

SPORT AND RECREATION SINCE THE 19th CENTURY

An Overview

Eric Apperley March 2020

In 1905, this section of Vol II of the first VCH Publications covered Football [Association and a short piece about Rugby Union] hunting and shooting [fox, wildfowl, foulmart¹ and sweetmart², otter], angling, cockfighting. It also included two activities which are much associated with the Lake District - Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling, and Hound Trailing, with horseracing and coursing to complete the picture. So much has changed by the 21st C but only brief notes are appropriate here since each of today's activities requires a book of its own, as indeed many such have been written. Much information can be found on the internet about each sport and its member clubs.

Establishing the number of amateur clubs playing in any one season is difficult since such clubs can easily find themselves unable to field a team. There are also problems for all sports of finding enough referees.

All the team sports at national level and at county level are usually organised into leagues with automatic promotion for the top few and corresponding relegation from the league above. For the local leagues, membership tends to be by application without necessarily any connection with any other league.

Association Football

Football of a sort has been played since the middle ages and that style of very rough and disorganised play still continues in a few places such as Workington.³ The sport grew and there were attempts to establish common rules in the mid 19thC. The oldest among professional football clubs is the English club Notts County that was formed in 1862 and still exists today.⁴ By 2020, the English Football League is organised into 8 levels whilst many amateurs play in less formal leagues.⁵

A striking development is the growth of Women's Football. Although its first golden age occurred in the United Kingdom in the early 1920s, with matches attracting large crowds (one match achieved over 50,000 spectators), The Football Association initiated a ban in 1921 that disallowed women's football games from taking place on the grounds used by its member clubs. This ban remained in effect until July 1971.⁶ There are a number of women's clubs in Cumbria. Since 1983 leagues have been sponsored by commercial

organisation and many leagues are then known by that name, and the sponsors change quite often making for confusion.

Rugby union

Rugby football started about 1845 at Rugby School in Rugby, Warwickshire, England, although forms of football in which the ball was carried and tossed date to medieval times. Rugby split into two sports in 1895, when twenty-one clubs split from the Rugby Football Union to form the Northern Rugby Football Union (later renamed the Rugby Football League in 1922), over broken-time payments to players who took time off from work to play the sport, thus making rugby league the first code to turn professional and pay players. Rugby union turned professional one hundred years later in 1995.⁷

Historically, there were no leagues allowed as these were seen as a sign of professionalism. In the 1970s the RFU allowed the creation of regional merit leagues with the most significant ones being the North, Midlands, South West and London merit leagues. In 1984 the RFU approved the creation of two national merit tables where clubs had to play a minimum of eight games against the clubs in their division. 1985 saw the creation of a third national merit league. In 1987 this was formed into a true national league system.⁸

Rugby League

In England, rugby league has traditionally been associated with the northern counties of Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cumbria where the game originated. Barrow, Workington and Whitehaven are prominent clubs with proud records at national level.. As of 2010 there are currently 27 nations fielding domestic leagues that meet the World Cup eligibility requirements. Further to this there are over 30 others that are playing at an emerging level status at varying degrees of international competition and are in the process of developing the game in their nations. The global player pool is estimated to be in the millions, including women. In England the sport is organised at three levels – Superleague, Championship and League 1. In Cumbria as semi-professional clubs., Workington Town (formed 1945) play in League 1, Barrow,Whitehaven play in the Championship. There is a Cumbria Amateur Rugby League Association [CARLA] which covers the many amateur clubs around the county.⁹

Cricket

There are about 22 clubs in Cumbria which play in leagues – premier (12), Division 1 (10) and division 2 (8 -all 2nd elevens) ^{10, 11}

Other Team Sports

Hockey: in 2020 7 clubs field teams in one of four leagues which extend into Lancashire and Cheshire; for Women, there is a Cumbria league with 12 teams from 10 clubs (includes some 2nd teams) ¹²

Other Individual Sports: a small number of clubs are devoted to the following and a number of Cumbrians have achieved international fame in these at various times-

Athletics, Bowls, Fell Running, Golf, Orienteering, Rowing, Sailing, Swimming, Sub-Aqua, Tennis. There are only a few clubs in each of the above and whilst they may meet in “Cup” competitions, few will organise themselves into leagues with a regular programme against each other.

Hunting & Shooting wildlife ¹³

In 2004, Parliament voted by a majority of 356 to 166 to ban the hunting of mammals with dogs (the Hunting Act) in England and Wales. The Act came into effect in 2005. Shooting foxes as pests remains lawful. ¹⁴ It became unlawful in England and Wales to shoot flights or game birds while they are not in flight, an action which has long been considered unsporting.

As of 2012 game shooting and deer stalking are carried on as field sports in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Hunting with hounds in the traditional manner became unlawful in England and Wales in 2005, but continues in certain accepted forms. Traditional foxhunting continues in Northern Ireland. Following a trail (similar to drag hunting) rather than a live quarry has subsequently grown in importance in Great Britain, as has hunting foxes to a bird of prey. The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) says that over a million people a year participate in shooting, including game shooting, clay shooting and target shooting.

