-frog, rounders, tip-in-the-hat, and all such favourite exercises and amusements amongst men and boys may now be said to be not only dead and buried, but in several localities to be entirely forgotten and unknown. And what have we got in their stead? We have got such foreign and fantastic field sports as lawn tennis, polo, croquet, cricket, and the like-very excellent, I believe, and health-giving exercises in their way, still not racy of the soil, but rather alien, on the contrary, to it, as are indeed, for the most part, the men and women who first imported, and still continue to patronise them....'*

*'...Indeed if we continue traveling for the next score years in the same direction that we have been going in for some time past, condemning the sports that were practised by our forefathers, effacing our national features as though we were ashamed of them, and putting, we had better at once, and publicly, abjure our nationality, clap hands for joy at sight of on, with England's stuffs and broadcloths, her masher habits and such other effeminate follies as she may recommend the Union Jack, and lace "England's bloody red" exultantly above the green....'*

*T.W.CROKE,*

*Archbishop of Cashel*

The approach set out below moves from straightforward description of the source to interpretation and critical evaluation to the wider context. Asking these types of questions will hopefully get the student involved with the source and therefore be able to answer the set questions come examination time.

#### ◆ **Comprehension**

*What sort of written source is it? When was it written? Who wrote it? Why was it written? Letter? Eyewitness account? Report? Is there a date given? Was it written at the time of events or later? Is the writer's name mentioned? Was it a newspaper article? A report? Letter to a political figure?*

#### ◆ **Comparison**

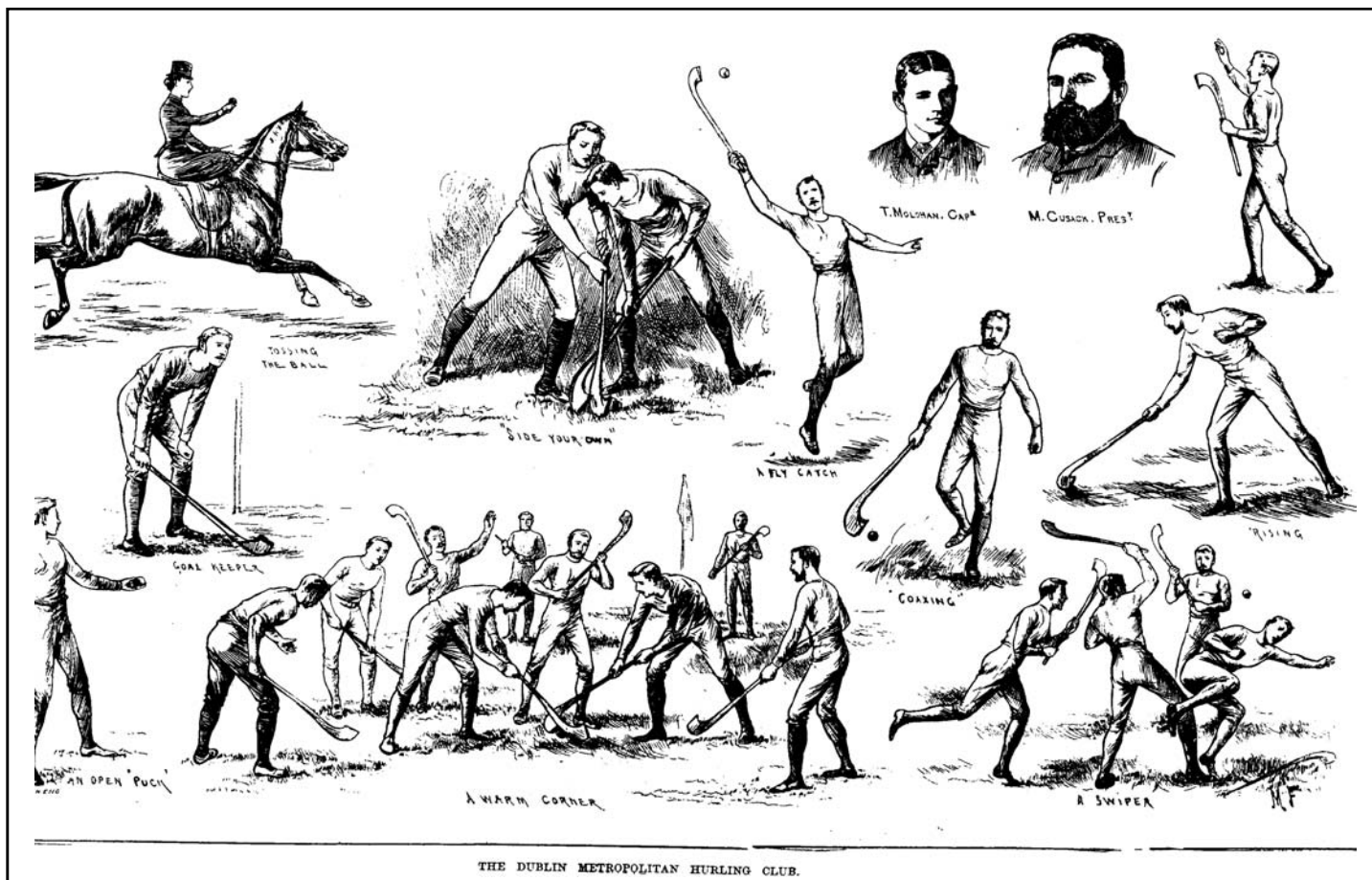
*Is this document one of a type? Are there more similar to this? Can we compare it to another viewpoint? Does the opinion change?*

#### ◆ **Criticism**

*Is this a primary or secondary document? Do we know how the writer obtained information in the article? Does this account seem reliable? Does the writer appear to have a motive? Does the writer express a point of view? Was the writer an eyewitness? Was it written at the time of the event? Are there any clues on the document itself? If so, what clues are on the document to show this? To promote a cause? To justify an action? Is it a mere description of an event or is there a personal opinion being offered?*

#### ◆ **Contextualisation**

*Does the information here support or contradict or knowledge of the broader topic? Are there any gaps here that make it difficult to come to conclusions? What other sources might be helpful in enhancing our understanding of the case study? If it conflicts with others how can this be explained? Missing names? Times? Places? Other historical data – more primary source material?*



**Source A**

*Source: University College Cork*

**CASE STUDY QUESTIONS**

**Comprehension**

In Source A, is there any impression that the hurling game has rules?  
 How is the game of hurling depicted in Source A?

**Comparison**

How does the game depicted on this illustration differ from the 'foreign and fantastic field sports' spoken about in Archbishop Croke's letter?  
 How does the game of hurling depicted in Source A differ from the modern game?

**Criticism**

Is this a primary or a secondary source?  
 How useful are illustrations such as the above as sources for historians?

**Contextualisation**

Explain the main motives behind the founding of the GAA in 1884?  
 What were the main issues facing the GAA in the period 1884-1891?  
 Discuss the role played by Michael Cusack in the establishment of the GAA.  
 Why would the GAA have attracted IRB elements?  
 Why did some in the GAA want to ban members playing foreign sports?  
 What impact did the GAA have on the development of Cultural Nationalism?