

**PERSISTENCE OF DIFFERENCE: A HISTORY OF CORNISH
WRESTLING**

Volume 1 of 2

**Submitted by Michael Tripp, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in, May 2009**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to provide an historical analysis of Cornish wrestling and in particular to address the following key questions: How has Cornish wrestling developed as a sport? Why is Cornish wrestling 'different'? Why has Cornish wrestling survived? It was argued that in order to provide an adequate historical analysis it was necessary to locate the sport within an appropriate and relevant conceptual framework. Two fields of enquiry were identified as having the potential to provide this; mainstream British sport history and the 'new Cornish Studies'. The main ideas and debates that form the basis for these two areas were reviewed and it was argued that British sport history offered only a partial interpretation for the history of Cornish wrestling as the evidence suggests it is different from other sports. It was further argued that with its emphasis upon 'difference' the 'new Cornish Studies' in general and Payton's 'centre-periphery model' in particular offers a more appropriate conceptual framework, which is also rooted in a relevant local context. Payton developed his model to answer a number of questions relating to Cornwall's distinctiveness: Why is Cornwall 'different'? Why has this persisted? Why is there a strong sense of 'Cornishness' and separate identity which has survived until today? He concluded that Cornwall's 'difference' has persisted because of its historical experience, which in each period has been distinct from other areas of Britain and has led directly to a unique identity. In Payton's model, the privileged 'centre', which is the location of power and influence, is based largely in London and the south-east of England; whereas the 'periphery' is geographically remote from the 'centre', but dependent upon it. Payton proposed three phases of peripherality: 'First' or 'Older Peripheralism', characterised by geographical and cultural isolation from the centre; 'Second Peripheralism', which recognises the central importance of industrial change, producing economic and social marginality and 'Third Peripheralism' characterised by a 'branch-factory' economy promoting a process of 'counter-urbanisation'. The structure of the thesis follows the phases of peripherality and argues the evidence is consistent with Payton's 'centre-periphery model'. The evidence also demonstrates that Cornish wrestling is 'different' and that 'difference' has persisted over time because of Cornwall's historical experience, which in each period of peripherality has been distinct. Furthermore, throughout the entire period of the study, Cornish wrestling has been, and still remains, an important icon of Cornishness, which has ensured its survival.

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INTRODUCTION

The origins of Cornish wrestling, similar to hurling, are unknown, but what is certain is that it has existed for centuries and is arguably Cornwall's oldest and longest surviving sport. By the beginning of the eighteenth century it was a widespread 'traditional' activity, deeply rooted in the local culture and although '...there are few records available...there are sufficient to show that wrestling was still Cornwall's most popular sport.'¹ It reached the height of its popularity during the first few decades of the nineteenth century, with hundreds of participants, competing for lucrative prizes at numerous tournaments, organised in the summer months throughout Cornwall, watched by thousands of spectators and widely reported in local newspapers.² It was also popular in London, where sporting entrepreneurs, usually publicans, organised and promoted wrestling in the Cornish style from the mid-1820s to the 1850s, when the best wrestlers were lured to the capital to perform for large prizes, witnessed by large crowds, which often included members of the nobility.³ Its popularity also spread to many other parts of the world, when adverse economic conditions from the 1860s onwards forced a large proportion of Cornwall's most economically active males to seek work elsewhere. Cornish wrestling tournaments were organised where these migrants settled, in places as far afield as Australia, South Africa and the USA and were still taking place well into the twentieth century.⁴

Cornish wrestling suffered a decline in the number of tournaments, participants and spectators, during the late nineteenth century, and by the start of the twentieth century had almost died out completely. This was largely due to the decline of the Cornish economy which led to the emigration of many of those very same young males who competed in wrestling tournaments, although other factors included the growth of 'faggotting',⁵ which antagonised both wrestlers and spectators, the proliferation of counter-attractions such as cricket and rugby, and a general shift of attitudes away from traditional activities. The almost terminal decline was partially reversed in the 1920s, with the establishment of the Cornwall County Wrestling Association in 1923⁶ and the inauguration in 1928 of regular tournaments between wrestlers from Cornwall and Brittany. However, since the 1920s Cornish wrestling has suffered recurring cycles of decline and revival, and today there are only a handful of wrestlers, competing in a small number of tournaments, watched by a dwindling set of dedicated supporters, although it has managed to survive.

Given its long history, its former popularity, and its survival, it is intriguing to note that there is not a definitive history of Cornish wrestling, or anything approaching it; what has been written is largely at the superficial level, or lacking any kind of academic rigour.⁷ Many writers from the seventeenth century to the present day have made only passing references to Cornish wrestling in their work, but these have not contributed greatly to an understanding of the sport, and they tend to be repetitious.⁸ There have also been a number of journal articles,⁹ written by a small group of authors that have filled some of the gaps in knowledge, which have been supplemented by work found in a wide variety of publications.¹⁰ Arguably the most comprehensive coverage to date is provided in a text on the history and techniques of Breton and Cornish wrestling, co-authored by a Frenchman, Guy Jaouen, of the International Federation of Celtic Wrestling, although this gives only a partial coverage and the poor translation is distracting.¹¹

Therefore, what is required is a full and thorough historical analysis of the development and survival of Cornish wrestling. The aim of this present study is to attempt that analysis and in order to achieve this the following key questions are addressed: What are the origins of Cornish wrestling? Why is Cornish wrestling 'different'? Why has Cornish wrestling survived?

A brief description of Cornish wrestling

Wrestling, which is one of the oldest and most basic of sports, is a combat activity '...between two unarmed men who try to overpower one another by strength or by techniques using the hips, legs or arms...'¹² Modern wrestling can be categorised into three basic types: belt-and-jacket styles, in which the clothing worn by the wrestlers, usually a belt, jacket or trousers, is used for grips; catch-hold styles in which the wrestlers are required to grip each other prior to, and usually throughout the contest; and loose styles, in which the wrestlers are separated prior to the contest, but can take any grip, other than on clothing. Wrestling styles can also be categorised according to the criteria required for victory, in an ascending order of violence. Break-stance involves forcing an opponent to relinquish a position; toppling involves forcing an opponent to touch the ground with part of the body, other than the feet; touch-fall involves forcing an opponent into a specified position, usually supine, for a brief period of time; pin-fall involves holding an opponent once thrown in a specified position for a brief period of

time; and submission involves forcing an opponent to admit defeat by the infliction of pain.¹³

Cornish wrestling is a belt-and-jacket style requiring a touch-fall for victory, which is a sport unique to Cornwall, although a similar, but not identical form is found in Brittany, and there was also a variant in Devon. The most distinctive feature of the sport is the short, loose jacket worn by the wrestlers, which is made of a strong, coarse, canvas material, resembling sailcloth, with loose sleeves, short of the wrists, and tied firmly but loosely at the front by tough loops made of string. All grips must be taken on the jacket. A similar jacket is worn by modern judo participants, or *judoka*, which ‘...may owe as much to the jacket worn by the wrestlers of Cornwall [...] as to any native costume of the Japanese,’¹⁴ as the man who devised the sport, Professor Jigaro Kano, was so worried by the decline of traditional martial arts which were being supplanted by European military exercises, that he toured Europe in the 1880s in order to obtain ideas and may have adopted many features from European wrestling styles.

Victory is achieved in Cornish wrestling when one wrestler ‘backs’ his opponent, or gains more points. To gain a ‘back’ a wrestler must throw his opponent onto his back, so that at least three out of four ‘pins’ (ie shoulders and hips) touch the ground simultaneously. A successful back ends a bout whenever it takes place during a contest; there is no grappling on the ground as in other styles of wrestling. If no back occurs the bout is decided on points, which are awarded to the wrestler who succeeds in throwing an opponent on to a pin or pins; one point is awarded for each pin down. If neither wrestler scores a point during the contest, one point is awarded to the wrestler who has made an honest attempt to throw his opponent or shows the most ‘play’ (ie the greatest effort to win). Wrestlers can also have ‘marks’ deducted if they transgress the rules (eg if a wrestler intentionally slips out of his jacket, or drops on to a knee or hand to avoid being thrown); a total of three ‘marks’ results in a one-point deduction.¹⁵

All contests in Cornish wrestling take place on flat grass in a ring consisting of two concentric circles. The inner circle is at least twelve metres in diameter and should allow two or three pairs of wrestlers to operate simultaneously, whilst the outer circle is four metres greater and acts as a safety area, with spectators, cars, seats, etc., arranged outside. Contests are controlled by three registered judges or ‘sticklers’, usually ex-wrestlers, who ensure fair play between the wrestlers and decide which throws merit

points, when a back occurs or a foul has been committed. The word ‘stickler’ which is probably derived from Old English, and may be the derivation for the popular saying ‘a stickler for the rules’, is usually associated with the ceremonial stick, which was used to place under a backed wrestler to adjudge a pin down; if a stick was able to go under a pin, it was not a pin down. These days the stickler raises the stick in the air to signify a back. It has been suggested that the stick may be ‘...an evolvement from the days when they used swords to restrain angry spectators who felt that the man their money was on was losing.’¹⁶

The governing body of the sport is the Cornish Wrestling Association (CWA), whose main aim is ‘...to promote and foster wrestling in the Cornish style whenever possible in the County’,¹⁷ which they achieve through tournaments organised by affiliated local organising committees. At all tournaments, which are usually open to all-comers, unless otherwise stipulated, wrestlers are first weighed in by the weighing-in steward on approved scales, before being matched off in pairs as equally as possible, based on weight and known experience by officials called ‘matchers’ whose aim is to ensure the best possible wrestling. Each pair of wrestlers, wrestle for a set period of time, which varies according to the age group and/or round; for example, in senior finals, the men wrestle for two rounds of ten minutes and extra time after that if there is no result in normal time. The winners of each match, who are called ‘standing men’ or ‘standards’, are those with the highest number of points on at least two of the sticklers scorecards. The standards are then paired off for the next round, and these continue until the final round, where the first and second placed wrestlers are decided.¹⁸

There are five senior weight categories and two junior weight categories, at four different age groups (see table 0.1). The CWA organises tournaments to decide the championships in each of the five senior and eight junior weight categories, and also awards a variety of trophies and belts.¹⁹

Table 0.1: Age and weight categories in Cornish wrestling²⁰

Weight	Age
Junior	
Lightweight: to 6st 4lbs	Under 12
Heavyweight: above 6st 4lbs	Under 12
Lightweight: to 7st 3lbs	Under 14
Heavyweight: above 7st 3lbs	Under 14

Lightweight: to 9st 10lbs	Under 16
Heavyweight: above 9st 10lbs	Under 16
Lightweight: to 10st 7lbs	Under 18
Heavyweight: above 10st 7lbs	Under 18
Senior	
Featherweight: 9st 9lbs	Over 18
Lightweight: 10st 10lbs	Over 18
Middleweight: 11st 11lbs	Over 18
Light-heavyweight: 12st 12lbs	Over 18
Heavyweight: no limit	Over 18

Using newspapers as source material

Owing to the lack of literature on the history of Cornish wrestling, it has been necessary in this present study to adopt regional newspapers as a major source of evidence; in particular *The Sherborne Mercury* from 1737, which became *The Western Flying-Post* from 1749; *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* from 1801; *The West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser* from 1810.²¹ The greater part of the research was conducted by consulting *The West Briton*, which was chosen for four main reasons. Firstly, *The West Briton* was a county-wide newspaper which covered Cornish wrestling from its inception in 1810 and it has continued to do so ever since, albeit intermittently from the 1960s, which allowed the accumulation of a vast amount of evidence. Secondly, other local newspapers, such as *The Cornish Guardian* (1901 to date), *The Cornishman* (1878 to date), *The Cornish Times* (1857 to date), *The Cornubian* (1880-1925) and *The Redruth Times* (1867-1879) covered the sport but only occasionally, not over such a long period of time and certainly not on a county-wide basis. Thirdly, it was often the case that the same advertisement or the same report of a tournament or challenge match could be found in other newspapers; for example, virtually identical reports of the famous Cann versus Polkinghorne match, which occurred in October 1826, can be found in both *The West Briton* and *The Royal Cornwall Gazette*. Fourthly, given *The West Briton's* coverage of Cornish wrestling it can be used as a reasonably accurate 'barometer' of the state of the sport over a long period of time, whereas that might not have been possible by consulting a range of other more 'local' newspapers.

In a recent text on sport historiography, the author claims that it '...is not much of an exaggeration to say that sport history rests on newspapers as historical sources.'²² Hill corroborates this by stating that '[p]ress reports have become a staple – perhaps *the* staple – source in the task of reconstructing the history of sport and games.'²³ This is not

surprising when it is realised that, until fairly recently, the bulk of sport history was based on research into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in particular the Industrial Revolution and its immediate aftermath.²⁴ It was during this period that not only did ‘modern’ sports emerge and spread rapidly both socially and geographically across Britain, but also the transmission of news was transformed by new technology, which made it possible for newspapers to be produced quickly and cheaply for an increasingly literate market. The two were in a symbiotic relationship; sport helped sell newspapers and newspapers advertised, publicised and promoted sport.²⁵ Newspapers can therefore provide a rich source of evidence, not recorded anywhere else, which can act as a partial substitute for non-existent records or documents. This typically includes: announcements of forthcoming events, with dates, times and venues; reports of sports’ results and scores with names of participants, teams, coaches and officials; editorials or editorial comment within a report; letters from readers; and photographs, pictures, and cartoons.

However, it is acknowledged that there are major disadvantages with using newspapers, which largely surround the issue of reliability. Newspapers have been consistently criticised for their bias, as ‘...journalists invariably see the world and events through the eyes of the community for which the newspaper purports to speak,’²⁶ and may select stories based on their own preferences, which therefore influences the descriptions of events. In order to build a loyal readership and thus be able to sell more copies, newspapers target specific affiliations or social classes, in choice of content and particularly in editorials. Many early newspapers were often established for political purposes, which meant that the stories covered were selected or altered to meet a particular political agenda. The *West Briton*, for example was established in 1810, in order to ‘...mount a persistent campaign to publicise the cause of [Parliamentary] Reform in Cornwall,’²⁷ as its supporters felt they were not given a fair voice in the avowedly Tory, *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, established in 1801; for many years the two were bitter rivals, mirroring the national political landscape. This did not seem to have influenced their attitudes towards Cornish wrestling, however, as both covered the sport for many decades.

Historians also have to accept that it is not possible to recover all the past and therefore newspapers, similar to other sources of information, are only partial accounts, not complete records. Journalists may not see it all or forget important elements, but they

are writing tomorrow's news not history. There were often Cornish wrestling tournaments that were announced but not reported upon, presumably because they were not thought to be important enough, or there was competition for space. However, just because a tournament was not reported does not mean it did not happen.

Newspapers are also prone to inaccuracies. Some events may have been hastily reported to meet print deadlines and not checked for errors. Both *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* and *The West Briton* went to print on a Thursday or Friday in the nineteenth century, consequently if a wrestling tournament took place on a Monday or Tuesday, which was often the case the report had to be written relatively quickly to meet the deadline. In some cases a journalist may have misunderstood some aspects of the event, transcribed names incorrectly, or included distortions, either deliberately or unconsciously. However, newspapers can lose credibility and therefore custom if they regularly publish inaccuracies and therefore are careful to avoid it; bias is usually accepted, but not inaccuracies. Therefore historians usually accept some information such as notices, announcements, results and scores as reliable, although subject to human error, whereas they are suspicious of editorials, whilst at the same time regarding stories that reveal social moods as good evidence.²⁸

Newspapers printed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can also be difficult to analyse or interpret, often needing intensive interrogation to establish the 'truth'. For example, the wrestling journalist who witnessed a match held in Penzance in 1827, reported that '[i]t is gratifying to state, that amidst the vast concourse [estimated at 10,000 people] on the ground no quarrel whatever took place; the whole of the persons present being actuated by one feeling – to enjoy themselves...'²⁹ What is not clear is what motivated this statement. Was the journalist simply reporting what he saw, or was he commenting on a situation which was unusual or unexpected of such a large crowd? Was the journalist a member of the wrestling fraternity and therefore wished to give a good impression of the sport to counter the attacks by its opponents, who often criticised the behaviour of crowds? Can it be assumed from this that reports of matches that did not include comments of good behaviour of crowds, implied the opposite was true?

An associated problem is the issue of anonymity. Reports of Cornish wrestling matches that appeared in regional newspapers, even up to the Second World War, rarely, if ever

included the names of journalists. It is therefore unclear whether the reports were written by trained journalists employed by the newspapers, or if they were contributed by wrestling officials or even spectators. What is evident is occasionally the same report can be located in several newspapers; did the journalist sell his story to them all, or were these syndicated as is the custom today, or did newspapers plagiarise each other? The reliability of newspapers is therefore brought into question by the anonymity of journalists; can a report be trusted if the source is unknown?

It is clear from the foregoing commentary that newspapers can provide a rich and unrivalled source of evidence, which simply cannot be ignored by the serious historian. For some sports, such as Cornish wrestling, where there is an absence of alternative sources, constructing a history would be almost impossible without newspapers. However, the historian should not rely upon newspapers exclusively, but be constantly aware of the many problems associated with using them, be prepared to interrogate them thoroughly, and make every attempt to corroborate evidence from other sources, such as oral testimony, films and photographs and official documents and archives, where these are available. Some historians have criticised colleagues for using newspapers excessively and have exhorted them to make fuller use of archival material on the assumption that it produces better history.³⁰ However, archives are not without their problems; amongst other things they are not a complete record, but a selection of material considered to be 'worth' preserving as they are often governed by confidentiality and some documents have been deliberately removed or censored.³¹

Research was also conducted using sources deposited at Cornwall Record Office, which give some details of Cornish wrestling, including: papers of the Tremayne family of Heligan; estate accounts of the Godolphin family of Godolphin; records of the Buller family of Morval House; papers of the Rashleigh family of Croft Andrew; details of land leased by Harvey and Company of Hayle; and title deeds and leases held by the solicitors, Coode and French of St Austell. Also deposited in Cornwall Record Office were some papers belonging to the CWA, including a minute book dating from its inception in 1923 to 1959. This latter source could have proven to be an invaluable record of the early years of the organisation and the schism with the East Cornwall Wrestling Federation in the 1930s, unfortunately during the whole period of the research it was not available. It appears that sometime during the early 1990s the minute book had been removed from the Cornwall Record Office by a former official of the

CWA and lent to some person attempting to write a history of the organisation, but the current officials had no knowledge of its whereabouts.

Another potential source of information was oral testimony from individuals who had competed in Cornish wrestling tournaments as far back as the 1930s and 1940s, which could have not only illuminated the minutiae of the sport but also provided a ‘voice’ for the wrestlers. It was also assumed that it was likely that many of the wrestlers would have retained a range of interesting memorabilia pertaining to the sport. Unfortunately, despite being provided with the names and contact details of several ex-wrestlers by an officer of the CWA, they were all reluctant to agree to be interviewed and when pressed refused to cooperate.

Non-Cornish primary sources such as newspapers, diaries, letters and other sources were not widely used for the chapter dedicated to the diaspora, however, a number of secondary sources that include citations from extensive primary sources have been chosen, as they adequately illuminate Cornish wrestling and therefore provide a satisfactory alternative. For example, ‘classic’ texts such as those by Dawe, Dickason, Hopkins, Lingenfelter, Rowe and Todd³² are supplemented by reference to more recent scholarship, especially by Payton³³ and by authors whose articles are contained within the pages of *Cornish Studies*.³⁴

Structure of the thesis

In order to provide an adequate historical analysis of the development and survival of Cornish wrestling it is necessary to locate the sport within an appropriate conceptual framework. It is argued there are two fields of academic enquiry that are suitable for further analysis; mainstream British sport history, and what has been called the ‘new Cornish Studies’.³⁵ Chapter one investigates the ideas and debates that form the basis of both these areas and argues that British sport history can offer only a partial interpretation for the history of Cornish wrestling, and therefore it is proposed that a more suitable historical analysis is provided by the ‘new Cornish Studies’, in particular Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’. Each of the following chapters provides a detailed examination of one aspect of Cornish wrestling within the context of the ‘centre-periphery model’.

Chapter two explores the origins and myths of Cornish wrestling and using evidence from largely contemporary sources set against the background of the phase of 'First' or 'Older Peripheralism', within Payton's 'centre-periphery model', argues that there is enough evidence to conclude that the sport is Celtic; it is 'different', especially when compared with other sports; it was regarded as 'different' by non-Cornish commentators; and the Cornish took pride in this 'difference'.

Chapter three examines in detail the period from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century, which can be regarded as the 'Golden Age' of Cornish wrestling, closely associated with the growth of the Cornish economy, especially the copper and tin mining industry. This is also the phase of 'Second Peripheralism', within Payton's 'centre-periphery model', when Cornish wrestling developed as a major commercial enterprise in the early decades of the nineteenth century, reaching its zenith in the 1820s, characterised by large numbers of wrestlers competing for lucrative prizes in frequent tournaments and watched by thousands of spectators. Cornishmen took great pride in their achievements in the wrestling ring, which formed part of an assertive, vibrant identity, reflecting the 'Cousin Jack' myth. However, it was also a period when the sport was attacked by moral reformers, especially Methodists, who objected to its links with drinking, gambling and fighting.

Chapter four investigates the decline of Cornish wrestling from 1850 until 1914, which almost led to its disappearance, except for a minor revival in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This is also the period of the mature manifestation of 'Second Peripheralism' in Payton's 'centre-periphery model'. It is argued that the decline, which was characterised by a decrease in the number of tournaments, active wrestlers, prizes and spectators, can be attributed to five main causes: the 'Great Migration' leading to many thousands of wrestlers to leave Cornwall; the continual attacks by Methodists; the growth of counter-attractions; the prevalence of 'faggoting'; and the decrease in leisure time. It was also argued by some writers that the rules of the sport made it boring for spectators and only the dedicated few were interested enough to spend all day watching a tournament.

Chapter five explores the 'Great Migration' in detail, which is crucial in the understanding of the history of Cornwall, and its impact upon Cornish wrestling.

Thousands of young men, many of whom were wrestlers, migrated to a large number of

places outside Cornwall, establishing a complex network of transnational communities and almost everywhere they settled they wrestled in their free time. These places, where there is evidence of Cornish wrestling tournaments still taking place into the twentieth century, include Latin America, Canada and the USA, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and other parts of England and Wales.