Hound Trailing

Hound trailing originated in the 18th century as a means of various hunt masters testing their fox hounds against each other in match races. Hound

trailing or hound racing became particularly popular in the Lake District, with hunt masters of packs conducting match races over laid drag lines. The rapid rise in the popularity of the sport led to the establishment of the Hound Trailing Association in 1906, this was followed by the Border Hound Trailing Association in 1933 and later the Yorkshire Hound Trailing Association¹⁵

Horse Racing:

- A. **Carlisle:** Racing at Carlisle is a truly longstanding tradition, seeing as the first race recorded in the area dates back to 1599. The race was conducted at Swift, the racing venue used prior to the opening of the racecourse we know today, and was titled the Carlisle Bell - named after the bells awarded to race winners traditionally during the Elizabethan era. In 1904 Carlisle Racecourse was moved to its present day Blackwell location. The racecourse erected its first grandstand shortly after opening its doors and established the first Tote betting system on a British racecourse in 1929. Since 2002 Carlisle Racecourse offers a new, state of the art grandstand.¹⁶
- B. **Cartmel:** It is assumed that horse racing in the Cartmel area was a much-loved past-time since the 15th century; however, the first organised horse race recorded is dated in 1856. The racecourse has inhabited its present location from the very beginning of the organised and publicised horse sporting events at Cartmel. Initially Cartmel was a venue for Flat races; until the course finally made the switch to become a National Hunt-only course at the beginning of the 20th century. Until 1947 Cartmel Racecourse only hosted a single event every year. To this original race on Whit Monday, Cartmel added a Saturday meeting and in 1960 introduced a third meeting in August. Today, Cartmel sports a new Grandstand, hospitality facilities and some new annual racing events.¹⁷

Coursing (Greyhound Racing)

Hare coursing is the pursuit of hares with greyhounds and other sighthounds, which chase the hare by sight, not by scent. Hare coursing is now illegal in Scotland, Wales and England and became illegal in Northern Ireland in 2011. Greyhound racing where hounds chase an artificial hare began in 1933 in Workington at Lonsdale park but came under new management in 1942. The

racing was independent (unaffiliated to a governing body). The greyhound racing ended in 1999; the site was later demolished.

Speedway Racing (Motor bikes)

Workington Comets -Speedway racing has enjoyed at least three different venues in the Workington area, beginning in 1931 at Lonsdale Park. The first match took place on 15th August 1931. The Club enjoyed a brief spell of Open racing but it was not an altogether successful period. Racing switched to Derwent Park Stadium in 1970 with the first meeting taking place on the 3rd April, although the Comets lost to Berwick. However, it proved to be much more successful than the previous venue and a crowd in excess of 5000 attended. The team went from strength to strength and joined the British Premier League in 1999 and have remained there until 2019 when they withdrew from the championship.¹⁸

Motor Sports: Another recreational area embraces Rally driving¹⁹, Motorbike racing, Karting²⁰, Hill Climbs²¹ and Motocross²², probably with other variations as well.

1 Polecat

2 Pinemarten

3 <https://calendarcustoms.com/articles/workington-football/>

4 <https://www.footballhistory.org/> The First FA Cup was in 1871-2 and the first League was in 1888, won by Preston North End. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FA_Cup

5 <http://www.thefa.com/get-involved/player/the-national-league-system> ;

Cumbrian Clubs are Carlisle United near the bottom of Level 4, Barrow top of Level 5, Workington Reds (top – Reds to distinguish it from Workington Town Rugby League Club) and Kendal (bottom in Level 8). Each club has a detailed website of its history.

6 The inaugural FIFA Women's World Cup was held in China in 1991. Since then, the sport has gained in popularity.^[6] The 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup Final in Canada was the most watched soccer game in United States history and over 1.12 billion people worldwide watched the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup in France.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_association_football

7 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby_football

8 Nationally the sort is organised into 12 tiers with no less than 106 leagues. There are 26 clubs affiliated to the Cumbria Rugby Union playing in tiers 7 and 8

9 <https://www.facebook.com/Cumberland-Amateur-Rugby-League-CARLA-121151739798/>

10 <https://cumbriacriccketlge.play-cricket.com>

11 Cockermouth Cricket Club fostered Ben Stokes, the young son of Ged Stokes who came from New Zealand to coach Whitehaven Rugby League club; Ben has become a striking player for

the England side and was very instrumental in its successes in 2019. He holds the record for England's fastest ever Test double-century, the fastest ever Test match 250, and the highest ever score for a Test batsman batting at number six. He also holds the record for the most runs scored by an individual batsman in the morning session of a Test match.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Stokes

12 A place to place is less easily found – Keswick play on the all-weather pitch at Cockermouth School.

13 <https://www.gov.uk/hunting/>

14 There are still 10 Hunts for foxes in Cumbria – Blencathra, Coniston, Cumberland Farmers, Cumberland Foxhounds, Eskdale & Ennerdale, Lunesdale, Melbreak, North Lonsdale, Pennine, Ullswater.

15 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hound_trailing

16 <https://www.horseracing.co.uk/racecourses/carlisle/>

17 <https://www.horseracing.co.uk/racecourses/cartmel/>

18 <http://www.greyhoundderby.com/Workington%20Comets.htm>

19 <https://www.malcolmwilson.co.uk/> Malcolm Wilson has built a high-tech rally car operation at Dovenby, near Cockermouth as M-Sport and prepares cars for rallies around the world.
<https://www.m-sport.co.uk/>

20 Karting at Rowrah, near Cleator Moor though not listed on this national website
<https://www.karting-nation.co.uk/karting/>

21 <https://www.eventyas.com/GB/Barbon/197649453776697/Barbon-Hillclimb>

22 <https://www.tmxnews.co.uk/news/motocross/cumbria-mlord/>