Another feature of the mature manifestation of the phase of ‘Second Peripheralism’ within Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’ is the ‘Cornish Revival’ that was evident from the beginning of the twentieth century but especially in the inter-war period. Chapter six examines the revival of Cornish wrestling in this period, set against the background of the much wider ‘Cornish Revival’ and notes the influence of prominent personalities. The period is significant for the sport because of the formation of the Cornwall County Wrestling Association (CCWA) in 1923 and the introduction of a set of written rules, timed rounds, a points system, penalties for infringements and different weight categories. The CCWA also introduced a formal set of regular tournaments, which had the effect of increasing the number of active wrestlers. The revival of Cornish wrestling is epitomised by an appearance of a small group of wrestlers on the stage of the Palladium Theatre, London in 1926. Another significant feature of the period was the creation in 1928 of a series of wrestling tournaments against wrestlers from Brittany.

Finally, chapter seven examines the progress of Cornish wrestling since the Second World War, which is also the phase of ‘Third Peripheralism’ within Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’. The period is characterised by alternating years of decline and revival reflected in continuing funding shortages; the relative decline in the number of active wrestlers compared to the 1930s; and the attempts made by the Cornish Wrestling Association to introduce the sport to young men and develop their skills. Other significant features of the period are the rehabilitation of the Cornish Revival, especially since the 1970s; the interest taken by Cornish nationalists; the involvement of Cornish wrestlers in Celtic festivals and other cultural events. Recent developments, such as the revival of regular Inter-Celtic tournaments; the coaching of youngsters in north and west Cornwall; the use of new technology; and the adoption of sponsorship for tournaments all suggest Cornish wrestling can survive in the immediate future.

Before attempting to locate Cornish wrestling in an appropriate conceptual framework, it is important to stress that women are notable by their absence in this study. This is not

deliberate, but an inevitable consequence of sport being an essentially male institution. This accords with Holt who asserts that, '[t]he history of sport in modern Britain is a history of men.'³⁶ For him '...sport, both spectator and participant, has been central to the maintenance of male sociability in all classes,'³⁷ which has '...its own language, its initiation rites, and models of true masculinity...'³⁸ The '...shared masculine and community values...' was an important component of what made the popular culture of sport.³⁹ Metcalfe also found this to be the case in his study of sport in east Northumberland and he questions whether women actually enjoyed any free time as men did and suggests their history '...in the colliery villages awaits a researcher.'⁴⁰ Women do appear fleetingly in the history of Cornish wrestling, but largely from the early twentieth century; for example, in September 1907 at Summercourt the tournament was witnessed by 2,000 spectators, which was '...almost entirely composed of men,'⁴¹ and in his summary of the 1927 season in a Cornwall County Wrestling Association meeting the secretary, Mr F.J. Jago, noted that '[o]ne gratifying feature of the season had been the number of ladies who witnessed the various tournaments.'⁴² Women were also often asked to perform the role of prize-giver; for example, in August 1929 at Falmouth, the mayoress, Mrs J.W. Sawle, presented the prizes and remarked that '...she had never seen wrestling before, and it had come as an unexpected pleasure to her.'⁴³ However, for the most part women are invisible from the history of Cornish wrestling.

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- ³ See for example *Bell's Life in London*, 9th December 1827
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PART 1: ESTABLISHING THE TERRITORY

CHAPTER 1: British sport history and the ‘new Cornish Studies’

Introduction

In order to provide an adequate historical analysis of the development and survival of Cornish wrestling and to answer the research questions identified in the introduction, it is necessary to locate the sport within an appropriate conceptual framework. There are two fields of academic enquiry that are suitable for further analysis; mainstream British sport history, and what has been called the ‘new Cornish Studies’.¹ This chapter investigates the ideas and debates that form the basis of both these areas and argues that British sport history can offer only a partial interpretation for the history of Cornish wrestling, and therefore it is proposed that a more suitable historical analysis is provided by the ‘new Cornish Studies’, in particular Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’, which is central to it.

British sport history

It is important to stress from the outset that British sport history does not present one conceptual framework but a plethora of approaches. For example, in a recent text on sport historiography, the author reports there is much disagreement amongst sport historians about their subject, concerning such fundamental things as the objectives of history, the meaning of facts, the role of theory and the most appropriate research methods.² Borrowing from the ideas of Munslow,³ Booth suggests that the differing epistemological assumptions held by sport historians can be categorised according to three models of historical enquiry; reconstructionism, which is based upon empirical evidence gleaned from primary sources; constructionism, which also relies upon empirical evidence but gives primacy to theory; and deconstructionism, which rejects grand narratives in sport history, questions the notion that it can ever be truly objective and favours a relativist approach which promotes multiple interpretations associated with *a* history, rather than *the* history of a given topic. Although most sport historians use an a-theoretical, reconstructionist model, which they regard as ‘practical realism’,⁴ increasingly some are willing to embrace elements of constructionism and more recently a few historians have explored the potential of deconstructionism for illuminating the subject.⁵ Moreover, Booth suggests that in addition to adopting one of these three models, sport historians work within seven ‘explanatory paradigms’, traditional narrative, advocacy, comparison, causation, social change, context and new

culture. In practice most sport historians adopt more than one paradigm, often dependent upon the preferred model of historical enquiry.

Despite the variety of models and paradigms, it is possible to identify a relatively coherent and interrelated set of historical themes and debates, which form the basis of a framework, within which Cornish wrestling can be located. Arguably the most prevalent debate in British sport history, which has been influential in directing attention at the reasons why sports change over time and therefore relevant here, is that surrounding the 'pre-modern/modern model'. The model proposes that traditional or 'pre-modern' sports were transformed by various social and cultural pressures into 'modern' sports with rules, regular competitions and bureaucracies.

'Pre-modern' sports

There is a relatively broad consensus amongst historians that the mid-nineteenth century was a defining moment in the history of sport in Britain, when the 'modern' sports that emerged, were fundamentally different in both scale and characteristics, compared with those from an earlier period. There was, '[a] remarkable range of popular games and contests [...] played and enjoyed in Britain before the advent of modern sport,'⁶ some associated with a particular holiday, others practised at various times throughout the year. The most notable, which '...had probably existed for generations,'⁷ included blood sports, such as the baiting of badgers, bears and bulls, bull-running, throwing at cocks, cock-fighting and dog-fighting, 'field sports' (ie hunting, shooting and fishing); athletic sports such as mob football, cricket, pugilism, wrestling, foot races and pedestrian contests, cudgelling, backsword and singlestick; and other pastimes such as bell-ringing, quoits, skittles and nine-pins, and horse-racing. By the mid-eighteenth century, '...these traditional recreations in England were thriving, deeply rooted and widely practiced.'⁸

What were the characteristics of these 'pre-modern' sports? 'Pre-modern' sports and other recreational activities, variously described as 'popular recreations',⁹ 'mediaeval sports',¹⁰ 'folk sports',¹¹ and 'pre-industrial sports',¹² were characterised by five main factors: part of a rural festive culture; local in nature; witnessed by large and at times poorly behaved crowds; dependent upon the patronage of others; and tolerated by those in authority. The rural festive culture occurred at times that were based on a long-established holiday calendar, which was largely determined by the major ecclesiastical

celebrations, often associated with pagan traditions and the seasonal rhythms of agriculture, which involved cycles of labour, with intervals between the completion of one set of tasks and the start of another.¹³ Despite the fact that the majority of the pre-industrial population lived in villages, England was not entirely rural (eg the population of London in 1700 was approximately 500,000), with a number of ‘pre-modern’ sports, such as blood sports and mob football also found in urban locations.¹⁴

The most important occasions for sports were annual parish feasts, major religious festivities, markets and fairs, and secular celebrations, which were ‘...widely established and broadly accepted by all levels of English society.’¹⁵ Annual parish feasts, also known as ‘wakes’¹⁶, or ‘revels’, were major recreational events, which were very popular and widespread throughout the country. Feasts were celebrated at the anniversary of the parish church’s dedication, usually on the Sunday after the saint’s feast day, although many were not, as they tended to be seasonally concentrated, so as to suit the agricultural year. The two most important periods were the temporary relaxation between the spring sowing of crops and the summer harvest in late spring – early summer, and the completion of the corn harvest in late summer – early autumn, although winter ‘...allowed more respite from normal labour than any other part of the year.’¹⁷ Feasts usually began on a Sunday with a special religious celebration and continued as a largely secular event for either part, or sometimes the whole of the following week. Apart from substantial eating and drinking, usually to excess, they often included a wide range of sports and recreations and by the eighteenth century had become, ‘...predominantly secular festivals; the religious rites, when they did survive, were usually confined to a special service on the Sunday...’¹⁸

Although there were at least 150 major religious feasts in the medieval calendar, the major ecclesiastical celebrations, which were widely observed and marked by special customs and rituals in different locations and accompanied by sports, included Christmas, Shrovetide, Eastertide and Whitsuntide.¹⁹ These are festivals ‘...which have stubbornly remained, through massive shifts in thought, belief, and attitude, in social structure, and in the systems of labour and leisure.’²⁰ Whitsuntide ‘...along with Christmas and Easter, were probably the most widely observed of the yearly celebrations.’²¹ Whitsuntide in particular represented the high point of the sporting year, with a wide range of sports and a large number of fairs concentrated at or around this time.²²

Sports were played on all Sundays and holy days, they tended to occupy at least one full day and often beyond that, and were arranged for when people were most likely to attend, which was not usually Saturday, as this was *the* working day of the week, when most workers were paid.²³ Monday was the nearest weekday to the previous wages and some disposable income remained, and therefore was the most popular day to devote to recreation, followed by Tuesday. Monday was also the day for unofficial holidays, often called 'St Monday' (and sometimes followed by 'Holy Tuesday'), which some workers regularly observed, although '[w]henver there was a day for amusement, people sought to fill it to the brim.'²⁴ Compared to today there was no clear distinction between work and leisure.²⁵

Fairs provided another occasion when sports took place, the majority of which '...were primarily concerned with commercial functions ...but a good many of them were also treated as pleasure fairs, and in a few cases pleasure provided their main rationale.'²⁶ Apart from stalls selling food and drink, the activities included the familiar sports of the day; major commercial entertainments such as a circus; and a whole array of amusements from music and dance to curiosities such as drolls, legerdemains and mountebanks.²⁷ Although fairs took place throughout the year, they were generally seasonally concentrated, similar to feasts, with autumn being a popular time, as it provided a temporary respite from agricultural labour. Many workers spent some of their disposable income on pleasure or on merchandise at fairs, as they had more money than usual, having been paid at the end of their contract period.²⁸ These were also the times when 'statute' or 'hiring' fairs (also known as 'mops'), occurred, when servants were traditionally hired, but by the late eighteenth century they had become simply labour exchanges. They were widely established, important as social occasions and were '...always observed as festive events.'²⁹

There were also other notable celebrations and events of a secular nature, which were occasions for sports often held on church land and always accompanied by excessive eating and drinking.³⁰ Plough Monday, which served as a major holiday for farm labourers occurred on the first Monday after Twelfth Day.³¹ Church ales consisted of either the free distribution of ale by churchwardens, commonly at quarter days,³² in order to 'persuade' tenants to pay their rent or rates, or to make a profit from the sale of ale to be used for church repairs and to distribute as alms to the poor of the parish. May

Day, like many ecclesiastical festivities, was originally pagan, in this case a celebration of and intervention in the process of fertility of crops, with an element of magic, but by the mid-eighteenth century was a wholly local, village-centred and secular affair.

Midsummer's Day was also originally pagan, celebrating the summer solstice, which largely lapsed when the calendar was adjusted by eleven days in 1752. The completion of the corn harvest was usually accompanied by a dinner for the labourers, provided by employers, which '...must have been one of the most widely observed of all the calendar festivities'.³³ There was also a whole array of activities specific to a locality.

For many workers in pre-industrial Britain, work was more intermittent than today, with nothing like a regular working week or even day, allowing abundant, if spasmodic leisure time, often spent on sports and other recreations, which were linked to rural life and benefiting from the extensive use of land.³⁴ Although the weather and seasons affected many occupations, such as farming, fishing and textile trades, many workers, particularly independent craftsmen, could choose the intensity and hours of work. Vamplew warned against exaggerating the amount of idleness, however, as many workers did other things in slack times, in order to supplement their meagre incomes, although workers often chose leisure, rather than work for extra money.³⁵ It must also be noted that the Bank of England closed for 47 days in the late eighteenth century.³⁶

As the majority of the population lived in villages, with popular recreations enclosed within them, geographical isolation compounded by the lack of effective communication meant that 'pre-modern' sports were protected from outside influences. Consequently they were of local significance only, with no national sports in the 'modern' sense and a great variety of regional and sub-regional differences. It also meant that there was little or no opportunity for individuals to earn a national reputation, or to receive money payments for participation.³⁷

An important feature of all popular recreations was the size, composition and behaviour of the largely plebeian crowds that gathered in a crude pursuit of sensual pleasure. Although it was almost impossible to accurately estimate the numbers, they were often very large and swelled by those from other parishes; were difficult to control, with organisers resorting to employing men with whips or hiking up prices to discourage the rabble; often frequented by pick-pockets and extortionists. They also comprised of a wide spectrum of society, with a mixture of generations, sexes and classes, although

attempts were made to separate the gentry or nobility from the masses. According to Ford, '[t]here is much evidence that sporting crowds behaved in a generally disorderly fashion, or at least that sections of them frequently did.'³⁸ The poor behaviour of crowds was partly the result of excessive drinking, which frequented most if not all holiday events,³⁹ as '[r]ural sport and alcohol have been longstanding companions.'⁴⁰

Although some sports were organised by people autonomously, many others were '...at least partly dependent on the patronage, or interest or acquiescence of persons with greater authority, usually the gentry.'⁴¹ Patronage was traditionally expected as one of the major paternalistic social obligations of the gentry to the communities they headed or *noblesse oblige*.⁴² This may have involved the granting as a privilege the longstanding custom of allowing private land to be used for sport, or be conspicuously displayed by the largess of donating and presenting prizes for sporting contests, or in providing food, drink and entertainment at a harvest dinner, or a special occasion such as a royal wedding. Some sports were patronised by the gentry for their own interest, such as horse racing, prize-fighting or cricket, with gambling being a major attraction, as they '...were seldom inclined to support a popular diversion very eagerly unless they could bet on its outcome.'⁴³

Patronage was also provided by publicans, who were important, and often, essential promoters of sports.⁴⁴ With the knowledge that a holiday crowd could be potential business, publicans actively organised sports and pastimes, provided prize money, or acted as stakeholders, and often sold alcohol from stalls or tents at sports events, such as race meetings. It was also customary to expect the victors to spend at least a portion of their winnings on alcohol. In many sports, such as cockfighting, matches were held in buildings belonging to the publican, and in village cricket it was common to use the inn's field. Not only was the alehouse one of the few permanent locations available for sports, at a time when there was a distinct lack of alternative purpose-built facilities, but also the publican was one of the few in a community to provide organised activities, ranging from cards and music, to blood sports, the latter providing '...much of the focus for pub entertainment...'⁴⁵ The alehouse also acted as an important meeting place where negotiations were held to discuss arrangements for a match, to hand over stake money, and to present the winnings.

Even if they were not personally interested in any activity ‘...the dominant attitude of the gentry towards the recreations of the people seems to have been one of acquiescence or tolerance.’⁴⁶ Many authority figures, who were rurally based and dependent for their power on a combination of consent and coercion, tolerated ‘pre-modern’ sports as they were regarded as part of the customary way of life; an important element of social control; and ‘...a safety valve to reduce tension built up during the working year...’⁴⁷ They were also seen as harmless amusements, which could temporarily avert the minds of the masses from any subversive ideas and therefore the chances of quiescence were greatly increased; especially effective when everybody could be seen and *largess* displayed. Even expressions of irreverence or even hostility against those with power, privilege and status exhibited at feasts and fairs seem to have been tolerated.⁴⁸ Some activities such as cudgelling, pugilism and wrestling were also regarded as militarily useful, as they helped to develop manliness and discourage effeminacy. In their own pastimes, which were deliberately exclusive, the gentry used the occasions to demonstrate their social superiority, to confirm and reinforce the status quo, and most importantly to ensure they were witnessed ‘...by an audience of lesser men, and to elicit a sense of awe and deference from these admiring [...] spectators...’⁴⁹

Other characteristics of ‘pre-modern’ sports identified in the literature were physical violence; gambling; the lack of spatial and temporal limits; and the lack of formal organisation and rules. According to Holt, ‘[b]y the standards of our day the level of violence tolerated in sports was remarkable,’ and ‘...fighting in its various forms was part of the everyday life of male youth...’⁵⁰ Many recreations entailed deliberately inflicting injuries on opponents, such as cudgelling,⁵¹ whereas others involved more casual violence, particularly in ‘mob’ football.⁵² However, not all popular recreations were characterised by violence; for example cricket, rowing and quoits, were relatively tame by comparison.

Gambling was the *raison d’être* for many recreations, with some activities such as cricket, golf and horse-racing being organised from the early eighteenth century largely for wagering rather than for the physical exercise, with rules to ensure fairness and therefore more appealing to gamblers.⁵³ Some sports cut across class lines, most did not, but gambling linked all strata of society with a common compulsion. Although the masses were only able to bet small amounts, the wealthy who owned horses and cocks,

and patronised prize-fighters, athletes and cricket teams, often gambled heavy sums, which provided the status symbol of conspicuous consumption.⁵⁴

Although an over-simplification, there were few venues in pre-industrial Britain that were specifically reserved for sport. Most sports took place on unspecialised land with vague or ill-defined spatial limits; often churchyards and roads were utilised. Sporting landscapes also had multi-cultural functions, often with a variety of activities taking place at the same venue on the same day.⁵⁵ Similarly, there were no fixed limits on the timing of activities;⁵⁶ often available daylight dictated the duration.

'Pre-modern' sports also had a 'diffuse, informal organisation implicit in the local structure',⁵⁷ with a lack of formal institutions that organised, governed or controlled activities; many simply occurred spontaneously. Rules when they existed were simple, unwritten and customary, transmitted orally from generation to generation, and consequently created much regional variation in the same activity.⁵⁸

'Pre-modern' sports under attack

There is also a broad consensus amongst historians that from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, 'pre-modern' sports and other recreations '...which had once been tolerated came to be questioned and sometimes heartily condemned',⁵⁹ until by 1914 many which had been widespread had become less important in the life of the nation, or had been radically transformed, whilst others disappeared completely. One of the most persistent themes in the history of sport is the debate concerning the effects of the Industrial Revolution upon the degree of sporting activity amongst the working class, from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries.⁶⁰ Tranter observed that the earliest historians of sport viewed the transformations in society, resulting from the twin processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, with its attendant population growth, as harmful to sport. This pessimistic interpretation, most robustly argued by Malcolmson, suggested the '...foundations of many traditional practices were relentlessly swept away, leaving a vacuum...'⁶¹ and as there were few alternatives, the gap in provision was temporarily filled by the public house, until new forms of leisure, including 'modern' sports, emerged after 1850.

The 'vacuum theory' has been rejected by historians of sport in more recent research, who demonstrate that although the attacks on popular recreations is beyond dispute,

there is little empirical evidence to indicate a significant decline. The theory rests on limited evidence based on an incomplete selection of sources; has questionable reliability; is concerned with what is atypical, irregular and large-scale, especially the most brutal activities; it reflects the opinions of men who were antagonistic to popular recreations; relates more to the larger cities and manufacturing towns; and includes a distorted interpretation of the Industrial Revolution.⁶² It has also been suggested it is only a partial theory as its proponents concentrated on major discontinuities and ignored some continuities (eg horse racing);⁶³ they concentrated on the growth of organised team games, but overlooked those activities that did not fit their definition of 'sport';⁶⁴ and they lack the dates of the cause and effect of the undermining of 'pre-modern' sports.⁶⁵ According to Holt '...to understand how far things did *not* change is just as important as understanding the extent to which they did.'⁶⁶ Thus, which 'pre-modern' sports were subjected to attack?

The suppression of 'pre-modern' sports and other recreations was primarily class biased, as the customs that were most vigorously attacked were largely those devoted to pleasure and popular with ordinary people, such as blood sports, mob football, prize-fights, feasts and fairs. The '[s]harpest and most sustained attack on traditional sports focused on activities involving the baiting and killing of tethered animals,'⁶⁷ as they were regarded by reformers as unsporting and unfair; were easy targets for suppression as they had only a working class following; tempted men from their work; encouraged gambling and indolence; and often led to brawling and riot. Eventually the opposition to blood sports, led by various voluntary groups with animal welfare as their *raison d'être*,⁶⁸ was successful in pressurising Parliament to pass the Cruelty to Animals Act in 1835, which prohibited all baiting of animals, including the keeping of cockpits. This was followed by the gradual decline of other blood sports, including cockfighting, which was outlawed in 1849.

Football matches, prize fights, feasts and fairs all involved the gathering of large, badly behaved, boisterous and often drunken crowds, which were therefore condemned largely for the perceived danger posed by the breakdown of law and order and the resultant damage that might be inflicted upon private property, although as Whannel has observed '...recorded histories often disapproved of popular pastimes and so exaggerated the less savoury elements.'⁶⁹ Football matches, particularly the major holiday events were opposed as they disturbed the normal routine of business, and those

that used public thoroughfares were banned under the Highways Act, 1835. The annual mob football match in Derby, for example was suppressed as it was not only inconvenient to and incompatible with local commerce, with banks and shops closed for two days and windows boarded up, but it was also considered politically necessary as large gatherings of working class people could damage property or be attracted to subversive activities; the American and French Revolutions being relatively fresh in the memories.⁷⁰ The authorities also attempted to suppress feasts, hiring and pleasure fairs, which came in for special criticism, as not only did they involve the problems associated with large numbers, but they were also regarded as licentious, involving too many opportunities for drunkenness, debauchery and sexual indulgence and involved common people in financial extravagance and time-wasting. The only other popular recreation regularly criticised from the late eighteenth century onwards, was prize-fighting, as it involved large numbers of unruly spectators, who were attracted by the opportunities it offered for gambling and the spectacle of severe beatings endured by the participants, which occasionally led to deaths.⁷¹

Who opposed 'pre-modern' sports and what were their motives? In the vanguard of the attacks were local authorities, employers and the evangelical movement. Local authorities, with magistrates and support from Parliament, not only prohibited football matches and prize-fights and other large gatherings of people likely to lead to a breach of the peace, but also refused to issue licences for events such as fairs and issued punitive fines or ordered arrests for those that chose to ignore the restrictions.⁷² Magistrates were assisted in this endeavour by parish constables and the new police force, formed in 1829, who enforced the law against blood sports; closely monitored working class entertainment by patrolling fairgrounds and race-tracks; stopped mob football and other local nuisances from the streets; and arrested people for disorder, drunkenness and rowdyism.⁷³

Industrial employers were concerned with efficiency and labour discipline, as work had become not only '...the dominant Victorian social ideal...',⁷⁴ but also the predominant implement of social control. In the early nineteenth century industrial capitalism had imposed new demands on the lives of workers, '...geared to the needs of factory production.'⁷⁵ To ensure that the maximum use was made of the huge investments in fixed capital of extensive machinery housed in large buildings, made possible by technological inventions, work had to be continuous and intensive, with twelve hour

days over six days a week being a common experience for men, women and children.⁷⁶ In order to create the work ethic that this necessitated, the lives of the workers had to be radically transformed, including their leisure time, although this was no easy task as industrial labour was scarce in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and therefore discipline difficult. Irregular timekeeping and the loss of working time, due to the numerous holidays, heavy drinking and the habit of celebrating ‘St Monday’ (and ‘Holy Tuesday’), was a hindrance to effective labour and thus incompatible with the objective of making a profit. In order to prevent workers taking holidays, attending festivities, gambling and getting drunk, employers adopted the strategy of ensuring working hours were long with few breaks, punctuality compulsory and wages low, thus leaving little time or disposable income for leisure, which led to the desired increase in attendance and productivity.⁷⁷ As industrial employees spent so much time at work, it resulted in a dramatic reduction in the occasions for popular recreations, especially the number of holidays,⁷⁸ feasts and fairs, and even when workers had some time off they had little energy or desire to maintain rural traditions.

The natural ally of employers in the attack against popular recreations was the evangelical movement, which supported the basic tenets of industrial capitalism.⁷⁹ Popular recreations were condemned not only because they distracted men from their basic duties of hard work and devotion to family,⁸⁰ but also because they provided ordinary people with too many opportunities for temptation and encouraged them to be idle, thriftless and hedonistic; were rooted in both pagan and papist practices; interfered with the worship of true believers; and the pursuit of pleasure was a stumbling block to salvation. Evangelical Christians, which included all denominations, targeted irrational popular entertainment, such as those that attracted large boisterous, disorderly crowds, especially at feasts and fairs, and gratuitous cruelty to animals.⁸¹ Evangelicalism was effective at weakening traditional recreations from the 1830s onwards, notably with the growth of Methodism, and especially the more populist form of Primitive Methodism, which appealed to working class communities, particularly those chapels that were democratic and offered people some measure of independence.⁸² According to Cunningham, ‘[t]he Wesleys attacked and confronted the old popular culture from the moment they started open-air preaching in 1739.’⁸³ In order to dissuade people away from what were regarded as licentious and wicked activities Methodists used a range of counter-attractions, such as revival meetings and seaside trips. These were targeted mainly at families, although the greatest impact was on children through the Sunday

Schools' movement, which did much to advance working class literacy.⁸⁴ Methodists were also concerned with drunkenness and became closely associated with the temperance movement, which was a broad amalgam of individuals and groups that promoted the moderation of drinking amongst the working class. Some in the movement sought total abstinence from alcohol, most notably the Independent Order of Rechabites. Evangelicalism was also closely linked to Sabbatarianism, which became a key struggle throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially for the established church, as many 'pre-modern' sports and secular festivities occurred on Sundays and some even took place on church land. Feasts in particular received severe criticism, as they had largely departed from their religious origins and become wholly secular events and therefore could no longer be justified. The Church of England promoted Sunday as a sacred day, sought to maintain traditional observance, and also withdrew its support for what it regarded as profane popular recreations.

The opposition to 'pre-modern' sports and other recreations was indicative of a general transformation of attitudes within society at large, made more effective by the interlocking membership of key institutions, such as chapel, school and workplace.⁸⁵ By the late eighteenth century the upper and middle classes no longer tolerated many sports, as they were regarded as vulgar, brutal, uncivilised and at odds with social propriety, there was a growing consideration for improvement in manners and tastes and consequently removed their patronage.⁸⁶ The general change in attitude has been described as the 'civilizing process' by Norbert Elias, who traced the development of societies in Western Europe from the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century and noted a gradual development towards more civilised behaviour, together with an increase in the pressure on people to use more self-control over their feelings and emotions, related to a lowering of the 'threshold of repugnance' towards acts of violence. Elias conjectured that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was an acceleration, or 'civilizing spurt' in the 'civilizing process' leading to a reconsideration of people's attitudes towards the more violent popular recreations, especially blood sports, mob football and prize fighting, which were now regarded as morally unacceptable.⁸⁷

Although the transformation of attitudes largely permeated society from above, popular manners were also changing from below with a '...gradual shift in public taste especially amongst the literate and more highly skilled elite...'⁸⁸ An artisan subculture

linked to trade unionism and secular radicalism emphasised sobriety, education, self-discipline, egalitarianism and especially respectability; opposed popular recreations as preventing progress; sought to develop the working class through reason; and created, with the assistance of middle class liberals, a range of institutions for moral and intellectual self-improvement, such as mechanics institutes, friendly and debating societies.⁸⁹

What was the effect of the opposition to 'pre-modern' sports? The weight of evidence suggests that a wide range of 'pre-modern' sports were '...still vibrant and pulsating, in defiance of the pressures [they] encountered',⁹⁰ and survived longer than previously supposed, often into and beyond the nineteenth century. For a whole range of sports, there was '...growth, or at worst, stability rather than persistent pronounced decline.'⁹¹ Some activities, such as cricket, gambling, horse-racing, pedestrianism and prize-fighting did not simply survive but grew in popularity, some even into the early decades of the twentieth century, largely on a regional basis, without the patronage of the gentry or nobility.⁹² Holt suggests that although most sports were more respectable than previously its pleasures remained deeply traditional, especially drinking and gambling.⁹³ The evidence demonstrates that '...although the immediate impact of the Industrial Revolution was to reduce the opportunities to organise sport, it remained deeply embedded within the culture of the working classes.'⁹⁴

The attempts to totally suppress popular recreations can be regarded as largely unsuccessful except the banning of blood and violent sports, although these did continue in defiance of the authorities, even in industrialised, mechanised, factorised areas.⁹⁵ Bull-running in Stamford took 50 years to be finally abolished in 1840.⁹⁶ Following several attempts during the eighteenth century, street football was not abolished in Derby until the 1850s⁹⁷ and in Kingston-upon-Thames it did not finally end until 1867.⁹⁸ Bull-baiting in Birmingham did not fade away but had to be forcibly suppressed by magistrates and police in the late 1830s.⁹⁹ Cockfighting continued in some parts of Scotland until the 1850s,¹⁰⁰ was still common in the enclosed and isolated mining communities of south Northumberland until the 1870s¹⁰¹ and survived in Birmingham late into the nineteenth century.¹⁰² Dog-fighting, ratting, hare and rabbit coursing were prevalent in some districts and among some working class communities until the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰³

Although the opposition to ‘pre-modern’ sports was not that effective, they were adversely affected by the lack of space, caused by the transformation in agricultural practice, introduced from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, in particular the enclosure movement and other changes to the breeding of animals and the growing of crops. Although enclosure, which led to the gradual transformation of the rural economy and involved the privatisation of previously common land, occurred in England from the twelfth century onwards in a rather piecemeal fashion, it gathered pace from the seventeenth century and, aided by government legislation, was largely complete by the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁴ Agriculture was also transformed by the selective breeding of animals with desirable genetic qualities leading to bigger and more profitable livestock; the mechanisation of some tasks leading to improved efficiency and reduced costs, partly by the reduction of the workforce; and the four-field crop rotation system allowing farmers to grow fodder crops in previously fallow fields, which led to both increased crop and livestock production. As a result of these changes, part of what is known as the Agrarian Revolution, agriculture became increasingly commercialised with capitalist landowners, many of whom were industrialists who had purchased large, enclosed estates, growing more interested in productivity and the efficient use of resources and were less likely to allow any fields to be used for customary activities such as mob football.¹⁰⁵ Following enclosure many popular recreations that needed open fields simply ceased, as there were no suitable alternatives available.

The lack of suitable open space for popular recreations was a problem not only in rural locations, but also in the industrial towns that developed during the Industrial Revolution, which during the early nineteenth century were starting to grow hugely, due in no small part to the internal migration of unemployed, landless labourers created by the changes in agriculture, who were now looking for work. This process of rapid urbanisation was accompanied by a massive growth in population. In 1750 the population of England was estimated at only 5.74 million; in 1801 it had increased to 8.3 million, with approximately 30% living in towns; by 1851 it had grown to 16.8 million, with the majority living in towns; and in 1901 it had nearly doubled again to 30.5 million, with 75% living in towns exceeding 5,000 people and 50% in towns exceeding 100,000. In the period 1800 to 1850, when the population as a whole doubled, many towns, such as Manchester and Leeds, trebled or quadrupled, and Bradford alone grew from 13,000 to 108,000.¹⁰⁶ By the mid-nineteenth century most of

the open space previously used for recreation, had been swallowed up by the expanding towns and the use of public thoroughfares as an alternative setting was banned. Consequently those people who had migrated from the countryside had to abandon their old recreational habits, which they had brought with them, as they were not only inappropriate and irrational in urban locations, but also impossible to practice.

Why was the opposition to 'pre-modern' sports and the occasions when they took place largely unsuccessful? This can be explained by five main factors. Firstly, they continued to be supported by a broad spectrum of people from all social classes; no social group was homogenous in its attitudes. Some employers encouraged sports by willingly closing factories to allow workers to attend important matches;¹⁰⁷ many gentlemen landowners still practised old-fashioned paternalism and regarded patronage of working class sport as one of their responsibilities;¹⁰⁸ some sports such as horse-racing had cross-class support with significant middle class involvement;¹⁰⁹ religious fanatics were often 'manhandled' by rough elements of the working class at horse races and fairs;¹¹⁰ traditionalists with an atavistic outlook wanted the revival of holy days and the sports that went with them.¹¹¹ This mixed alliance defended the rights of people to enjoy their sports by arguing that it kept the poor content; was a useful safety valve for letting off steam; brought the classes closer together and helped communal solidarity; promoted martial qualities and patriotism; and prevented effeminacy.¹¹² Where patronage was withdrawn, especially of blood sports, the gap in provision was often replaced by a variety of groups, particularly publicans, but also those with reputable commercial and business backgrounds, men from the very same class who were most vociferous in their opposition to popular recreations.¹¹³

Secondly, the decrease in available recreational space caused mainly by enclosure was indicative of changing social relations in the countryside, which was marked by an increased antagonism between classes. Landowners developed their own leisure pursuits, such as hunting, shooting and fishing, which deliberately excluded the working class; they ceased granting as a privilege the use of their private property for such activities as gleaning in fields and gathering fuel;¹¹⁴ and abandoned their traditional role as the principal patrons of popular recreations.¹¹⁵ This can be seen as part of a general trend towards a tightening of control over the lives of ordinary people, which also included a penal code, that punished individuals severely for relatively minor offences; punitive Game Laws, which regulated the right to pursue and kill certain kinds of wild

animals; and the Combination Laws, which prohibited trade unionism and collective bargaining.¹¹⁶

Thirdly, the 'vacuum theory' relates more to the largest and fastest developing urban, industrialised areas rather than those locations where the economy remained predominantly agricultural or based in rural areas.¹¹⁷ The Industrial Revolution is now thought to be more evolutionary, with more gradual changes stretched over long periods and was regional in extent rather than nationwide, largely confined to certain industries and in particular locations.¹¹⁸ Although the majority of the population of England lived in towns in 1851, agriculture was still important, being the single largest employer of labour; the small county town was typical of urban life; the agrarian changes were not rapid or widespread; and some of the old activities could therefore be accommodated, where space for recreation was rarely a problem.¹¹⁹ In some rural locations many 'pre-modern' sports, such as knur-and-spell¹²⁰ and Scottish hurling, which '...were part of a customary life that was still vital and popular,'¹²¹ flourished as strongly as ever.

Fourthly, spectators continued to find the time to watch many 'pre-modern' sports; the '...underlying conflict of the period was less one between leisure and work than between the official and unofficial calendars.'¹²² Despite the many pressures on time, large crowds still attended sports, arranged for when spectators were most likely to attend, which for three of the most popular, horse racing, cricket and prize-fighting, meant Monday or Tuesday.¹²³ Even in the strictest of work environments, factory commissioners reported that industrial workers took extended holidays and customary breaks, especially 'St Mondays', although some of these were involuntary due to such things as a seasonal fall-off in trade.¹²⁴ The practice of taking 'St Monday' was also reported by Reid, who noted that amongst skilled men in some of the small workshops and heavier trades in Birmingham, it survived well into the second half of the nineteenth century, although it gradually became known by the pejorative, 'shackling day' (ie shackled or impaired by drink).¹²⁵ Huggins also observed that working class attendance at race meetings during the working week continued until the end of the nineteenth century, with local industries being forced to shut down.¹²⁶

Lastly, as far as blood sports were concerned, their survival was partly a problem of enforcement as policing was too ineffective to suppress them completely; in some cases the police were ambushed and stoned;¹²⁷ most people disregarded the law; and

magistrates were reluctant to prosecute spectators at prize-fights as members of riotous assemblies when they included in their number members of the gentry.¹²⁸

'Modern' sports

Although some popular recreations survived, even into the twentieth century, the emergence of 'modern' sports has been referred to as a 'revolution', whose distinguishing features are an increase in the range of sports being played, with a consequent rise in the numbers of participants; an increase in the numbers of spectators, especially at football matches; and the spread in the extent of sports, both geographically and in the social composition of the participants.¹²⁹ Consequently sport became largely national in scope and de-localized.¹³⁰ Lowerson noted the phenomenal rise in the number of sports clubs that were formed in the second half of the nineteenth century, which varied between the sport and the region,¹³¹ although statistics suggest playing organised sport was largely a minority activity compared with the numbers of spectators.¹³²

What were the characteristics of this 'revolution'? There were three main characteristics. Firstly bureaucratic national governing bodies were created in a wide range of sports, which introduced formal, standardised, written rules; established regular regional and national league and cup competitions; regulated their sports through officials; and enforced fair play and discipline. McIntosh noted that of the earliest national governing bodies of sport, the majority were established in a relatively short period of time (see table 1.1). In some cases similar organisational arrangements were introduced in order to regulate international competitions, which saw the initial developments in globalisation.

Secondly, there was an increase in commercialisation. Despite many failures in commercialised sport, recreational entrepreneurs responded to the growth of concentrated urbanised markets and the rise in working class spending power, by investing heavily in building enclosed leisure facilities, where gate money was charged, such as football stadia, in order to attract mass audiences and maximise profits.¹³³ By the beginning of the twentieth century sport had become a major industry, with an increase in the number of professional sportsmen; the adoption of company status by sports such as cricket, golf, horse racing and football; and the employment of many people in areas such as the manufacture of sports equipment.¹³⁴

Table 1.1: The earliest national governing bodies of sport (adapted from McIntosh)¹³⁵

Sport	Earliest National Organisation	Date
Horse-racing	Jockey Club	c.1750
Golf	Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews	1754
Cricket	Marylebone Cricket Club	1788
Mountaineering	Alpine Club	1857
Archery	Grand National Archery Society	1861
Association Football	Football Association	1863
Swimming	Amateur Metropolitan Swimming Association	1869
Rugby Union	Rugby Football Union	1871
Sailing	Yacht Racing Association	1875
Cycling	Bicyclists' Union	1878
Athletics	Amateur Athletics Association	1880
Rowing	Metropolitan Rowing Association	1879
Skating	National Skating Association of Great Britain	1879
Boxing	Amateur Boxing Association	1884
Hockey (field)	Hockey Association	1886
Lawn Tennis	Lawn Tennis Association	1888
Lawn Bowls	Scottish Bowling Association	1892
Badminton	Badminton Association of England	1893
Rugby League	Northern Rugby Football Union	1895
Association Croquet	Croquet Association	1896
Fencing	Amateur Fencing Association	1898

Thirdly, spatial and temporal standardisation became the norm. Bale noted that the transformation from 'pre-modern' to 'modern' sport necessitated the creation of separate and specialised environments, isolated from everyday life, where space is more confined and standardised; what he termed mono-cultural 'sportsapes'.¹³⁶ The ultimate form of modernity for Bale was 'placelessness', where the parameters of space are identical irrespective of location or environment, with boundaries clearly defined and precisely measured. Even water became subject to increasing containment and control.¹³⁷ Time also became standardised and quantified, with fixed limits measured precisely. Brailsford observed that the periods of time spent playing or watching sport in the second half of the nineteenth century, compared with earlier, were not only greatly reduced, but also concentrated within Saturday afternoons, a pattern that remained for the next century.¹³⁸ A clear distinction between work and leisure time was also recognised.

Furthermore, several historians have attempted to develop typologies that classify the characteristics of modern sports. Guttmann’s classification, which was derived from Max Weber’s analysis of the transition from traditional to modern society, is based on distinguishing the characteristics of modern sports contrasted with those of primitive society, classic civilisations (Greece and Rome are treated separately) and mediaeval society. He concluded there are seven systematically inter-related formal structural characteristics, which modern sports depend upon: secularism; equality (of the opportunity to compete and in the conditions of competition); specialization (of roles); rationalization; bureaucratic organization; quantification; and a quest for records (see table 1.2). Guttmann was adamant that modern sports are a ‘...unique, socially constructed phenomenon whose most distinguishing features are an extraordinary degree of quantification and an obsession with the sports record.’¹³⁹

Table 1.2: The characteristics of modern sports¹⁴⁰

	Primitive	Greek	Roman	Mediaeval	Modern
Secularism	Yes and No	Y & N	Y & N	Y & N	Yes
Equality	No	Y & N	Y & N	No	Yes
Specialization	No	Yes	Y & N	No	Yes
Rationalization	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Bureaucracy	No	Y & N	Yes	No	Yes
Quantification	No	No	Y & N	No	Yes
Records	No	No	No	No	Yes

Critics of Guttmann’s analysis have argued there is evidence of ‘records’ in royal arrow shooting in ancient Egypt;¹⁴¹ outstanding achievements in Greece and Rome;¹⁴² exceptional performance in mediaeval tournaments;¹⁴³ rules being applied in sports in Renaissance Europe;¹⁴⁴ a long tradition of measuring and recording feats of strength through rock-lifting (*chikaraishi*) in Japan.¹⁴⁵ Others have argued that that he pays only lip-service to the possibility of conflicting evidence;¹⁴⁶ both his ritual theory and modernization theory are flawed;¹⁴⁷ there are faults in his methodology;¹⁴⁸ and that it relies upon a ‘...relatively linear and evolutionary process.’¹⁴⁹

Another and perhaps more useful classification, as it focuses upon ‘...the general characteristics of sports in the transformative period of industrialisation,’¹⁵⁰ is that produced by Dunning and Sheard (see appendix 1). This classification was originally developed for the study of the development of rugby football, although there have been attempts to apply it to other sports, most notably boxing,¹⁵¹ but similar to Guttmann’s

typology, it has been criticised for being too simplistic, linear and evolutionary. Holt for example has argued that the history of sport involves the reciprocal action of continuity and change, with survivals in some areas and reform in others, which is far too complex to be adopted into a simple 'modernisation' theory.¹⁵² It would therefore be a mistake, as some have warned, to assume a sharp distinction between 'pre-modern' and 'modern'¹⁵³ and that the history of sport was a simple linear development.¹⁵⁴ Brownell, for example has argued that '...tradition doesn't die out; it is reinvented and reincorporated into new forms...' and therefore it is difficult to clearly separate traditional from modern.¹⁵⁵ Holt noted that the orthodox explanation for the transformation of sport contended that 'modern' sports were 'invented' between the 1850s and 1880s, everything before this being 'pre-modern', and the central features which differentiate 'pre-modern' from 'modern' sport were formal codification and administration at a national level. He suggested that, although 'pre-modern' sports did differ from 'modern' sports, major changes had already taken place during the eighteenth century, including the establishment of the Jockey Club, the Marylebone Cricket Club and the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews as regulatory bodies (see table 1.1), which made the early nineteenth century less 'traditional' and the late nineteenth century less 'modern' than sometimes presented. Holt also noted two broad themes in the pattern of sport before the Victorians, firstly 'pre-modern' sports as part of a festive culture, and secondly the '...more organised world of pugilism, rowing, racing and cricket where written rules were established, challenges were issued and advertised in the press, and large crowds gathered to watch and to wager.'¹⁵⁶ It is also evident that multi-sports events, which needed high levels of organisation, such as Robert Dover's Olympick Games, existed from the early seventeenth century.¹⁵⁷ Brailsford also argued that the orthodox view, held by many social historians, that sport in the early nineteenth century was largely rural, informal, unstructured and lacked codification, and that modern sport was born in the mid-nineteenth century was '...too precise, sweeping and simple.'¹⁵⁸ He demonstrated that boxing, cricket and horse racing were commercialised, supported professionalism, consistently reported in the national press, dependent on spectators and relatively organised well before 1750. He therefore concluded that '...spectator sports were sufficiently developed in the eighteenth century to constitute a significant element in popular recreation...' ¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, the 'modernisation model' cannot be applied to all parts of Britain at the same time, especially not to the south-west of England,¹⁶⁰ and different sports were 'modernised' at different times; for example, the chronology of the formalisation of sports in central

Scotland and in the north-east of England, did not follow the pattern of the rest of Britain, being delayed by several decades.¹⁶¹

Why did 'modern' sports emerge in the second half of the nineteenth century?

According to Tranter, there were four main reasons, although in reality there was a complex mix of forces at work. Firstly, levels of real working class wages rose by 40% between 1860 and 1875 and by another 50% by 1900,¹⁶² whilst during the same period prices and living costs fell, leading to an increase in disposable incomes.¹⁶³ However the emerging affluence was not experienced by all workers; those who were skilled and organised benefited from rising standards of living, whereas those who were semi- or unskilled and not members of a union remained largely poverty-stricken.¹⁶⁴ One consequence of rising standards of living was improved diets, which contributed towards a healthier and more energetic populace and led to increased life expectancy.¹⁶⁵

Secondly, there was a gradual reduction in working hours for most groups of workers, with nine hours per day and fifty four hours per week, being the norm by 1914, partly driven by trade union activity and partly by some employers who realised that it might be beneficial to productivity.¹⁶⁶ By the same period, most groups of workers were also granted a half-day holiday on Saturday afternoons, '...in return for the guaranteed regularity of a fair level of leisure time.'¹⁶⁷ 'It was only Saturday afternoons that were on offer,¹⁶⁸ as there was no intention of opening up the whole weekend and therefore, '...play no longer had to be stolen from the working week,'¹⁶⁹ and it also ensured that Sundays were kept free from secular activities. Although some sports were slower to adapt than others,¹⁷⁰ it became the norm for sport to be played on Saturday afternoons, with entrepreneurs and promoters quick to recognise the potential profits to be made by exploiting the increased spending power of the working class.¹⁷¹ Although 'Saturday-afternoons and the clock replaced the agrarian season and the holy day as the time-keepers of organised physical recreations,'¹⁷² some groups of workers, particularly those in the expanding world of retailing, did not have Saturday afternoons free, but benefited instead from the early closing of shops in midweek, which led to an alternative, though vibrant network of sporting fixtures.

Thirdly, there were real improvements in industrial technology, which led to such things as, better balls for golf; better lawnmowers for cutting grass and therefore much

improved surfaces for playing sport; vulcanised rubber for tennis balls; better sporting guns for shooting; and the mass production of the bicycle.¹⁷³

Fourthly, improvements in transport made travel easier and allowed spectators to move outside their own areas to watch sport, which when combined with increased disposable incomes and more free time led to large crowds at sports such as cricket, athletics, rowing and sailing regattas and horse racing.¹⁷⁴ The railways in particular made travel relatively quicker, cheaper and nationwide,¹⁷⁵ and forced the introduction of the standardised Greenwich Mean Time in 1880, which also greatly assisted the planning of sports fixtures.¹⁷⁶ The railways transformed horse racing from a series of local events to a national spectator sport by transporting not only horses, but also large numbers of spectators, especially at weekends and Bank Holidays, which allowed organisers to charge higher admission fees, leading to higher prize money, more horses per race,¹⁷⁷ and a greater interest in the sport.¹⁷⁸ Cricket and football were also transformed into national sports by the railways. Prize-fighting survived into the second half of the nineteenth century as organisers chose secret locations in areas where magistrates and constables were known to be sympathetic or reluctant to prosecute, did not advertise publicly, often changed at the last moment and used the rail system to evade the law¹⁷⁹

Other reasons advanced for the 'revolution' in sport include Victorian town life, which Midwinter suggested was the 'cradle' of modern sport,¹⁸⁰ the expansion in the size of the middle class, who had the leisure time to be able to enjoy a wide range of pursuits and were also able to afford them;¹⁸¹ increased communication, through greater literacy, especially after the 1870 Education Act, and cheap mass newspapers, that popularised sport, particularly football;¹⁸² and the increasing availability of recreational land in the new suburbs, such as public parks and playing fields, provided by enlightened local authorities and by philanthropic effort.¹⁸³

Why did 'modern' sports spread so rapidly? Some historians have employed a 'downwards social diffusionist model'¹⁸⁴ to account for the rapid spread of modern sports throughout British society during the second half of the nineteenth century. It has been claimed that the most influential factors in the development of modern sports were 'athleticism' and 'rational recreation'.¹⁸⁵

‘Athleticism’, ‘Muscular Christianity’ and ‘Amateurism’

‘Athleticism’ refers to the exaggerated encouragement of team games and the simultaneous denigration of intellectualism, which developed in English public schools from the 1840s and lasted until the outbreak of the First World War, when it came to be questioned as an educational ideology.¹⁸⁶ Sports, especially cricket, rugby and football, were adapted from popular recreations introduced by pupils and adopted by reforming headmasters, such as Arnold at Rugby, Kennedy at Shrewsbury and Moberley at Winchester, in order to assert control over boys in well-defined and confined spaces; to discourage laziness and ‘vice’;¹⁸⁷ to discourage effeminacy; and to promote the so-called ‘sturdy English’ form of ‘manliness’,¹⁸⁸ which was translated into self-reliance, unselfishness, fearlessness and strength. Showing ‘pluck’ was according to Holt the most important quality a boy could demonstrate.¹⁸⁹ By far the most important rationale for sports, and especially team games, however, was to develop boys’ characters, which comprised physical and moral courage, group loyalty and cooperation; the ability to play fairly and accept defeat graciously; and the capacity to command and obey.¹⁹⁰ It was believed that qualities developed on the games field could be transferred to other areas of life, including the battlefield. From the 1850s team games were deliberately promoted to encourage Christian spiritual development, which became known as ‘Muscular Christianity’, and popularised in fiction by Charles Kingsley and more especially by Thomas Hughes, whose semi-autobiographical novel *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* was a best seller. Games were regarded as a preparation for the future battle of life and the ‘...body was to be trained...in order to protect the weak and advance righteous causes.’¹⁹¹ Closely linked to Muscular Christianity and what was regarded as the ideal product of athleticism, the gentleman amateur, whose watchword was ‘fair play’, which could be translated into accepting rules and the decisions of the referee or umpire without question; abiding by the spirit of the game; never taking an unfair advantage over an opponent; self-restraint and courtesy in victory; and compassion to the defeated.¹⁹²

Athleticism was able to exert a strong influence upon generations of boys due to a number of reasons, including such factors as, compulsory games afternoons for all boys, with the involvement of masters, many of whom were deliberately appointed for their prowess in sport; the structure of the ‘house’ system, with inter-house competitions and ‘colours’ awarded for success at sport; regular friendly matches against other schools; the employment of professionals to coach teams; and the supervision of boys by other

boys through games committees, such as the 'Philathletic Club' at Harrow.¹⁹³ A significant contribution of the public schools to many sports was the development of written rules, which became imperative with the increase in matches against other schools that employed different sets of rules. Moir, for example, has noted that between 1846 and 1863 all seven of the 'great' boarding public schools codified football for the first time, each contributing to the evolution of the game. He also noted that these laws were probably posted on notice boards well before these dates for boys to memorise prior to matches.¹⁹⁴ The model of athleticism was taken by former public school pupils, imbued with Muscular Christianity and amateurism, into the old universities, which played a vital role in developing common standardised sets of rules for both football and rugby. It was also copied by ambitious grammar schools, girls' public schools, and '...seeped into secondary schools'.¹⁹⁵ Former pupils and university men '...sought ways of continuing the games they had enjoyed',¹⁹⁶ by establishing exclusive clubs based on amateurism; introducing sport to others, especially working class groups, through workplaces, churches and chapels; playing a central role in the formation and administration of a range of national governing bodies of sport such as the Football Association and the Rugby Football Union; and by spreading their games throughout the Empire.

Although the effects of athleticism had long-lasting effects on the character of sport in Britain, '...a downwards social diffusionist model is too restricted to be acceptable as an adequate description and interpretation of the spread of organised sport in Victorian and Edwardian Britain,'¹⁹⁷ for three main reasons. Firstly, some sports that became popular amongst the middle classes, such as badminton, lawn bowls and croquet, were not played at school or university, whereas others, such as lawn tennis and mountaineering, were not adopted by the working classes as they lacked the necessary disposable income or leisure time. Secondly, there is a failure to give sufficient weight to other factors, such as the part played by climate, which explains why cricket is not as widespread in Scotland as it is in England, and the interest of working class men in league and cup competitions. Thirdly, '...the impetus for the spread of organised sport to working class men came as much from below as from above and was by no means simply an inevitable, later consequence of middle-class initiative and example.'¹⁹⁸

'Rational recreation'

'Rational recreation' refers to a set of loosely related initiatives by a broad alliance of largely middle class former public school and university men, imbued with athleticism, amateurism and muscular Christianity, who were concerned about the way that the working classes were spending their leisure time. It became a slogan '...if not for an organised movement than for a slowly diffusing mood.'¹⁹⁹ A 'moral panic' existed in the third quarter of the nineteenth century caused by such factors as the survival of some 'pre-modern' sports, with links to a disorderly and intemperate culture, based upon pubs and illegal gambling; the rise in urban radical politics; the large proportion of the urban working class who did not attend any kind of church and therefore lacked any moral guidance; the large numbers of unskilled, casual labour, who were perceived as 'dangerous'; and the large numbers of young people, who were regarded as a 'social problem'.²⁰⁰ 'Rational recreationists' aimed to maintain social control and stability and to create social cohesion through breaking down class barriers, by diverting the working classes away from inappropriate and irrational activities. The solution was to provide attractive, wholesome and more acceptable rational alternatives to cater for all ages. If games were valuable in inculcating desirable moral qualities for the upper and middle classes, they could also be of value to the working class. Muscular Christians therefore promoted newly codified games, especially football and rugby, to develop appropriate values of self-discipline, *esprit de corps* and respect for authority.²⁰¹ Whereas in the early nineteenth century attempts were made to suppress popular recreations, by the 1850s it was recognised that a subtle, persuasive approach, with an element of public supervision, would be more successful, at changing the habits of the working classes. The Government passed legislation which enabled local authorities to levy a rate to provide such things as museums, baths, libraries, public parks and open spaces,²⁰² many financed largely or entirely through philanthropic efforts. It also introduced compulsory schooling with the Education Act 1870, which according to Holt was '...the single most important means of taming the young,'²⁰³ partly due to the introduction of military drill, based on the War Office's *Field Exercise Book*, for working class children.

Organised religion also played an important role in 'rational recreation', for evangelicals rationality was based on religious criteria and thus recreations without religion were irrational.²⁰⁴ Sport was seen '...as an ideal medium for rational recreation,'²⁰⁵ with churches and chapels being instrumental in the foundation of sports clubs for their congregations, especially football and cricket, which, offered the

‘...possibility of linking a moral message to a recreation with mass appeal.’²⁰⁶ Between 1870 and 1885 in Birmingham alone approximately 25% of football clubs and 20% of cricket clubs had some connections to religious organisations.²⁰⁷ Men from a Methodist teetotal background, who emphasised self-improvement and moral purpose, established local church and Sunday school leagues in pursuit of a non-alcoholic culture for sport and as an alternative to pub-based clubs and leagues.²⁰⁸ Christian youth organisations such as the Boys’ Brigade, formed in 1883, and the YMCA formed in 1844 also used sport as an important counter-attraction for working class boys and as a way to consume their energies.²⁰⁹

Not all ‘rational recreationists’ were middle class. The articulate, educated and radical elements of the working class sought temperance, respectability and self-improvement;²¹⁰ they wanted working men to create their own culture; they argued for the promotion of such things as reading rooms, debating circles and Mechanics’ Institutes;²¹¹ and they raged against commercial amusement as it was regarded as trivial and passive hedonism.²¹² Professionalism was also criticised and especially spectatorism which was seen as mindless fanaticism, on a par with crowds at pre-modern spectacles, such as bull-baiting, and therefore not rational.

Sports historians now question the effectiveness of the ‘rational recreation’ movement in the development of modern sports, as it was not very successful in its primary objective of the transformation of working class culture. It may have been an influential ideal, but it had few practical successes, although it did at least establish amongst the new local authorities²¹³ ‘...the principle of the public provision of leisure out of the rates and with little or no direct charge...’²¹⁴ with the creation of libraries, museums and parks. Historians now ‘...question the validity of the contention that sport was widely supported for the contribution it made to social stability simply by providing an alternative to more demoralising and disruptive activities.’²¹⁵

Why did ‘rational recreation’ fail in its primary objective of transforming working class culture? There were three main reasons. Firstly, the middle classes were not united in their commitment to its implementation. Not only were they too concerned with their own leisure and did not want to share or mix with the working class, partly as the latter’s sports were associated with pubs, but they were also unable to persuade the government to provide money for facilities.²¹⁶ Reforming the morals of the working

class was expensive, which partly explains the lack of commitment; the provision of public parks had less to do with sport and much more to do with civic pride.²¹⁷ Middle class 'rational recreationists' did not always receive support even from their own class. In his study of horse-racing, Huggins found evidence of a middle class ethos which was not antagonistic, compared to the more vociferous and evangelical opponents of much working class sport.²¹⁸ Jones also noted that some amongst the middle classes, especially those who had not attended public school or university and had little sympathy with the ethos,²¹⁹ even defended the rougher sports, especially those in the drinks trade, who benefited financially from the working class drinking culture.²²⁰ Furthermore, the newly created national governing bodies of sport, which were largely controlled by middle class men, made very few attempts to actively promote their sports amongst the working class, and some successfully excluded them, using amateurism as the unifying ideology.

Secondly, there was a divergence between what the middle class desired and the working class wanted, which simply served to reinforce and reproduce class differences.²²¹ Whilst commenting upon football in England and rugby in south Wales, Holt observed that '...the sheer density of the network of local leagues, and the speed with which they were set up are remarkable,'²²² and all established without the help of middle class reformers. Although the working class were prepared to accept middle class help in the provision of sporting opportunities, they resented attempts to control²²³ and resisted 'rational recreation', especially the ideology of the gentleman amateur; organised leisure according to their own values and aspirations; and attached their own meanings to sport. Some working men, especially the less skilled and the less educated wanted more tempting alternatives than libraries, museums and reading rooms.

Thirdly, there were powerful influences on working class males. The pub was a '...powerful source of continuity in popular culture,'²²⁴ which remained as '...the basic unit of male social life,'²²⁵ and the '...social catalysing agent.'²²⁶ Pubs provided facilities; acted as the meeting place for organising matches in a variety of sports and games; provided prizes; sponsored events; and together with the sporting paper, the race-course and the music-hall were the dominant working class cultural institutions, rather than the church, chapel or private sports club.²²⁷ Another popular working class activity was gambling, which was loathed by the 'rational recreationists' as it was mostly illegal, had links to pre-industrial recreations and therefore irrational. Metcalfe

found in his study of mining communities in Northumberland, that gambling provided the meaning to sport, with miners prepared to wager large amounts.²²⁸ He also demonstrated that whereas middle class sport emphasised symbolic prizes; a value system that stressed fair play; the use of private clubs; involved women and was one of many factors in life; working class sport by contrast always involved a monetary prize; a value system that emphasised individuality; played on mainly public spaces; was a male domain; and was the most important part of miners' lives.²²⁹ Holt also argued that working class sport provided men with opportunities for camaraderie and friendships; contributed to a sense of community identity, especially loyalty to a neighbourhood, which imitated pre-industrial village life; and allowed individuals to demonstrate pride in the community, particularly whilst watching professional football.²³⁰

Developments in sport since the end of the nineteenth century

How have sports developed since the end of the nineteenth century? Some historians have argued that from the beginning of the twentieth century sport has followed in a largely similar direction to that established in the nineteenth century. Polley, for example suggests that major continuities include the essential structure of regular competitions, organised by national governing bodies that ensure rules and regulations are enforced; voluntarism and amateurism which provide the fundamental framework of sporting administration; the basic structures of league and knock-out competitions; and the various constraints which have preserved sport as largely patriarchal and class divided. He also suggests that major changes include greater commercialisation; a shift towards a performance culture; increased professionalism, including management structures and social mobility; less insularity; greater access for women; more ethnically diverse; and increased state intervention, especially funding.²³¹ Moreover Polley has identified a number of characteristics of contemporary sport, which he believes is '...a third age of sport: after the traditional and the industrial comes the post-industrial, characterised by demands for access to an increasingly fragmentary sporting life.'²³² These include a proliferation in the range of sports to play or watch, especially individual activities and a '...relative decline in mass spectator sports',²³³ a reclamation of the countryside with activities such as mountain biking; and increased globalisation, with '...transnational media coverage and a greater mobility of the labour market in sport.'²³⁴

Locating Cornish wrestling within a sport history framework

To what extent can Cornish wrestling be located within a sport history framework, as outlined above? The available evidence suggests that the history of Cornish wrestling is broadly consistent with the experience of sport in the rest of Britain, particularly before the advent of ‘modern’ sports. It was one of many ‘pre-modern’ sports and physical recreations that were thriving, deeply-rooted and widely practiced, occurring at times of annual parish feasts and religious festivities, markets and fairs and other secular celebrations; all at a local level. Clinnick, for example has provided evidence that Cornwall had its fair share of occasions that were accompanied by Cornish wrestling tournaments.²³⁵ There is also evidence from local newspapers that when tournaments were organised, usually on mid-week days and between May and October, they were never short of either participants or spectators. Although there is little evidence of crowd behaviour, there are occasional reports in local newspapers and other publications that hint at problems; for example, Borlase writing about wrestling and hurling in 1758 thought it a ‘...great pity that frolicking and drinking immoderately (if what is said is true) at the parish festivals should take place of such ancient, and (under a few regulations) such laudable and manly recreations.’²³⁶ There is only scant evidence of gambling in Cornish wrestling, most probably as it formed part of what Holt called the ‘submerged tradition’²³⁷ of working class sport, although it is unlikely to have been immune from the practice. There is also little evidence of the reliance upon the patronage of the gentry or nobility, although they did donate prizes and therefore must have tolerated the sport; for example at Tregony in 1807 the Earl of Darlington gave a gold laced hat as the first prize.²³⁸ Publicans, however, were clearly involved in organising tournaments; for example, at a match ‘...at the house of Mr William Fry, the Rose and Crown, in Millbrook...’²³⁹ on the 9th June, 1783 the first prize was a gold laced waistcoat and on the following day, a silver cup. It was also attacked by moral reformers during the early nineteenth century, especially the Methodists, for its association with drinking and gambling, and because they regarded it as a brutal activity, although this opposition which for over a century ultimately proved ineffective.

In other ways Cornish wrestling was ‘different’ from other sports. There is no evidence to suggest that Cornish wrestling was particularly violent, although it was clearly a very physical activity. Although the ‘rules’ of the sport were probably unwritten and customary, orally transmitted from generation to generation, the fragmentary evidence

suggests they were simple, few in number, understood and consistent through the centuries. There is also no evidence that employers, magistrates or local authorities actively promoted Cornish wrestling, but equally little or no evidence that they conducted a concerted effort to suppress it. In fact as some mine managers, or ‘captains’, acted as ‘sticklers’ in tournaments it is more than likely the sport was tolerated; for example, at a tournament in Redruth in 1853, three of the four ‘sticklers’ were ‘captains’.²⁴⁰ Despite being attacked, ‘[e]ven in the furthest Methodist mining communities of Cornwall, where preachers inveighed against the sport, wrestling matches, often promoted by local publicans, survived.’²⁴¹ The evidence suggests that Cornish wrestling not only survived, thus disproving the ‘vacuum’ theory, but it actually increased in popularity; for example, at a tournament held in Penzance, in September 1827 ‘...upwards of 10,000 persons were present’²⁴² on the third day, a Wednesday. Cornish wrestling was also not adversely affected by the lack of space, as Cornwall was little influenced by the enclosure movement, was not heavily urbanised and matches only needed a relatively small patch of turf, often provided by a farmer, or a publican, adjacent to a pub; for example, a tournament at St Austell in 1830 took place ‘...in the large field, behind the White Hart Stable...’²⁴³ There is also evidence that Cornish wrestling had some characteristics of ‘modern’ sports well before the mid-nineteenth century. Carew, for example, writing at the end of the sixteenth century, describes many features of matches including the ring, the clothing worn, the grip on the jacket, the ‘back’, some basic rules and different types of throw.²⁴⁴

Arguably the most striking feature of Cornish wrestling was that there was no evident difference between a ‘pre-modern’ form and a ‘modern’ sport. In fact in many ways the sport appeared unaffected by modernity, preserving many characteristics from an earlier period; it remained local in context; it did not adopt a governing body until 1923 and even then it was not a national organisation; mid-week matches, often accompanying feasts or fairs, continued until the beginning of the twentieth century; there was not a formal, standardised set of written rules until 1923; there were no officials to enforce the rules and penalise misdemeanours until 1923; there were no fixed limits on duration of bouts; there was not a regular calendar of fixtures until 1923; and matches continued to take place on multicultural spaces.

Cornish wrestling remained largely untouched by the effects of athleticism, no doubt as middle class former public school and university men concentrated their efforts on the

modern sports they were used to playing, such as rugby football.²⁴⁵ There is evidence that athleticism did have some effect, however, especially in the use of its vocabulary; for example, a newspaper report in 1847, describing a wrestling match in London which involved Thomas Gundry who dominated the sport in the 1840s, stated that ‘...his fine wrestling, and manliness and good temper deserve all praise.’²⁴⁶ What is unclear is in what way ‘manliness’ was used in this context as Cornish wrestlers identified not with the refined manliness of the middle class gentleman-amateur but with masculinity, which according to Holt meant showing ‘grit’ together with ‘...hardness, strength, courage and durability alongside physical skill...’²⁴⁷ Maguire observed that manliness was an important part of being a man, but it carried different interpretations reflecting the structure of British society. Although the working class shared a common concern for courage and loyalty with the middle classes, for the former manliness meant a certain degree of ruggedness and the ability to fight and look after oneself.²⁴⁸ Tranter also noted that for working class males manliness involved a greater emphasis upon physical aggression.²⁴⁹

The leading wrestlers continued to receive monetary prizes throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century and there was never any attempt to prevent anybody from participating on the basis of their class, thus the ethos of amateurism was also not effective.²⁵⁰ It is interesting to note that several players from various rugby football clubs, especially Redruth successfully competed in Cornish wrestling tournaments during the 1930s but were not barred from playing rugby union although there were very strict rules governing amateurism at that time and yet the same was not true for men who had played rugby league. The availability of lucrative monetary prizes was one feature of commercialism evident in Cornish wrestling, particularly during the nineteenth century. Other features included: the dependence upon spectators; the raising of ‘subscriptions’ for prizes by committees of gentlemen; the many opportunities provided for gambling; the provision of alcohol and food in refreshment booths surrounding the wrestling fields and exploited by local publicans; the provision of spectator facilities, such as accommodation booths, seats and grandstands; the charging of entrance fees; and various amusements and ‘diversions’ to entertain the crowds between bouts. However, the degree of commercialism never reached the level where it was possible to create a fully fledged professional sport, such as boxing, cricket, football or horse racing in other parts of Britain most likely because there was never a

critical mass of spectators and Cornish wrestling promoters were arguably more interested in covering their costs rather than making substantial profits.

There is also little evidence that 'rational recreation' had any effect upon the sport. Even those men involved in the formation of the CCWA, were arguably not interested in reforming the morals or lifestyle of working class men, but only in reviving the sport.

It also becomes obvious that, despite being a secular activity, when compared to Guttman's typology, Cornish wrestling it does not match the other characteristics of a 'modern' sport. It did not exhibit equality, as small men could wrestle big men, until weight categories were introduced in 1923; there is no specialization; there is no rationalization; there was no bureaucratic organisation until 1923; there is no quantification; and no quest for records. Moreover, Cornish wrestling does not match numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 15 on Dunning and Sheard's model of the structural properties of folk-games and modern sport (see appendix 1) and only partially matches number 10 and 14. Therefore, by these typologies Cornish wrestling cannot be described as a truly 'modern' sport. Conversely the sport was well organised, reported regularly in the press and supported limited 'professionalism' before most other so-called 'modern' sports of the mid nineteenth century.

Furthermore, Cornish wrestling did suffer a decline in popularity in the second half of the nineteenth century and then experienced a discernible revival at the beginning of the twentieth century, which was consolidated and built on in the 1920s, but the explanation for these developments cannot be found from within the corpus of work which is mainstream British sport history.

It is argued here that Cornish wrestling was 'different' and that difference can be emphasised when compared with the sporting experience of other regions or localities in Britain, although it has to be pointed out that the majority of research in sport history has been conducted into 'mainstream' sports and at a macro level and there is a paucity of regional or local sport histories. However, there are three historians whose work is relevant to the present study. Huggins explored the way that Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling was constantly reinvented and re-launched in order to maintain its existence whilst competing with other popular sports.²⁵¹ He suggested that in order to survive the sport changed and adapted in four main ways: the reorganisation of

governing bodies; the attempts to eliminate ‘barneying’ or fixed results; the introduction of presentational aspects to make it more attractive to spectators, such as moving events from weekdays to weekends, embroidered costumes, rules to speed up bouts; and the relocation to a ‘Celtic’ context, especially the affiliation to the International Federation of Celtic Wrestling in the 1980s. He also argued that the sport ‘...became increasingly linked to the maintenance and promotion of a specifically Cumbrian identity and cultural heritage within those rural communities where it survived best.’²⁵²

Metcalf, in a series of articles, explored working class leisure amongst the relatively isolated and homogenous coal mining communities in the clearly defined geographical area of east Northumberland.²⁵³ He not only focused on 22 sports regularly played in the region,²⁵⁴ but he also examined in detail ‘potshare’ bowling as a case study of traditional sport which was unique to miners and the most popular in the nineteenth century in Durham and Northumberland.²⁵⁵ Metcalf also compared the leisure activities of coal miners in east Northumberland with other miners and considered the similarities and differences between them and other working class communities in Britain.²⁵⁶

Tranter, in a series of articles, explored sport in a twenty mile radius of Stirling, in central Scotland, during the nineteenth century. In particular he examined the evidence from the statistical accounts of the effects of the Industrial Revolution on popular sports; the social and occupational structure of organised sport; the role of private patrons; the patterns and causes in the chronology of organised sport in the region. He also focused on the sport of quoiting as a case study of organised sport played by the working classes.²⁵⁷

It is acknowledged that Cornish wrestling shares many characteristics with sports in other regions and localities of Britain, such as: the dominance of men from working class backgrounds, both as participants and spectators; the support of patronage, particularly by publicans; a lack of formal organisation; the tacit approval by the upper and middle classes who often provided subscriptions and/or prizes; the rules which were customary and disseminated by word of mouth; widespread gambling; and the use of public or common land. However, what is argued here is that Cornwall’s ‘difference’ has persisted because of its historical experience, which in each period has been distinct from other areas of Britain and has led directly to a unique identity. In this context

Cornish wrestling is inextricably linked not only to Cornwall's historical experience, but it also forms a significant part of the Cornish identity; it could be argued that to be a wrestler was to be Cornish and to be Cornish was to be a wrestler. This cannot be said of sports from other regions of Britain. Neither Metcalfe nor Tranter have demonstrated that any single sport, not even the most popular ones of 'potshare' bowling in the northeast or quoiting in central Scotland, form part of a strong regional identity. Huggins has indicated that Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling has '...increasingly delineated and confirmed a sense of place, the Lake District as both a geographical entity and an "imagined community", to modern Cumbrians and to visiting tourists,'²⁵⁸ although this is a relatively recent phenomenon and cannot be compared with the place of wrestling in Cornwall over several centuries. Cornish wrestling was also an important component in the development of an international Cornish identity, which is not true of sports in other regions of Britain.

Thus for Cornish wrestling what appears to be missing from the historical analysis provided by mainstream British sport history is an appropriate and relevant context. This is neatly summarised in a recent text by Polley, who suggests that the type of sport history that its practitioners should aspire to is a '...detailed exploration of what sport was like in the past in relation to the society in which it was taking place.'²⁵⁹ Sport does not merely reflect the characteristics of a society, it is a product of that society and is shaped by various social forces, which Booth argues consist of four principal components, major forces and constraints, including structural, ideological and institutional; events; human agencies; and convergences and contingencies.²⁶⁰ Holt claimed that it is important to understand '...why certain groups of people preferred one activity to another and why quite culturally specific meanings were attached to sports in different places and at different times.'²⁶¹ Moreover, Metcalfe, in his research of the leisure and recreation of the mining communities in the north-east of England, also suggested that a true understanding of the history of sport in Britain is only possible through an exploration of regional and local sport history.²⁶² Therefore in order to understand the relationship of Cornish wrestling to its society, it is argued here that it is necessary to place the sport within a Cornish context.

'New Cornish Studies'

The alternative conceptual framework in which Cornish wrestling can be located and that provides the most appropriate and relevant context, is the 'new Cornish Studies'.

Deacon has noted that there is no single key text which clarifies the ‘new Cornish Studies’, but the writings of Payton are the clearest elucidation of its characteristics, especially in the pages of *Cornish Studies*, the annual volume which he edits.²⁶³ ‘New Cornish Studies’ has its origins in the ‘Cornish Revival’ of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which had an antiquarian, linguistics and Celtic Studies background, but since 1945 it has gradually broadened its base to include work of scholars from a range of disciplines, all of whom assume that Cornwall and the Cornish are worthy of study. An important facet of the discipline has been the role played by the Institute of Cornish Studies, established by the University of Exeter in 1972, under the directorship of Professor Charles Thomas, who was an archaeologist.

According to Deacon, ‘[i]nterdisciplinarity, comparison and context are the three central concepts of the New Cornish Studies’, and he has incorporated these ‘...into an ideal model of the contrast between “new” and “old” Cornish Studies...’²⁶⁴ (see table 1.3)

Table 1.3: The new Cornish Studies and its context²⁶⁵

	Old Cornish Studies	New Cornish Studies
Theory	empiricist	informed by social theory
Content	the past	the contemporary
	Cornish particularities	Cornish difference and identity
Methods	insights of specialist disciplines	multi- and inter-disciplinary
	pure	applied/policy engagement

Deacon has also suggested that ‘difference’ and ‘identity formation’ are the ‘[t]wo issues [which] have been prominent in the preferred content of the New Cornish Studies’.²⁶⁶ Payton asserts that, ‘[w]hen all is said and done it is this Cornish “difference” that is at root the *raison d’être* of Cornish Studies as an area of academic inquiry.’²⁶⁷ He later added that ‘...elucidation and analysis of [the Cornish identity] is perhaps the prime task of Cornish Studies as an academic discipline.’²⁶⁸ Deacon further suggests that the ‘new Cornish Studies’ can be defined as a ‘rhetorically defined space’, which is a ‘...space that bounds a number of different, even contradictory concepts and has expansive and shifting boundaries defined in terms of a set of broad values rather than rigid ideological traditions.’²⁶⁹ Moreover, there is no clear distinction between old and new Cornish Studies, the new ‘...builds on, re-emphasizes and develops some of the concerns of the “old” Cornish Studies.’²⁷⁰

An important feature of the ‘old’ Cornish Studies was the study of Celticity, which has not only remained an area of concern in the ‘new’ Cornish Studies, but has also witnessed a recent resurgence of interest by academics and the general public alike. What has been termed a ‘New Celtomania’²⁷¹ is characterised by a wide variety of factors such as, the promotion of Celtic music, art and dance; an interest in genealogy, heritage and roots; the globalisation of Celticity, related to diasporic communities; a revived interest in Arthurian legends; the commercial and political appropriation of some aspects of Celticity; and a revival of Pan-Celticism.²⁷² There have also been attempts to revitalise languages, against a backdrop of gradual decline in speakers, although there have been some successes, notably bi-lingual signage, but this ‘fall[s] well short of popular revival.’²⁷³ It has been suggested that counter-intuitively the decline in languages has strengthened the ‘...symbolic power and enhances the visibility and audibility of the languages over wider regions.’²⁷⁴ It has also been noted that what is *new* is the focus upon the deconstruction of the terms ‘Celt’ and ‘Celtic’,²⁷⁵ in particular there is ‘...an increased questioning of the exact nature of the concept, and a degree of scepticism concerning the veracity of the term “Celtic” as a meaningful category...’²⁷⁶ Notions of the ‘Celtic’ are becoming more heterogeneous, fragmentary and fluid than previously, with less reliance upon linguistics, territory or ethnicity as markers of identity. Kent, for example, has demonstrated that popular music, tattoo art and surfing have been appropriated by youth culture in order to express identity,²⁷⁷ and Bowman has shown that for some, such as Pagans, New Age and some Christians, Celticity is appealing and choose to identify with ‘Celtic’ for spiritual purposes, an example of ‘elective affinity’. She also coined the term ‘Cardiac Celt’ for those who feel in their hearts they are Celts.²⁷⁸

Related to the ‘new Cornish Studies’, what Deacon calls a ‘sub-genre’, is the ‘new Cornish historiography’.²⁷⁹ Payton has urged Cornish Studies scholars to learn from, contribute towards and engage in current major scholarly debates and discourses, especially the new British historiography which is increasingly becoming less Anglocentric; with its debate about Britishness; its emphasis upon the ‘Atlantic Archipelago’ in order to transcend separate nations; and with regional distinctiveness set within the boundaries of the ‘Archipelago’.²⁸⁰ This led Payton to suggest that Cornish Studies scholars should seek ‘...to locate consideration of Cornwall and the Cornish within debates about the processes of state formation and the perpetuation of

“difference” within the British Isles – or the “Atlantic Archipelago”...’²⁸¹ In his review of the ‘new Cornish Studies’, Deacon suggests that the ‘new Cornish historiography’ overlaps to some degree with old Cornish historiography, both are reconstructionist rather than deconstructionist and it does not utilise particularly new methodology, but its newness is the assumption of placing Cornish people at its centre and it is more critical than local studies.²⁸²

Features of the ‘new Cornish historiography’ that have witnessed progress in the last few years have been work related to the Cornish language and literature of the late medieval/early modern period and new research into the ‘Great Migration’.²⁸³ The language has benefited from the recent discovery in the National Library of Wales of *Beunans Ke* (Life of St Kea), a sixteenth century copy of an unknown ‘miracle play’, which has added new words and phrases to the language. Research into the ‘Great Migration’ includes the application of transnational perspectives to Cornish emigration; the significant internal migration within the British Isles; the migration to and from micro localities; and the use of quantitative material, which has been aided considerably by online sources such as census returns. Payton has also identified progress in work on Cornwall’s political landscape, in the early twentieth century.²⁸⁴

Another ‘sub-genre’ related to the ‘new Cornish Studies’, is the ‘new Cornish Social Science’, which is ‘...an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of a range of subjects, from manifestations of poverty in Cornwall to the nature of contemporary Cornish culture.’²⁸⁵ Williams noted that in the first ten years (ie up to 2002) the ‘new Cornish Social Science’, which is theoretically and methodologically eclectic, with influences ranging from Foucauldian-inspired post-structuralism at one end of the continuum, to statistical modelling of large data sets at the other, included Cornish economics, migration studies, housing studies, identity, politics and tourism.²⁸⁶ The ‘new Cornish Social Science’ should contribute towards one of the important roles of Cornish Studies as a subject, which is ‘...to inform, influence and assist those planners and policymakers charged with guiding Cornwall’s future.’²⁸⁷ Durring has recently added to this sub-genre by suggesting that the discourses implicit within economics can be deconstructed to suit a Cornish context and has developed what he calls a ‘theory of embedded choice’; a step towards ‘New Cornish Economics’.²⁸⁸

A major feature of the ‘new Cornish Studies’, emphasised by its practitioners, which separates it from the ‘old’ Cornish Studies, is that it is more reflexive and self-critical.²⁸⁹ Critics have argued that the multidisciplinary nature of Cornish Studies means that it tends to attract generalists, rather than specialists;²⁹⁰ a lack of a critical mass of academic personnel has led to significant gaps in some areas; it has not been critical enough of the ‘... various frameworks it employs...’²⁹¹ and there are gaps between rhetoric and real achievements.²⁹² The ‘new Cornish Social Science’ has also been critiqued for not yet being fully established enough as a discipline, largely due to the eclectic nature of the theory and methodology it employs, which has created a lack of coherence.²⁹³ This led Payton to suggest that unlike the progress made in language and migration studies, ‘... social science in general and economics in particular – has not received the attention it warrants.’²⁹⁴ It has also been critiqued for not translating theory into practice²⁹⁵ and lacking the structural links to ensure that it informs, influences and guides planners and decision-makers.²⁹⁶ Furthermore, the practitioners of the ‘new Cornish Historiography’ have been criticised for not engaging with theory, especially the new discourses associated with post-modernism.²⁹⁷

Deacon has also argued for more research into neglected aspects of Cornwall and Cornishness and has identified a missing ‘turn’, the spatial dimension, which could contribute towards social or historical interpretations of Cornwall. He suggests that Cornish Studies practitioners should consider researching at three levels of spatial scale, the global, the Cornish and the local.²⁹⁸ He has also reflected on methodology, advocating the adoption of a more critical approach to Cornish Studies, especially that related to different discourses of Cornwall, and subjecting them to interrogation, in order to understand them; he calls this ‘critical discourse analysis.’²⁹⁹ Hale has not only called for research into what Celtic means to contemporary Cornish people,³⁰⁰ but has also suggested the need for an ethnographic approach to studying the Cornish, with the focus on lived experience.³⁰¹

In the context of this present study, the corpus of work which is mainstream sports history, reviewed above should be regarded as another discipline which can provide the ‘new Cornish Studies’ and its two ‘sub-genres’ with a rich vein of material, so far unexploited. Since 1973, when *Cornish Studies* was first published, there have only been two articles devoted to sport related topics out of a total of 283, contained in thirty two publications (ie sixteen in series one and sixteen in series two).³⁰² Sport history and

Cornish Studies practitioners should be able to learn from, engage with and contribute towards each others' disciplines.

A significant step in the development of the 'new Cornish Studies' and its 'sub-genres' occurred in 1991, when Professor Philip Payton became the second Director of the Institute of Cornish Studies, which saw a broadening of the discipline into new areas, including the promotion of the 'centre-periphery model'. The model, which must be seen within the context of the 'new Cornish Studies', was first developed in his PhD thesis,³⁰³ then transposed into a book,³⁰⁴ Deacon suggests is '...closer to social sciences than to the Humanities,' and reiterated in various articles in *Cornish Studies*.³⁰⁵ The model was produced at a time when the orthodox view of an Anglocentric homogenous United Kingdom was being seriously questioned, which was partly based on political protests in the 'Celtic fringe' dating from the 1960s and 1970s, including to a certain extent in Cornwall, and mirrored in other western European states. Payton sought to develop a conceptual framework in order to analyse a peripheral territory and to answer a number of questions relating to Cornwall's distinctiveness: Why is Cornwall 'different'? Why has this persisted? Why is there a strong sense of 'Cornishness' and separate identity which has survived until today? He concluded that Cornwall's 'difference' has persisted because of Cornwall's historical experience, which in each period '...has been highly individual when compared to that of the English "centre", or indeed other areas of Britain,'³⁰⁶ and has led directly to a very distinct and unique identity.

Payton drew heavily from the work of Rokkan and Urwin,³⁰⁷ who developed a 'centre-periphery model', where the privileged 'centre' is the location of '...political control, economic dominance and the means to promote cultural standardisation...',³⁰⁸ based largely in London and the south-east of England; whereas the 'periphery' is characterised by being geographically remote from the 'centre', but dependent upon it economically and for decision-making. Payton also adopted and developed Tarrow's³⁰⁹ typology of two phases of peripherality; 'Older Peripheralism', characterised by geographical and cultural isolation from the centre, and 'Second Peripheralism', which recognises the central importance of industrial change, producing economic and social marginality. In a further refinement of Tarrow's ideas, Payton proposed there is a 'Third Peripheralism' characterised by a 'branch-factory' economy³¹⁰ promoting a process of 'counter-urbanisation'.³¹¹ According to Payton '...peripherality is a dynamic condition

and will alter over time in response to changes in the nature of the centre-periphery relationship.³¹² Although elements of one phase will overlap and affect the next, and the nature of peripherality may change over time, both geographical location and the physical distance from the ‘centre’ remain in each phase; he calls these ‘constants of peripherality’.

‘Older Peripheralism’

‘Older’ or ‘First Peripheralism’ developed from Athelstan’s creation of the modern English state in AD936, when various disparate kingdoms were united under one rule and the River Tamar was fixed as Cornwall’s boundary with the rest of England and became arguably one of the ‘...most long-standing European political borders...’³¹³ This ‘...created the modern geo-political entity of Cornwall in that [Athelstan] guaranteed its territorial and ethnic integrity...’³¹⁴ From the outset Cornwall’s territorial position made its peripheral status inevitable. It is the most physically remote of all the counties of England, lying at the far south-west, which at the Land’s End is the most westerly point of the English mainland and at the Lizard includes the southern-most part of the British mainland; this makes it at a distance from the ‘centre’ of the state’s power. It is also bounded on three sides by the sea, with the longest coastline of any English county;³¹⁵ is almost entirely cut off on the fourth side by the River Tamar; and is the only English county to be bounded by only one other.

Cornwall’s peripheral status was not only created by its remote geographical location, but was also enhanced by three interrelated and interdependent factors, which contributed towards the county’s ‘difference’. Cornwall was Celtic and therefore un-English in culture and outlook; the Duchy and the Stannaries made Cornwall constitutionally distinct; and mining emerged as an important area of the Cornish economy.³¹⁶

Celticity

Arguably five features made Cornwall Celtic and therefore un-English.³¹⁷ Firstly, what distinguished Cornwall as different from the rest of England was the Cornish language, which was widely spoken throughout Cornwall by the mass of the population and survived much later and was more complex than previously accepted.³¹⁸ It was also the medium, together with Latin, through which church services were performed, until the Reformation. Secondly, the church throughout Cornwall also exhibited a number of

Celtic features; at almost every holy place crosses, with very distinctive designs, were erected; springs, many with pagan origins were venerated as mystical holy wells;³¹⁹ the Celtic saints, especially St Piran, the patron saint of tanners, and St Petroc, were enthusiastically revered; and feasts of local saints were celebrated widely. Thirdly, Cornwall's Celticity was enhanced by a close affinity with Brittany. Both Breton and Cornish are members of the Brythonic branch of languages, which share many features; similar saints were venerated; both Brittany and Cornwall were Duchies with a semi-independent status; they have a common literary tradition, reflected especially in the Trystan and Isold, and Arthurian legends; and there was movement between the two for either trade or religious pilgrimage. Fourthly, the Cornish lived in scattered hamlets or small clusters of dwellings, rather than the more typical nucleated settlement pattern of English villages and land was enclosed from an early date, more typical of Celtic regions.³²⁰ Lastly, the Cornish also exhibited a general disregard for the law, although this was '...not so much a Celtic trait, as a reaction to peripheral status – to being not quite within the law's writ...' ³²¹ the law was not intended for the Cornish, but for the English. Members of the gentry were involved in piracy; lawlessness, rioting and drunkenness were rife; there was an attitude of antagonism towards outsiders; and on three separate occasions, in 1497, 1549 and 1688, Cornishmen were so outraged by the interference by outsiders that they rose up in open rebellion. Interestingly, one of the leaders of the 'Prayer Book Rebellion' of 1549, Father Welsh from Penryn, was acknowledged as an accomplished archer with both long bow and crossbow and a fine wrestler.³²²

The Duchy and Stannaries

The establishment of the Duchy of Cornwall and the incorporation of the Stannaries can be seen as a form of constitutional 'accommodation'; Cornwall was firmly annexed to the English state but in return was guaranteed no more attacks from east of the Tamar. This was not a '...benign and altruistic process [...] but was the result of realpolitik: the Cornish, no longer a threat, could safely be left alone...' ³²³ The Duchy and the Stannaries '...gave Cornwall a unique relationship with the Crown and afforded a special constitutional identity.' ³²⁴ The Duchy, established in 1337 not only became a semi-autonomous state, with little interference by central government, but it also applied considerable influence upon the Cornish people and economy. It created a '...class of independent and potentially mobile peasants,' ³²⁵ through the system of

tenancy, and it also ‘... inhibit[ed] the emergence of a strong and influential (and potentially rival) gentry.’³²⁶

‘The importance of the tin industry was reflected in the significance of the Stannaries...’³²⁷ which developed an almost territorial semi-independence. They developed from ancient rights and customs enjoyed by tanners, to a more formalised structure, established by a series of Charters. By 1508 there were four Stannaries, overseen by the Lord Warden appointed by the Crown, which had its own convocation (or parliament), with extensive legislative powers and their own courts, overseen by stewards, that heard both mining and non-mining cases affecting tanners. As most, if not all of Cornwall was metalliferous, Stannary law and its convocation affected all Cornwall, although the Stannaries ultimately fell under the jurisdiction of the Duchy and according to Payton,

[I]like the Duchy tenancies, one effect of the Stannary Charters was to create a class of independent workers, living and toiling according to their own rules, capable of enacting their own laws independently of Westminster, answerable only to their own kind, and jealous of their rights and privileges.³²⁸

The emergence of mining

Towards the end of ‘Older Peripheralism’, copper and especially tin mining emerged as ‘...the dynamic element in the economy, the main force for prosperity – or for depression, as the case might be,’³²⁹ which largely helped to create the conditions that were favourable for the period of ‘Second Peripheralism’ and which emphasised Cornwall’s distinctiveness as compared with the rest of England, including her nearest neighbour, Devon. Whetter noted that during the seventeenth century output from the mines increased by 250%, a trend which continued in the following centuries.³³⁰ A very distinctive feature of the Cornish mining industry was the system of employment, which enhanced the miners’ independence; miners provided their own equipment, bid for an area of land to work and were paid either the value of the ore mined (‘tribute’), or the total amount of land mined (‘tutwork’).

The Cornish viewed as different

Another feature of Cornwall’s peripheral status, noted by Payton, was the fact that non-Cornish writers considered Cornwall to be a land apart, and the Cornish were viewed as ethnically distinct and therefore different from the English. This ‘...was a rational

reflection of what they saw around them – a peripheral society appended to the English state.’³³¹ Cornwall appeared on medieval maps described as ‘West Wales’; the famous Mappa Mundi, in Hereford Cathedral, depicts England, Scotland, Wales and Cornwall as the four constituent parts of Britain; and government documents often referred to ‘Anglia et Cornubia’ (England and Cornwall).

‘Second Peripheralism’

According to Payton, the phase of ‘Second Peripheralism’, replaced ‘Older or First Peripheralism’ at the commencement of the eighteenth century and continued until the end of the Second World War.³³² The transformation from one phase of peripheralism to the next was not a sudden process, but a gradual erosion of elements of the earlier period, as a result of Tudor centralism and expansionism, together with the growth of the Cornish economy, led by the emergence of industrialisation, especially in the mining industry. Despite the transformations that industrialisation inevitably brought in its wake, elements from the phase of ‘Older Peripheralism’, survived into and affected the next phase, particularly Cornwall’s diversity and distinctiveness. Apart from the ‘constants of peripherality’, the constitutional accommodation provided by the Duchy, the Stannaries and the existence of 44 MPs, still exerted some influence upon the life of the county.³³³ Additionally the Cornish language, although moribund, was not yet extinguished; the activities of smuggling and wrecking were still practiced; a sense of independence and individualism endured; and certain customs and folktales, the celebration of feast days and the existence of place-names and a rich dialect, all remained from the pre-industrial period.³³⁴

Payton divided the phase of ‘Second Peripheralism’ into two distinct periods; firstly between c. 1700 and 1850, when the copper and tin mining industry was dominant and Methodism established itself as ‘...the hegemonic religious institution in Cornwall,’³³⁵ and secondly from 1850 until 1945, when economic crisis led to what Payton termed ‘social and economic marginalisation’.³³⁶

1 Mining and Methodism, c. 1750-1850

a. Mining

Throughout the entire phase of ‘Second Peripheralism’ the experience of Cornwall as an economic region was distinctive as compared with other regions in a number of ways, which served to emphasise the differences with the rest of Britain. Firstly, ‘[t]he

Cornish economy was one of the very first in the world to industrialise...³³⁷ and as such was in the vanguard of the Industrial Revolution. The development of the economy was led by the metal mining industry, especially copper and tin, but also lead, silver, zinc and wolfram, together with other products such as arsenic.³³⁸ Between 1700 and 1801 Cornish copper ore production was higher than British industry in general and output that ‘...grew faster than all other major industrial sectors before 1770.’³³⁹ By 1798 the Cornish copper industry produced 70-75% of the total British production of copper ore and by 1816 it had supplied 85% of British copper metal.³⁴⁰ Cornwall also developed as an important tin mining centre, which at one time had a virtual monopoly of the world’s production.³⁴¹ With this level of production, Cornish mines were, not surprisingly, amongst the largest employers in the British economy in the late eighteenth century;³⁴² for example, in the 1830s Gwennap, Consolidated and United Mines were ‘...amongst the largest enterprises in the world at that time.’³⁴³ Cornish copper mines alone employed 20,000 people in 1830, 40% of whom were women and children,³⁴⁴ and at its height in the mid-nineteenth century mining directly employed a third of the working population of Cornwall, with more in support services.³⁴⁵ According to Burke, mining was a ‘...major source of direct and indirect income and employment across the class spectrum.’³⁴⁶ Deacon has shown that by 1851 Cornwall’s occupational structure was dominated by mining and quarrying, with 29% of men employed in these areas, which was a higher level of occupational specialisation than coal mining in South Wales (25%), or textiles in North-west England (27%).³⁴⁷ He also noted that in 1861, Cornwall had four of the twenty Registration Districts in England and Wales with the highest percentage of men in mining.

Secondly, deep metal mining was accompanied by, and largely dependent upon technological innovation, which by the late eighteenth century led to Cornwall being one of the most advanced engineering centres in the world, attracting engineers, inventors and scientists, who in particular developed the use of steam power. The Cornish engineers became celebrated in the improvement in the efficiency of the Cornish beam engine, which was used for pumping, winding, ore-crushing and man engines.³⁴⁸ Engineering foundries were also established to manufacture not only beam engines, but also other products, which were exported around the world. Other technological developments that assisted the mining industry included improvements in transport and communications, especially the building of mineral tramways and railways linking mines and quarries to ports; improved ventilation and maintenance of

adits; the introduction of crushing mills; and the invention of mechanical separators to process poor quality ores.³⁴⁹

Thirdly, there were also demographic differences compared with other industrial regions. Cornwall had more native-born people amongst the resident population than any other English county consequently miners came from a very limited area.³⁵⁰ Copper and tin mining took place in a population that lived in a widely scattered and dispersed settlement pattern, with no large towns even by the mid-nineteenth century. Burke describes the typical miner as ‘...a rural dweller although an industrial worker,’ living in communities that were ‘dominated by mining but not mining communities.’³⁵¹ In order to supplement their incomes³⁵² miners often rented land or owned smallholdings, took shares in fishing boats, cultivated potatoes in the fields of neighbouring farmers³⁵³ and helped with the harvest. Although Cornwall was in many ways similar to other industrial regions, there was one crucial difference. At a time when the Cornish economy was expanding, it was the only industrial region that experienced major emigration;³⁵⁴ a factor which was to become highly significant in the decades to come. For example, in 1801 the Cornish population was higher than Glamorgan and Monmouthshire combined and was 61% of the total in Northumberland and Durham, and yet by 1861 the population was only 75% the size of South Wales and 43% of the north east of England.

Other notable features that demonstrated ‘difference’ included the distinctive work practices, such as the ‘tribute’ and ‘tutwork’ system of employment; the lack of an employer class as the majority of mines were owned by a number of ‘adventurers’ and managed by mine ‘captains’, who became influential men,³⁵⁵ and the ‘cost-book’ system, which was a ‘...financial and managerial eccentricity born of Cornish isolation and independence...’³⁵⁶ In this system each shareholder or ‘adventurer’, would be paid a dividend if the mine was profitable, whereas if it was unprofitable they would receive obligatory ‘calls’ for funds, in order to provide further financial support. It is ‘...now recognised that the process of industrialisation promoted regional differentiation rather than homogeneity.’³⁵⁷

b. Methodism

From the moment that Charles and John Wesley arrived in Cornwall in 1743, as part of an evangelical awakening that occurred during the eighteenth century, they inveighed

against the ‘...frequent lawlessness of the individualistic Cornish.’³⁵⁸ This included violence and hostility towards ‘foreigners’; smuggling, which was especially prevalent in the eighteenth century; wrecking; food riots; and a propensity to break the law. Their message must have fallen on fertile ground because ‘[b]y 1801 Wesleyan Methodist membership, as a proportion of the total population, was higher in Cornwall than anywhere in England,’³⁵⁹ and by 1851, when the Census of Religious Worship was conducted, 60% of the population of Cornwall were reported as Methodists, with only 27% as Anglicans, and it was the only county apart from North Wales where the attendances at Methodist chapels were in the majority.³⁶⁰ Deacon suggests there are three factors which help to explain why Methodism took root in Cornwall at an early date. Firstly, there were structural factors which included such things as the relative weakness of the Church of England; the large parishes, with remote churches and absentee clergy; the scattered settlement pattern; the independent nature of miners; control of chapels or meeting houses by local communities; and the way that Methodist societies operated. Secondly, whereas Church of England clergy were fixed in static churches, the itinerancy of Methodist preachers, who could move to areas quickly to hold meetings in any available buildings, such as farms or cottages, or even in large open air gatherings, allowed dispersed communities to be connected. Thirdly, the message was based on a simple theology of faith and salvation, which gave people hope and made people’s lives more bearable at a time when life was short and hazardous.³⁶¹ With its stress upon the equality of men before God, Methodism had an important egalitarian and democratic strand, which also emphasised self-help, individual improvement, compassion, concern for those less fortunate, thrift and contempt for wealth.³⁶² The message was often delivered by local charismatic lay preachers who spoke to people in a language they understood and therefore Methodism was a people’s faith, which also acted as a bridge between the indigenous folk beliefs of the pre-modern world and the rational formal religion of the modern world.³⁶³

From its early establishment in Cornwall, the growth of Methodism throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, acquired distinct ‘Cornish’ characteristics that were different from the rest of England and similar to other ‘Celtic’ regions. Firstly, Cornwall experienced periodic upsurges of religious fervour or ‘revivals’, whereby chapels gained new members, often through mass conversions and which remained popular as a form of recruitment until the 1860s, long after revivalism had become unfashionable in other parts of England. Revivalism became so distinctly Cornish that

‘foreigners’ were regarded as non-revivalists.³⁶⁴ Secondly, lay members in many Methodist communities governed their own societies, which not only fostered a sense of independence, but was also partly responsible for a series of schisms, that led to the establishment of numerous factions. The three principal Methodist denominations that eventually emerged in Cornwall were the ‘original’ Wesleyans, the Bible Christians and Primitive Methodists. Shaw indicated that by 1856, 40% of all Methodists in Cornwall were non-Wesleyans, who preferred greater self-governance.³⁶⁵ Thirdly, the popularity of revivalism allied to cottage folk religion, allowed women to play an important role in disseminating the Methodist message in the domestic field, some even became itinerant lay preachers.³⁶⁶

c. *Identity*

A significant feature of ‘Second Peripheralism’ was the development of a self-confident, assertive, vigorous identity based on industrial prowess, which had also ‘...inherited the lingering remnants and fading attributes of an earlier Celtic culture,³⁶⁷ such as a belief in the healing qualities of holy wells, the reverence for Cornish saints and the celebration of feast days. This new identity also included a sense of independence and individualism that was so widespread in mining, fishing and farming.³⁶⁸ The Cornish were proud of their reputation for being ‘...acknowledged world leaders in the field of deep metal mining,³⁶⁹ and ‘...miners were seen as the chief repository of Cornish distinctiveness...³⁷⁰ Mining became ‘...a geographically and culturally unifying factor by the 1850s;³⁷¹ mining *was* Cornwall and *Cornwall* was mining. The pride in Cornish achievement often ‘...verged on arrogance or even chauvinism,³⁷² which developed into the Cousin Jack myth; the belief that the Cornish excelled all others in the skills of hard-rock mining.

An important feature of identities is the way they are imagined, either by ‘outsiders’ or ‘insiders’.³⁷³ Lane examined the writing of travellers to Cornwall during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and observed that they were largely from a metropolitan élite and ‘[t]heir words, therefore are a priceless insight into the way in which Cornwall was regarded by that élite...³⁷⁴ The majority expected to find a remote and forbidding land, full of drunkenness, violence and lawlessness, or ‘West Barbary’, but what they actually found was a land dominated by mining and industrial modernity, or ‘industrial civilisation’. Methodism claimed credit for this moral revolution in Cornish society, with ‘improving’ societies and philanthropic donations that introduced

moral improvement. However, Deacon questions the role played by Methodism as a widespread moral regenerator and suggests that it was only really successful in preparing the way for the adoption of the Temperance movement.³⁷⁵

Equally important as ‘outsider’ images, according to Deacon, were ‘insider’ representations of Cornwall. Using a model of regional identity formation, Deacon examined the role of social institutions in the reproduction of the Cornish identity between the 1770s and 1860s. He suggests that a ‘county’ identity was first articulated by the landed class, which merged with the pride in the industrial region found amongst the middle classes, reproduced by county institutions, newspapers and novels and which eventually penetrated the working class, producing a vigorous regional identity by the 1850s.³⁷⁶ Pride in being Cornish was matched by the dismissal of non-Cornish as ‘foreigners’, especially towards Londoners and Devonians; the former were regarded as scheming and untrustworthy and the latter as backward and slow.³⁷⁷

2 Economic and social marginalisation, 1850-1945

During the second half of the nineteenth century Cornwall experienced a catastrophic downturn in its economy, leading to a period of de-industrialisation, and economic marginalisation, which was precipitated by the collapse of the mining industry.³⁷⁸

Copper mining declined in the 1850s and 1860s eventually leading to a crash in 1866, in the face of competition from producers such as the USA, Chile, Cuba and South Australia that were able to produce the ore much cheaper, and the movement of investment to mines overseas. Tin mining, which temporarily provided some respite through a minor boom in the early 1870s, also suffered a collapse in 1874. The collapse of both copper and tin mining was accompanied by the reciprocal decline of beam engine manufacturing and of other engineering and was exacerbated by periods of general depression in the economy, including the agricultural crisis of the 1870s and the international downturn in the 1880s. According to Payton, not only did the mining industry fail to recover, but also other industries had little opportunity to diversify as Cornwall’s industrial base was ‘...imperfect, overspecialised and incomplete.’³⁷⁹ The collapse of the mining industry also had a deleterious effect upon farming and fishing, which ‘...created a profile of economic marginalisation which served to mark Cornwall off in a most striking way from the experience elsewhere in the United Kingdom.’³⁸⁰

Economic marginalisation was associated with the social marginalisation of the so-called ‘Great Migration’, which was seen as one solution to poverty, distress and starvation and for many, who had over-specialised skills, that were no longer needed, they had no other option but to leave Cornwall³⁸¹ It has been estimated that approximately 230,000 Cornish people left the county during the nineteenth century, which represented at least a third of the population and according to one source, Cornwall was ‘...probably an emigration region comparable with any in Europe.’³⁸² Between 1861 and 1900, Cornwall lost 118,500 of its population, which was the largest percentage of people than any other county; 10.5% of its male population went overseas and 7% to other counties; nearly 45% of the male population aged between fifteen and twenty four went overseas and almost 30% went to other counties.³⁸³ Cornish men and women were also more than three times more likely to emigrate in this period than was the norm for counties in England and Wales.³⁸⁴ Despite the depopulation of many parishes caused by the ‘Great Migration’, it was seen by many in Cornwall as ‘...the culmination of Cornish experience, the highpoint of a Cornish achievement that – having established Cornwall in the forefront of technological advance – now took its energy and expertise to the four points of the compass.’³⁸⁵ However, the reality was far different, as the decline of the Cornish economy was accelerated by the most skilled, youngest and energetic who left Cornwall to find work, thus exacerbating the problems caused by overseas competition.³⁸⁶

‘Social marginalisation’ was accompanied by what Payton calls a ‘dependency culture’ which emerged by the end of the nineteenth century, whereby the ‘...welfare of large sections of the community was dependent upon the support of the Cornish overseas.’³⁸⁷ The support was in the form of financial remittances sent ‘back home’ to relieve the poverty of relatives, which has been estimated to have amounted to £1,000,000 each year in the early twentieth century, from South Africa alone. Payton has remarked that this dependency on Cornish exiles was far removed from the ‘...vibrant, assertive, innovative society that had existed less than a century before...’³⁸⁸

The cumulative effect of economic and social marginalisation upon Cornwall in the period between 1900 and 1945, was characterised by ‘...lethargy and inertia, perhaps even trauma, in which (in marked contrast to all the vigour and movement of the previous two hundred years) very little actually happened.’³⁸⁹ Payton calls this period the ‘Great Paralysis’, which coincided with the First World War and the Depression.

Cornwall's experience during this period was different from the rest of the country, even of its nearest neighbour, Devon. There were higher numbers of people employed in the service sector and agriculture and fewer in manufacturing and mining; the population density was lower and was falling; unemployment was high, especially in mining and china clay districts; fishing fleets were on the decline; agriculture was in a poor state; and there were extremes of poverty. The paralysis also affected Cornwall's social and cultural life as the Cornish response was characterised by fatalism and resignation, '...a "making do" in which a hitherto assertive and self-confident identity turned in on itself, becoming instead introspective, even "fossilised"'³⁹⁰

A small group of middle class scholars, mostly exiles, proposed to solve the problems of paralysis by looking back to a perceived golden age when Cornwall was more truly Cornish; when Cornwall was Celtic; when the Cornish language was widely spoken; when churches were Catholic; and when the Duchy was an important institution. They were determined to '...break out of the cultural paralysis in which Cornwall had found itself by rebuilding the Cornish identity anew.'³⁹¹ This became the 'Cornish Revival', related to the much broader 'Celtic Revival' of the nineteenth century, in which its important figures viewed Brittany as a role model and devoted most of their efforts in reviving the Cornish language.³⁹² The Revival was largely a failure as it did not address the real problems of Cornwall and did not relate to the broad mass of the Cornish population, although some Revivalists did suggest that the solution to Cornwall's demise was tourism; most of the Revivalists' activities, especially the attempt to revive the language was '...hardly relevant amongst the destitution and depression of economic reality.'³⁹³

'Third Peripheralism'

According to Payton the phase of 'Third Peripheralism replaced 'Second Peripheralism' in the post Second World War period, although there were remnants of the earlier phase; the 'constants of peripherality' of geographical location and the physical distance from the centre; the sustained sense of individualism and independence; the scattered settlements and small holdings; the lack of influence of squire and church; and the Nonconformist and Liberal tendencies.³⁹⁴ 'Third Peripheralism' is characterised by government regional development policies, which encouraged companies outside Cornwall to establish 'branch-factories' on new industrial estates in the county. This development led to substantial in-migration or 'counter-urbanisation', as the 'branch-

factories' enticed managers and key workers to move to Cornwall. The effect of the increase in population upon Cornwall led to rising unemployment as the indigenous population were squeezed out of skilled jobs by in-migrants at the same time that there was a decline in employment in manufacturing and the extractive industries. There were also many in-migrants who moved to Cornwall for a variety of reasons, but without employment. High unemployment was accompanied by a high cost of living, including house prices beyond the means of most 'locals' and low pay, especially in the tourism and service sectors, where employment was largely part-time, short-term and seasonal; a set of characteristics which made Cornwall 'different' from the rest of the country.³⁹⁵

The response to the rapid social, economic and political changes brought by 'branch-factories', 'counter-urbanisation' and unemployment was the emergence from the paralysis and fossilisation of the previous phase of peripherality of a new assertion of Cornish identity. The phase of 'Third Peripheralism' is dominated by the rehabilitation of the Cornish Revival, which was characterised not only by an increased academic interest in Cornwall's Celticity, the industrial age and issues of modern Cornwall, but at the same time it also had a much broader appeal for the mass of the Cornish population, largely because it wedded the 'Celtic' with the 'popular'.³⁹⁶ This was manifested in particular at County Championship rugby matches, where traditional icons of Cornishness, such as the wearing of black-and-gold and the singing of 'Trelawny' in Cornish were augmented with the Revivalist symbols of the St Piran's flag and numerous placards in Cornish.³⁹⁷ Similarly, in 2000 the rugby player, Charles Robert ('Bonzo') Johns, who played for Redruth throughout his career, amassed 88 caps for Cornwall, played for the Barbarians in the 1961-62 season and had five England international trials,³⁹⁸ was initiated as a bard of the Gorseth Kernow, taking the bardic name of Gwarier Du Hag Owr ('Black and Gold Player'), becoming the first sportsman to be so honoured.³⁹⁹

Whereas the Cornish Revival was apolitical in the inter-war period, after 1945 it was much more politicised in nature, with a strategy to, '...defend and promote the ethnic identity of Cornwall and the Cornish,'⁴⁰⁰ manifested by the formation in 1951 of Mebyon Kernow ('Sons of Cornwall'), the attempts to restore the Stannary Parliament in 1974, the formation of the Cornish Nationalist Party in 1975 and the creation of other groups such as Tyr-Gwyr-Gweryn ('Land-Truth-People'). Although there was no single coherent strategy developed by these groups there was a discernible anti-

metropolitanism, manifested in the opposition to the government's regional development policies, including 'branch-factories', 'counter-urbanisation' and the creation of south west regional bodies with headquarters outside Cornwall, which influenced the activities of the national political parties, especially the Liberals, who voiced concerns over low wages, the increasing population largely due to in-migration, and the proliferation of second homes. There were also concerns expressed by various groups and individuals about the territorial integrity of Cornwall, such as the demand for Cornwall to be a constituency in the European Parliament; the campaign for a devolved Cornish Assembly, similar to that in Wales; the opposition to the partition of Cornwall into two or three separate units; the threat of south east Cornwall being administered in Plymouth; and the bid to UNESCO for the Cornish and West Devon mining industry to be granted World Heritage Site status.⁴⁰¹

Since the 1970s, there has also been a resurgence of interest in Cornish identity overseas, especially in genealogy and family history, but also a renewed sense of Cornishness, which was reflected in the formation of Cornish Associations worldwide, but particularly in the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. It was also manifested through specific events; for example, in May 1973 the first Kernewek Lowender ('Cornish Festival') was organised at Moonta, Australia, in response to the South Australian State Government's active encouragement of heritage tourism '...as a means of economic diversification as well as a celebration of the State's diverse historical and natural heritage.'⁴⁰² The festival was so successful that it encouraged the organisers to stage it every other year since, in the 'Copper Triangle' towns of Moonta, Kadina and Wallaroo and by 1999 it was being marketed as '...the world's largest Cornish festival.'⁴⁰³ In May 2009 the festival included, amongst other things, a pasty and saffron cake workshop, music and dance, literary events, seminars, an art prize exhibition, concerts, theatrical events, church and chapel services, Cornish language classes, Fer Kernewek ('Cornish Fair'), an exhibition of mining, a procession, and a gathering of the Bards of Cornwall, conducted in Cornish.⁴⁰⁴ Also, in 1988 a giant statue of a Cornish miner, entitled Map Kernow ('Son of Cornwall'), was erected at Kapunda, South Australia, as a reminder to Australians of the contribution made by the Cornish to their country.⁴⁰⁵

Three other examples can testify to the renewed sense of Cornishness in the diaspora. Firstly, in 2002 Cornwall hosted Dehwelans ('Homecoming'), at Pendennis Castle,

Falmouth, which included a programme of artistic, literary and cultural events, lectures and trips to surrounding sites of interest, designed to celebrate Cornishness and to attract those from around the world who have a Cornish heritage. The event was so successful it was repeated in 2004 at Newquay, in 2008 at Looe and will be organised again in 2010.⁴⁰⁶ Secondly, in the 2004 Christmas edition of *The Simpsons*, the American satirical animated television programme, one of the characters, Lisa Simpson waves a St Piran's flag and shouts, 'rydhsys rag Kernow lemsnyn' ('freedom for Cornwall now') and 'Kernow bys vyken' ('Cornwall forever').⁴⁰⁷ Thirdly, in 2006 the Cornish Mexican Cultural Society was established with the aim of fostering and promoting the historic cultural ties between Cornwall and Mexico, especially the towns of Pachuca and Real del Monte in the state of Hidalgo, which culminated in a friendship agreement between Camborne with the former and a formal twinning between Redruth and the latter.⁴⁰⁸

Conclusion

This chapter sought to provide a relevant historical analysis of the development and survival of Cornish wrestling by locating the sport within an appropriate conceptual framework. Two fields of enquiry were identified as being suitable for further analysis; mainstream British sport history and the 'new Cornish Studies'. Following a review of the major ideas and debates that form the basis of both these areas, it was argued that, although the available evidence appears to suggest that the history of Cornish wrestling is broadly consistent with the experience of sport in the rest of Britain, particularly before the proliferation of 'modern' sports, in many ways the sport was and is 'different' from other sports. It is further argued that the 'new Cornish Studies' in general and Payton's 'centre-periphery model' in particular, with the emphasis upon 'difference' provides a more suitable context for Cornish wrestling. Consequently the following chapters provide a detailed examination of Cornish wrestling within the context of the 'centre-periphery model'.

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- ¹⁷ op. cit. Brailsford, 1991, p. 2
- ¹⁸ op. cit. Malcolmson, 1973, p. 19
- ¹⁹ op. cit. Brailsford, 1991
- ²⁰ ibid. p. 2
- ²¹ op.cit. Malcolmson, 1973, p. 31
- ²² Especially Ascension Day (Thursday in the 6th week after Easter Sunday); Whit Sunday (7th Sunday after Easter Sunday) through to Whit Tuesday; Trinity Sunday (8th Sunday after Easter Sunday) and Monday
- ²³ op. cit. Brailsford, 1991
- ²⁴ ibid, p. 78
- ²⁵ Lowerson, J. and Myerscough, J., *Time to Spare in Victorian England*, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1977
- ²⁶ op. cit. Malcolmson, 1973, p. 20
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- ²⁸ This traditionally occurred around the time of Michaelmas (The Feast of St Michael on 29th September) or Martinmas (the Feast of St Martin on 11th November), although in other places Christmas was also common
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- ⁵⁰ op. cit. Holt, 1990, pp. 18-19
- ⁵¹ The object of cudgelling was to be the first to draw blood from an opponent's head
- ⁵² The name given to an explicitly violent variety of games, that were characterised by an unlimited number of players, an absence of rules and played on any available terrain
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- ⁵⁷ ibid. p. 33
- ⁵⁸ ibid.
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age of 20, less than 25% over 45, 60% unmarried and an average age of 26, it was also a relatively young, restless and energetic population (op. cit. Midwinter, 1986).

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PART 2: 'FIRST' OR 'OLDER PERIPHERALISM'

CHAPTER 2: Origins and myths

Introduction

The intention in this chapter is to examine the early history of Cornish wrestling. Although the origins of Cornish wrestling are unclear, with very little written evidence before the sixteenth century and what there is tends to rely upon mythical accounts, there is sufficient after this date to be able to identify four main features. Firstly, it is argued here that Cornish wrestling may have been Celtic in origin, which is supported by its common ancestry with Breton wrestling and the possible links with Ireland. Secondly, with its very distinctive style of wrestling unique to Cornwall it demonstrates 'difference', especially when compared with the rest of England. The most distinctive features include the jacket, the unique combination of holds, all of which are taken on the jacket, the absence of grappling on the ground as in many other styles of wrestling, the criteria for victory and the adjudication by three sticklers. Thirdly, from the sixteenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth there are many commentators, mainly non-Cornish who remarked upon the Cornish as 'different' and a component of that 'difference' is the Cornish ability in their style of wrestling, making it a distinctive feature of Cornishness. Lastly, the Cornish saw themselves as different and took pride in that difference, especially their expertise in wrestling, which contributed towards their sense of identity, based on independence and individualism.

Celticity and Cornish wrestling

Although there is only evidence of a fragmentary kind before the fifteenth century, which attests to the origins of Cornish wrestling, frustratingly there is a lack of documentary evidence. This led Pascoe to state that '[n]obody can say "Here beginneth the first chapter of Cornish Wrestling"' because nobody has kept an authentic record of it through the ages.¹ This may be, as Henricks has noted, because '[i]t is in the nature of history to memorialize the exceptional [...] ordinary activities of the ordinary escape notice.'² Consequently in attempting to locate the origins of Cornish wrestling it would be a mistake, as Dunning has warned, not to separate fact from myth. He identifies two broad kinds of mythical account of the origins of sports, '...those that trace a sport to actions of individuals and those which trace it to a collectivity.'³ An example of the former is that attributed to Geoffrey of Monmouth (c.1100 – c.1155), a Welsh cleric and 'historian', who is responsible for the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings*

of Britain), written in about 1136-38, in which he records the lives of the kings of Britain in a chronological and genealogical narrative, spread over 2,000 years, starting with the Trojans of Homer's *Iliad* and ending with Anglo-Saxon control in the seventh century. The work is believed to be based on extant manuscripts, ranging from *Historia Britonum* (*History of the Britons*), a ninth century Welsh-Latin history; Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*); some Roman histories; Welsh legend; and especially '...his own fertile imagination...' ⁴ With its many references to Merlin and Arthur myths, Geoffrey's *Historia*, which '...was one of the best-sellers of the Middle Ages...' ⁵ is regarded as a major establisher of Arthurian texts, but it has no value as history, although it may contain some factual information.

Geoffrey claimed that in about 1,000BC, following various battles, Brutus, great-grandson of the Trojan Aeneas, settled in the island of Albion, which he named after himself and rewarded Corineus, one of his trusted warriors with land, who:

...in imitation of his leader, called that part of the island which fell to his share, Corinea, and his people Corineans, after his name; and though he had his choice of the provinces before all the rest, yet he preferred this country, which is called in Latin Cornubia, either from its being in the shape of a horn (in Latin cornu), or from the corruption of the said name. ⁶

Cornwall was then supposedly inhabited by giants, which Brutus and his army killed, except one who was a '...detestable monster, named Goëmagot (or Gogmagog), in stature twelve cubits [18 feet], and of such prodigious strength that at one shake he pulled up an oak as if it had been a hazel wand.' ⁷ He was deliberately kept alive for a wrestling match with Corineus. According to Geoffrey's account:

At the beginning of the encounter, Corineus and the giant, standing front to front, held each other strongly in their arms, and panted aloud for breath, but Goëmagot presently grasping Corineus with all his might, broke three of his ribs, two on his right side and one on his left. At which Corineus, highly enraged, roused up his whole strength, and snatching him upon his shoulders, ran with him, as fast as the weight would allow him, to the next shore, and there getting upon the top of a high rock, hurled down the savage monster into the sea; where falling on the sides of craggy rocks, he was torn to pieces and coloured the waves with his blood. The place where he fell, taking its name from the giant's fall is called Lam Goëmagot, that is, Goëmagot's Leap, to this day. ⁸

Thus according to Kent, Corineus's wrestling match with Gogmagog '...conveniently provid[ed] a mythical origin for the Cornish sport.' ⁹ Carew demonstrated the enduring

influence of Geoffrey's *Historia* when, writing at the end of the sixteenth century, he provides a description of the wrestling match and considered that '...the activity of Devon and Cornish men in this faculty of wrestling, beyond those of other shires, doth seem to derive them a special pedigree from that grand wrestler Corineus.'¹⁰ Carew also noted that at Plymouth Hoe, the supposed site of the encounter, '...there is cut out in the ground the portraiture of two men, the one bigger, the other lesser, with clubs in their hands...and...it is renewed by order of the townsmen when cause requireth...'¹¹ Chope confirms this from Corporation records '...which gives entries relating to the re-cutting and renewal of these figures from time to time. In 1567 eightpence was paid for the purpose.'¹² It appears the figures were destroyed in about 1670 when the citadel was built.¹³

It is interesting to note that legends about Gogmagog or Gog and Magog occur widely in mythology and folklore, over a long period of time, across several countries and appear as humans, giants or demons. Although Gogmagog was clearly a mythical figure and Geoffrey of Monmouth is not a reliable source, it is evident that not only was wrestling known to him, but it is also highly likely that the Cornish had a reputation for the sport even in the twelfth century.

Sheard has warned against the desire for myth creation by some historians, in four ways. Firstly, by attempting to create tenuous links with ancient Greece or Rome, as has been the case with some sports, thus establishing, '...legitimacy of the activities by appealing to the sanctity of tradition and antiquity...'¹⁴ Secondly, by justifying one's activities when that activity comes under threat by those who see it as 'frivolous' or 'uncivilised'. Thirdly, by contemporary writers who regard their own time and their own sport as 'civilised' compared with the past. Lastly, by tracing the '...origins of sports to the innovative actions of "great individuals" or "personalities" and to ignore, or underplay the social "soup" – the figuration – that is the "true" progenitor of all activities of this kind.'¹⁵

With this warning in mind, what are the origins of Cornish wrestling? Polley has suggested the quest for origins is one of the major themes in sport history, yet to establish a precise moment in time when an activity originated, is an extremely difficult task. Most 'modern' sport forms developed out of various local or regional versions, with no written records and '[t]o trace lineage is far harder than noting basic

similarities, however, as the diffusion routes are extremely complicated.’¹⁶ The modern sportive form of wrestling most probably developed sometime in prehistory from survival fighting, when it became expedient to replace death or serious injury with a more symbolic victory. There is considerable evidence for historians to conclude that wrestling existed in most, if not all, early civilisations. At Beni-Hasan, in Egypt, for example, a series of wall paintings dating from circa 3,400BC, have been found, which depict over two hundred wrestling scenes, in what can only be described as an early form of ‘coaching manual’. However, it was in ancient Greece where it really developed into a sport, being included in the eighteenth Olympic Games of 704BC.¹⁷ Longhurst noted that ‘[o]f all athletic recreations, to one only, wrestling, may the term universal be truly applied.’¹⁸

Whether Cornish wrestling developed in Cornwall through a process of diffusion or it evolved independently is unclear, although the sport is as likely to have developed here at an early date as any other place in the world, especially as there is recent evidence there was at least ‘...sporadic human activity in Cornwall in the Paleolithic era.’¹⁹ Kent suggests that ‘[w]e know that wrestling was established in the West Country before the invasion of the Romans, and that the Cornish meetings on Halvagar [sic] Moor were being held during the Saxon period...’²⁰ although he fails to offer any evidence for this assertion. It appears to be based on a reading of Strutt, writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, who concluded that ‘[p]erhaps the skill which the natives of Devonshire and Cornwall retain to the present day, in hurling and wrestling may properly be considered as a vestige of British activity.’²¹ Interestingly, the wrestling styles that eventually emerged in the British Isles, including in Cornwall, bore little resemblance, if any, to that practised by Roman soldiers and gladiators.²² This suggests three possible conclusions: wrestling styles had previously developed before the Romans arrived and were resistant to change; the native Britons continued to practice their indigenous styles either because they did not favour the militaristic style practised by Roman soldiers, or as an act of defiance against the colonisers; and the sport was introduced into Britain some time after the Roman occupation. Soulsby noted that in Cornwall there were ‘...four centuries of only nominal Roman rule’,²³ with no town west of Exeter, it appears the Romans were more interested in the area for trading purposes, especially tin, gold and silver, than for settlement. Although ‘...there was undoubtedly a steady diffusion of Roman culture...’²⁴ it is most unlikely that this was widespread in Cornwall, including their wrestling style. It is therefore plausible that,

given the early settlement of Cornwall, the universality of wrestling and the absence of the Roman style, Cornish wrestling could have originated at some time before the arrival of the Romans, which if this is true, it is entirely possible it is Celtic in origin.

Although early theories referred to racial characteristics, in contemporary scholarship the term Celt is usually associated with people who share cultural commonalities, based on similarities, especially language, material artefacts, especially art forms, social organisation and religious and mythological aspects. There is much debate and controversy, with competing theories, surrounding the choice of an original homeland, although the Hallstatt and Le Tène cultures of central Europe are often cited. It appears that in Britain there was no large scale migration of people involving war and conquest, but sometime during the first millennium BC there was a gradual peaceful mixing of local tribal cultures, linked by kinship and trade. According to Cunliffe, the Celts are a loose collection of various indigenous tribal societies linked together by trade, speaking related languages, with a common druidic religion and similar social institutions, but each having their own traditions.²⁵

A similar, but not identical style to Cornish wrestling is that practiced in Brittany. Hooper has suggested that what proves a very early origin of Cornish wrestling is that between the fourth and seventh centuries AD, emigrants from Cornwall and Devon, fleeing the encroaching Saxon invasion, settled in Brittany and introduced the two indigenous sports of Cornwall, hurling and wrestling, which the Bretons named *la soule* and *gouren* respectively.²⁶ It is interesting to note there is an area in the south of modern Brittany called *Cornouaille*, a name which is also used in French for Cornwall, with *cornouaillais* being one of four main Breton dialects, and in the north/north-west an area called *Dumnonia*, the name which is also given to the area of what is now Cornwall, Scilly, Devon and west Somerset in the pre-Roman era. According to Jaouen, the Cornish and Bretons shared a common language, many traditions and had trading links, therefore, ‘...it is probable that those people also had sporting exchanges in the form of wrestling competitions.’²⁷ Kent suggests that these wrestling contests ‘...were a way of settling disputes over fishing rights,’²⁸ although he offers no evidence for this assertion.

The two modern styles of Cornish and Breton wrestling, share many characteristics and have some variations, but the similarities are so many and the differences are so few that

it provides compelling evidence of a common ancestry. Breton wrestling varies from Cornish wrestling in the following ways: a fall (or *lamm*) has to be on both shoulders, rather than three or four ‘pins’; the jacket is a close fitting shirt (or *chemise*) fastened by a belt, rather than a loose jacket; it is compulsory for wrestlers to control the follow-through of a throw in order to reduce injuries to opponents; the wrestling arena consists of a four metre square ring of sawdust or woodchips, set within a thirty six metre square mat, rather than a grass ring. In all other respects the styles are identical, which made it possible for the Cornish Revivalists to adopt wrestling as a symbol of Celticity during the 1920s and to establish a series of Cornu-Breton tournaments, which lasted until the 1980s. Jaouen also suggests, the evidence that the two styles are Celtic in origin is that they ‘...are all styles of wrestling which take place standing up, wearing special clothes, where blows, arm locks or violence have never been allowed,’²⁹ whereas non-Celtic styles allow one or all of these. Jaouen also suggests that Celtic styles might have always been fought in the same way, as all Celtic lands, which include two peninsulas (Cornwall and Brittany), two mountain regions (Cumbria and Scotland) and one island (Iceland), were geographically isolated and therefore unaffected by influences from outside. However, this idea must be treated with some caution as it may be based more on a study of the obvious characteristics of the modern styles of wrestling that are members of the International Federation of Celtic Wrestling, rather than actual Celtic features. Nevertheless, the similarities between the two styles are intriguing.

The Celtic lineage of Cornish wrestling is also indicated by the links with Ireland. The oldest reference to Celtic wrestling and the first to wrestling in the British Isles is in the *Book of Leinster*, an important source of Medieval Irish literature, genealogy and mythology, compiled between 1151 and 1201, which records that it formed part of the Tailtean Games, held in County Meath, dating back to at least 1829BC and continued until AD554.³⁰ Other evidence, again from Ireland, comes from ninth century stone carvings, which Payton, citing Professor Charles Thomas, suggests can be used as primary documents;³¹ these are found on the so-called ‘high crosses’ at Durrow, County Offaly and Kells, County Meath and a church arch at Killeel, County Kildare.³² Although each carving has religious significance, consisting of biblical themes, the carver has clearly adopted wrestling poses with which he was familiar; interestingly the wrestlers are clothed and are taking grips on the clothing. After the conversion of Ireland by St Patrick in the early fifth century, ‘...countless missionaries travelled to Wales and Cornwall and founded monasteries in both territories.’³³ Of interest here is

that, in a description of both current and extinct wrestling styles from around the world, Baxter and Einarsson note a jacket style in south Wales similar to Cornish wrestling, which still existed as late as the 1940s.³⁴ What is unclear is how old this style is and whether the Cornish were responsible for introducing it.

It is tempting to speculate that the Irish introduced wrestling into Cornwall, with the early Christian missions, and the Cornish then transported it to Brittany, although there is little evidence to support this claim. It is interesting to note, however, that there are newspaper reports of wrestling bouts between Cornish and Irish wrestlers, during the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century's, in tournaments not only in Cornwall, but also in London, where the sport became an attraction, and in the numerous places around the world where both groups sought employment for their skills.³⁵ The difference in rules between the two styles could not have been that great, as it did not appear to present an insurmountable barrier to participation.

Lyon has identified another possible Celtic connection worthy of note; the *plen-an-gwary* or 'playing place'. Believed to have been created in the fifteenth century, these were large amphitheatres, which were '...originally constructed to function as an open-air theatre for the performance of Cornish miracle plays – religious dramas which lasted over a period of two or three days, describing biblical events or perhaps the life of a saint.'³⁶ Although only two playing places survive extant, at St Just-in-Penwith and Perran Round, near Goonhavern, Lyon has identified almost forty sites throughout Cornwall where there is evidence they may have existed or are worthy of further research, including twelve where Cornish wrestling is likely to have taken place. Lyon noted that wrestling was popular before, during and after the time of miracle plays and that although playing places undoubtedly staged matches, venues for the sport need not have catered for miracle plays and probably never had an amphitheatre; Cornish wrestling only needed a relatively small area of flat, level turf and did not require anything as grandiose. It is possible there were traditional wrestling sites in use well before the fifteenth century that were co-opted for miracle plays and developed into playing places. 'The miracle plays, as vehicles of popular culture in the Cornish language, were either suppressed as subversive [during the Reformation] or allowed to fossilise as half-understood relics from earlier times,'³⁷ and therefore it is entirely possible there were many more playing place sites across Cornwall, where wrestling also took place.

Thus, despite the lack of written evidence before the sixteenth century, the desire for myth creation by some historians, the absence of clear diffusion routes and therefore the difficulty in establishing the origins of Cornish wrestling, the links with Brittany, the possible Irish connection and the existence of playing places, all suggest that the sport was Celtic in origin. Moreover, if it is accepted that the Cornish were a Celtic people, and Cornish Studies practitioners spend little time justifying Cornwall's Celticity,³⁸ it naturally follows that the traditional sports they played can also be regarded as Celtic.

A distinctive style of wrestling

As indicated in the introduction, the most distinctive feature of Cornish wrestling is the jacket, although there is some debate amongst historians concerning its ancestry. Carew, writing at the end of the sixteenth century, describes a typical wrestling match at the time and states '...taking hold only above girdle, wearing a girdle to take hold by...'³⁹ This led Hooper to question whether wrestlers wore a jacket in Carew's day and concluded that what he (ie Carew) may have observed was what looked like a 'girdle', as once wrestlers succeed in establishing a firm grip, they roll and tighten the loose material of the jacket for a more effective hold '...until it is like a girdle round the man's body.'⁴⁰ Conversely, Pascoe who admits to disliking the modern jacket, as '...it is big, loose, canvas and ugly [and an] abomination,'⁴¹ suggests that what Carew describes as a girdle was something like a shawl or sash, which '...appears to have grown bigger and bigger until it became "the jacket".'⁴² He also noted that in the early eighteenth century '...the jacket was almost tight-fitting and small enough to be called a "vest",'⁴³ although he offers no evidence for this statement. In describing regional styles of wrestling in Britain, Kent includes examples of illustrations taken from medieval manuscripts, which clearly show wrestlers using a shawl or scarf; however, none of these are from Cornwall.⁴⁴ A clearer pictorial representation of early wrestling can be found in a carved roof boss in the vaulting of the presbytery of Exeter Cathedral, which dates from the end of the thirteenth century. It is the earliest known reference to wrestling in the south-west and is of particular interest as the two wrestlers are wearing what looks like jackets and are taking holds in an identical manner to modern Cornish wrestling. The wrestlers are also in bare feet and one wrestler is using a 'hitch' known as a 'crook', where a foot is wound round or crooked around the opponent's leg.⁴⁵ According to Hooper, although it is likely to represent a Biblical scene, '[t]he sculptor probably intended to depict contemporary Westcountry wrestling'⁴⁶ and deliberately

chose a subject which was familiar to him and deeply embedded in local culture. It is also worth noting that as Cornwall fell within the diocese of Exeter at that time, it is likely that the carver intended to depict a Cornish theme.

Other features which contributed towards Cornish wrestling's distinctiveness, which Carew described at the end of the sixteenth century, are the unique combination of holds, all of which are taken on the jacket and nowhere else; the absence of grappling on the ground, as wrestling ceases when any part of the body other than the feet touches the ground; a 'back' as the criteria for victory; and the presence of three 'sticklers', who act as judges.

It is likely that one of the most important factors in the development of the distinctive style of Cornish wrestling was Cornwall's geographical isolation and therefore its resistance to outside influences. Mandell has noted that '...despite its universality [wrestling], has paradoxically, been narrowly local,' with much breadth and variety in features such as the position at the start, prescribed clothing, permissible holds, the definition of a fall and the permitted duration of bouts, which '...all favo[u]red the development of mutually exclusive refinements.'⁴⁷ He also suggested that prior to the Industrial Revolution, '...the rules [of wrestling] were more rooted in local customs and therefore more particularized, various, and, it follows, mutually exclusive.'⁴⁸ Moreover, Baxter and Einarsson suggest that '[e]ach of the many wrestling styles of the world has techniques which every one of us could claim for our own national style, but none is particular to any one style...each style has its specialisms but none is unique.'⁴⁹ Cooper in his critique of Cornish distinctiveness, warns against viewing Cornish wrestling as different; the Devonians also wrestled, using an almost identical style.⁵⁰ Armstrong in his summary of British wrestling, written towards the end of the nineteenth century, suggested there was little difference in substance between the two styles, which he categorised under a single heading of 'West-country wrestling', although the Devonshire style was '...characterised by kicking and tripping, while the Cornishmen were... noted for hugging and heaving.'⁵¹ Devonshire wrestling also had features similar to Cornish wrestling; the jacket; the criteria for victory; and the use of three 'sticklers'.⁵² Interestingly, Jolly described two styles of Cornish wrestling, although he offers no evidence for such an assertion; the 'western style, which was '...perhaps more purely Cornish...;' and the 'eastern' style, which was influenced by contact with Devonshire wrestlers at places near the county border.⁵³ The notion that there are two

types of wrestling defined by geography is similar to the point made by Stoye, who in describing Cornish distinctiveness, noted that Cornwall could be delineated between the Celtic west and the more Anglicised east, which is reflected in two different types of hurling, originally described by Carew.⁵⁴ Jolly also suggested, ‘...it is likely that at one time Cornish wrestlers were as much at home in the style of Devonshire as in their own Cornish style.’⁵⁵ However, Cornish wrestling was different from Devonshire wrestling in one important respect, which Baring-Gould described:⁵⁶

...it was less brutal, as no kicking was allowed. The [Devonshire] wrestlers wore boots soaked in bullock’s blood and indurated at the fire, and with these hacked the shins of their opponents, who wore as a protection *skillibegs*, or bands of hay twisted and wrapped round their legs below the knee.⁵⁷

Thus, irrespective of the existence of similar styles, the wearing of the jacket, which probably became a feature of Cornish wrestling sometime during the period of ‘Older Peripheralism’, although it is difficult to establish its ancestry precisely; the necessity of taking all holds on the jacket; the absence of grappling on the ground; and the adjudication by three ‘sticklers’ all combine to create a distinctive sport unique to Cornwall.

Cornish wrestling as a distinctive feature of Cornishness

As noted earlier, an important aspect of the ‘new Cornish Studies’ and Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’ is the Cornish were seen by the non-Cornish as ‘different’. It is also evident that non-Cornish commentators also recognised that Cornish wrestling was a distinctive feature of Cornishness and therefore contributed towards this ‘difference’, making it worthy of comment. Unfortunately there do not appear to be any references to Cornish wrestling before the sixteenth century. From the Elizabethan period to about 1700 there are few references to Cornish wrestling, yet ‘...sufficient to show that wrestling was still Cornwall’s most popular sport.’⁵⁸ In fact, according to Hooper, it was so popular ‘...every Cornishman was a wrestler...’⁵⁹

In the Spring of 1520 Henry VIII travelled to Calais, then an English possession, to take part in the ‘...greatest and most conspicuous display of wealth and culture and courtly sports that Europe had ever seen,’⁶⁰ which became known as the ‘Field of the Cloth of Gold’ (or *Camp du Drap d’Or*). The primary objective was to meet the French king, Francis I, in an attempt to forge some kind of diplomatic alliance through a show of

magnificence and display, which was partly achieved by the building of a special palace near the edge of Calais, ‘...eight feet high of brick, and then the rest was temporary – timber, canvas. The canvas was painted with brick [...] five thousand feet of clear glass [...] with bay windows.’⁶¹ There was also a chapel, 820 lodgings in elaborate tents containing three or four people per tent, and was attended by approximately 12,000 people (6,000 from each nation), which was the size of Norwich (the second most populous city in England at that time). As part of this extravaganza, in which Henry ‘...aimed to impress the French, amongst the demonstrations was a display of Cornish wrestling,’⁶² from a group of wrestlers from Helston,⁶³ who had been sent by Godolphin, at the behest of the king. Presumably in order to leave the right impression Henry chose the best wrestlers in his kingdom. Whilst the two monarchs watched the wrestling between the Cornish and French (probably not Bretons), which the ‘...Cornishmen justified their choice by winning,’⁶⁴ Henry challenged Francis to a bout and was duly thrown by the French king, using a ‘tour de Bretagne’, or possibly a ‘flying mare’. It appears the incident was only reported in one source, ‘...the memoir of de Florange, a close childhood friend of Francis...’⁶⁵ and therefore may not be true, or at the very least exaggerated, although Hooper suggests it ‘...may have been the real *causus belli* for the war which broke out the following year.’⁶⁶

A relatively important figure in Renaissance England was John Leland (1506-1552), Henry VIII’s library keeper or ‘Royal Antiquary’, who was given the role to search England’s antiquities and explore libraries, cathedrals, abbeys, priories, colleges, etc., which he did over a six year period. Once completed he wrote his *Itinerary*, which was the first detailed exploration of England and ‘...one of the greatest physical descriptions of the country,’⁶⁷ stretching from Hadrian’s Wall to Land’s End. He also wrote poems, including *The Genethliacum* (c. 1537), in which he records the birth of Prince Edward, the long awaited male heir for Henry VIII and writes, ‘[i]n Cornwall the celebrations took the form of boat races on the Fal...and...traditional Cornish wrestling matches.’⁶⁸ According to Cooper, the birth poem which is a reasonably accurate account of popular festivities, is nonetheless a work of propaganda, ‘...prompted by Leland’s high excitement that the royal succession was secure at last.’⁶⁹ Cooper also believed the Cornish were ‘...a people eager to prove their devotion to the crown.’⁷⁰ The poem is significant as it demonstrates that Cornish wrestling was highly regarded; not only was it a suitable activity to celebrate a royal birth, but it also alludes to the notion that it was

the Cornish custom of marking a special occasion. For sport historians, it would have been useful if Leland could have elaborated on the use of the term ‘traditional’.

An interesting reference to Cornish wrestling, which demonstrates that the sport was worthy of being performed in front of a royal and courtly audience and that it was regarded as important enough to be recorded, is made by Sir Thomas Hoby (1530-1566). Hoby, the well-connected English diplomat and translator,⁷¹ who was in the service of the Marquis of Northampton, brother of Catherine Parr, sixth and last wife of Henry VIII, refers to Cornish wrestling in his autobiographical *Book of Travaille and Lief* (c. 1560). In May 1551 Edward VI sent the Marquis to the French court, then being held at Chateaubriand, Brittany, to invest Henry II with the Order of the Garter. Hoby records,

...the French King shewed my Lord Marquess great pleasure and disport, sometime in playing at “tenice”, sometime hunting the “bore” and sometime with his great boisterlie Britons [Bretons] wrestling with my lorde’s yemen of Cornwall, who had much a-do to get the upper hand of them.⁷²

Another reference to the Cornish ability in wrestling is provided by the explorer George Best (c. 1555-1584), who accompanied Martin Frobisher as his lieutenant in the *Ayde*, on his expedition to discover a north-west passage linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans in 1577.⁷³ In the following year Best published, *A True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie, for the Finding of a Passage to Cathaya, by the northweast, under Martin Frobisher Generall*, in which he records the events of the expedition, including the capture of three Eskimos, who were taken as hostages in return for five seamen captured on a previous expedition. Best provides an eye-witness description of the capture of one of the Eskimos by Nicholas Conger, a Cornish wrestler, who ‘...showed his companion [the Eskimo] such a Cornish trick that he made his sides ache against the ground for a month after.’⁷⁴ The Eskimo, who with his two companions had been taken back to England as a curiosity, died a few weeks later of complications due to his broken ribs.⁷⁵ Apart from consolidating the reputation of Cornish wrestling, this reference is of particular interest because it illustrates the role played by Cornish seamen in Tudor expansion, which included the colonisation of north America.⁷⁶

The topographer, John Norden (1548-1625), who was the first Englishman to design a complete series of county histories, completed his *Speculi Britanniae Pars: A*

Topographical and Historical Description of Cornwall, in 1610, although not published until 1728, in which he noted the distinctiveness of Cornish sports with the following comment:

[t]he Cornishmen as they are strong and hardye so are their exercises violent, two especially, wrast[ling] and hurling, sharpe and severe activities, and in neither of them doth any county excel or equal them. They are very kind, affable, full of humanitie and courteous entertainment.⁷⁷

By far the most interesting reference to Cornish wrestling during this period is that provided by the English poet, Michael Drayton (1563-1631), who wrote the epic poem, *Poly-Olbion*,⁷⁸ which celebrates and describes all topographical and antiquarian interest in England and Wales. The work, which was started in about 1598, although not published until 1612 and reprinted with a second part in 1622, is composed of a couplet of alexandrines and is divided into thirty *cantos* or songs of almost 15,000 lines, with each song devoted to between one to three counties, describing their topography, traditions and histories. In this, Drayton describes the designs on the banners of the various county contingents that fought on behalf of Henry V at the Battle of Agincourt, on St Crispin's Day (ie 25th October) 1415, and wrote,

A silver tower, Dorset's red banner bears,
The Cornishmen two Wrestlers had for theirs.⁷⁹

Although Drayton was writing a century later and does not provide any evidence for this assertion, Edgcumbe suggests that he can be regarded as reasonably reliable, as having something resembling two wrestlers for a banner would not have been unusual, he was well acquainted with heraldry and was accurate in many of his descriptions; approximately a third of the banners were correctly described, as they were still used at the time of his writing and it is reasonable to assume that a further third are accurate.⁸⁰

Edgcumbe also argues that Cornwall County Council, as chief representative of the county should adopt two wrestlers in a 'hitch', as a more appropriate coat of arms rather than the 'fifteen bezants on a sable field,'⁸¹ which is often taken to be symbolic of Cornwall, but are in fact the official arms of the Duchy of Cornwall. He suggests that the authority for this comes from Henry V, who in 1419 proclaimed that '...none were entitled to bear arms unless they could prove their right to do so either by descent or grant,'⁸² except those who bore arms at Agincourt. Therefore the

county is entitled to have a coat of arms that resembles the banner flown at Agincourt. Although Cornwall County Council did not act on his suggestion, a replica of the banner depicting two wrestlers in a 'hitch' is flown at all Cornish Wrestling Association official tournaments; donated by Sir Robert Edgcumbe in June 1924 and described as 'The Agincourt Banner'.⁸³

In an interesting article about the Cornish at the Battle of Agincourt, Kent provides an analysis of an incident from Act IV, Scene I, in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, in which the king is wandering the camp before the battle, in order to assess the mood of his soldiers:

Pistol: What is thy name?

King Henry (in disguise as a common soldier): Harry le Roy

Pistol: Le Roy! a Cornish name: art thou of Cornish crew?⁸⁴

According to Kent, Pistol does not discern the pun in the name le Roy, but does recognise it as not English, as an 'other'; it is not Irish, Scots or Welsh and therefore had to be Cornish. Kent suggests the scene says much about how the Cornish are perceived by the English; the Cornish were different from the English but Shakespeare chooses not to make Cornwall a 'nation' like the other Celtic lands; the word 'crew' suggests a group working together in a gang and therefore implies respect; the Cornish may have been given this respect as they were no longer seen as a threat to the English state and because of Cornwall's strategic importance, at a time of conflict with Spain. Kent also notes that several authorities have suggested that many of those described as 'Welsh' archers at Poitiers, Crécy and Agincourt, were in fact Cornish; presumably as the two groups spoke a similar but 'foreign' language, contemporary commentators had difficulty differentiating between them.⁸⁵

Shakespeare places wrestling in Act 1, Scene 2 of *As You Like It*, between Orlando, one of the central characters and Charles, a professional wrestler in the employment of Duke Frederick. Rather unexpectedly and to the annoyance of Oliver, Orlando's elder brother, who hopes Charles injures him, Orlando throws and seriously injures Charles. Although it is not certain, it is possible Shakespeare got his inspiration from Cornish wrestling; he recognised the Cornish were different, the sport was also well known to his contemporaries and it is unlikely that he was unaware of this.

Thomas Fuller (1608-1661), a cleric, also recognised the ability of the Cornish in wrestling. Fuller thought the '...Cornish are masters of the art of wrestling, and to give

a Cornish hug is proverbial,⁸⁶ and also suggested ‘...that if the Olympic Games were now in fashion, they would come away with victory...’⁸⁷

Charles II was also ‘...known to hold in high regard the Cornish wrestlers in his kingdom after he had seen a display of Cornish wrestling at Bodmin on his way to the Scilly Isles.’⁸⁸ It is quite likely that the king was highly disposed towards the sport, not only as the Cornish were Royalist during the Civil War, but also because he was keen to allow his subjects to enjoy those traditional activities that were suppressed during the Interregnum.⁸⁹ It appears that he witnessed a match organised for him by the Earl of Radnor, between two of his tenants, Lytton Weynorth (or Weymouth) and Thomas Hawken (or Hosken), both from Cubert; Hawken won.⁹⁰ Charles II also witnessed a wrestling match described by John Evelyn (1620-1706), the famous writer and diarist, who records how he saw,

...a wrestling-match for £1000 in St James’s Park, before his Majesty, a world of lords and other spectators, ‘twixt the Western and Northern men, Mr. Secretary Morice and Lord Gerard being the judges. The Western men won. Many great sums were betted.’⁹¹

It is assumed that his allusions to Western and Northern men refer to Cornish and Cumberland and Westmorland wrestlers, who were renowned for their prowess in wrestling at that time and were deliberately brought to the capital to perform.

An indication of how Cornwall and the Cornish were perceived is hinted at in a note in the journal of an anonymous traveller from East Anglia, described as a ‘Lieutenant from Norwich’, who stated that he had no desire to cross the River Tamar into Cornwall, ‘...to [visit] ye horned-nock-hole Land’s-end, nor her horned wayes to the rough, hard-bred, and brawny strong limb’d wrastling Inhabitants thereof.’⁹² The traveller was clearly perpetuating the notion that Cornishness and wrestling ability were synonymous.

The acknowledged expertise of the Cornish in their distinctive style of wrestling was also utilised in literature. For example, in Sir Walter Scott’s (1771-1832) *Kenilworth*, although published in 1821 and therefore outside the period of this chapter, was based in the eighteenth year of Elizabeth’s reign (1575), Edmund Tresillian, a Cornish gentleman and follower of the Earl of Sussex, clashes with the unscrupulous Richard Varney, a friend of the Earl of Leicester and a fight ensues. It starts with drawn swords, but ends with a wrestling bout:

...the struggle which followed, displayed so much address, as might have confirmed the opinion that he drew his origin from Cornwall, whose natives are such masters in the art of wrestling, as, were the games of antiquity revived, might enable them to challenge all Europe to the ring. Varney in his ill-advised attempt, received a fall so sudden and violent, that his sword flew several paces from his hand.⁹³

Another example is found in *Lorna Doone*, by R.D. Blackmore (1825-1900), again written outside the period of this chapter, in 1869, but the narration is set in the reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714) and interestingly written to emulate the style of seventeenth century speech. The hero, of the novel, Jan Ridd, who regards himself as a son of Devon, although born in Somerset, is urged by friends to represent the former against a Cornish wrestler in what appears to be an inter-county match, arranged at Bodmin in August 1685, for a prize of £100. His adversary is a very large man, whose

...calf was twenty-five inches round, and the breadth of his shoulders two feet and a quarter; and his stature seven feet and three quarters. Round the chest he was seventy inches, and his hand a foot across, and there were no scales strong enough to judge of his weight, in the market place.⁹⁴

Ridd decides that, even though he was much smaller, '...without clothes on, sixty inches round the breast, and round the calf scarce twenty-one, only two feet across the shoulders, and in height not six and three quarters,'⁹⁵ he would attempt to fight the giant. He realised that,

...when my arms were round him once the giant was but a farthingale⁹⁶ put into the vice of a blacksmith. The man had no bones; his frame sank in, and I was afraid of crushing him. He lay on his back, and smiled at me; and I begged his pardon.⁹⁷

Ridd duly won the £100.

There are also stories or legends that have been transmitted orally down the generations. *The Wrestlers of Kenidjack*, for example, tells the story of Davy Tremayne and Kevern Angove, two drunken tin miners from near St Just, who witness a ghostly wrestling match in the plain-an-gwarry, on the 'Hooting' Carn Kenidjack, amidst a frightening thunderstorm, late one night. It is according to Rawe, '...almost certainly a very old story, overlaid with medieval Christian moral [and] illustrates the immemorial love of wrestling among the Cornish.'⁹⁸

Thus, from the Tudor period onwards there are sufficient references to Cornish wrestling, written by literate non-Cornish observers, that all confirm that the Cornish were renowned for their prowess in wrestling, which marked them out as different from the rest of Britain, and the style of wrestling was a distinctive feature of what it was to be Cornish.

Cornish pride in wrestling

The Cornish also regarded themselves as different and took pride in that difference, especially their expertise in wrestling, demonstrated in particular by Sir Richard Carew of Antony (1555-1620) in his *Survey of Cornwall*, written at the end of the sixteenth century and published in 1602. Payton notes that although Carew is a typical Englishman of the Renaissance, he is also a genuine Cornishmen, who is especially proud of Cornish prowess in archery and wrestling.⁹⁹ In his *Survey*, Carew boasts that,

[w]restling is as full of manliness, more delightful and less dangerous [than hurling]...their continual exercise in this play hath bred them so skilful a habit, as they presume, that neither the ancient Greek Palestritae,¹⁰⁰ nor the Turks so much delighted Pelvianders,¹⁰¹ nor their once countrymen, and still neighbours, the Bretons, can bereave them of this laurel...you shall hardly find an assembly of boys, in Devon or Cornwall, where the most untowardly amongst them will not as readily give you a muster of this exercise, as you are prone to require it.¹⁰²

Carew not only describes the wrestling arena, but also the wrestlers' dress, the customary handshake, the criteria for victory, the name of a fall not leading to a 'back' (ie a 'foil'), some basic rules and names of throws; all characteristics which a 'modern' wrestler would recognise. This makes Cornish wrestling 'different' compared to other contemporary popular recreations, which did not have this level of sophistication, certainly not at this early date. He records that,

[f]or performing this play, the beholders cast themselves in a ring, which they call making a place; into the empty middle space whereof the two champion wrestlers step forth, stripped into their doublets and hosen, and untrussed, that they may so the better command the use of their limbs, and first shaking hands in token of friendship, they fall presently to the effects of anger; for each striveth how to take hold of the other with the best advantage, and to bear his adverse party down: wherein, whosoever overthroweth his mate in such sort, as that either his back, or the one shoulder, and contrary heel, do touch the ground, is accounted to give the fall. If he be endangered, and make narrow escape, it is called a foil... This hath also his laws, of taking hold only above girdle, wearing a girdle to take hold by, playing three pulls, for trial of the mastery, the fall-giver to be exempted from playing again with the taker, and bound to answer his successor, etc.

Many sleights and tricks appertain hereunto, in which a skilful, weak man will soon get the overhand of one that is strong and ignorant. Such are the trip, fore-hip, inturn, the faulx, forward and backward, the mare, and divers other like.¹⁰³

Carew also notes that ‘[s]ilver prizes for this and other activities were wont to be carried about by certain circumforanei,¹⁰⁴ or set up for bidales;¹⁰⁵ but time, or their abuse, hath now worn them out of use.’¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, Carew not only hints at the decline of Cornish wrestling at that time, but also provides the first mention of the name of an individual wrestler, when he states that,

[a]mongst Cornish wrestlers now living, my friend John Goit may justly challenge the first place, not be prerogative of his service in her Majesty’s guard, but through having answered all challenges in that pastime without blemish. Neither is his commendation bounded within these limits, but his clean mad body and active strength extend (with great agility) to whatsoever other exercise of the arm or leg, besides his ability (upon often trial) to take charge at sea, either as master or captain. All which good parts he graceth with a good fellowlike, kind, and respectful carriage.¹⁰⁷

In describing the English Civil War, Stoye noted that as ‘...Cornishmen had been renowned as the greatest wrestlers in the kingdom’ before 1642 ‘...propagandists on both sides made increasing use of wrestling imagery when referring to Cornwall and its inhabitants.’¹⁰⁸ Royalists described victories inflicted by Cornish soldiers on Parliamentary forces, as giving them a Cornish hug, which alluded not only to their military prowess but also their reputation as wrestlers. It is unlikely the Cornish did not feel a sense of pride in these comments. In contrast, Parliamentarians not only used a range of disparaging stereotypes of the Cornish in their pamphlets, but also used the phrase, to give a Cornish hug, ironically to describe defeats *of* the Cornish and allusions to killing without mercy.¹⁰⁹

Thomas Tonkin (1678-1742), a Cornishman from St Agnes, also makes it clear he enjoyed and took pride in wrestling in a manuscript he left, written in about 1716, in which he records the names of several wrestlers he was familiar with, ‘...most of whom by their following it too long, shortened their days...’¹¹⁰ He not only mentions Carew’s friend, John Goit, but also James ‘Skipper’ Harris of St Agnes and William Nott, ...of [St Gorran] (whom by way of a joke we commonly call the philosopher, for his merry conceits), a substantial farmer, who in his time could scarce be thrown

by any man, and generally came out of the green a conqueror, but his is now grown too old and stiff for the sport.¹¹¹

Tonkin also notes that,

‘...I know no-one now living that excells Charles Dawe of St Gorran, either for strength, skill or neat playing; for which he has been admired by all who have seen him, having severall times (considerable sums being laid on his head) wrestled in publick places...’¹¹²

Thus, the evidence from admittedly limited sources suggests that the Cornish were fully aware of their prowess in wrestling and took pride in it. Although it would be extremely useful to have the ‘voice’ of the ordinary Cornish during this period, to ascertain what they felt, it is speculated that given the distinctiveness of Cornish wrestling and the fact that, according to Payton, the Cornish identity was based on a sense of independence and individualism, Cornish wrestling contributed towards that identity.

Conclusion

The early history of Cornish wrestling is dominated by four main features. Firstly, Cornish wrestling has a strong association with Brittany, especially the very similar style of wrestling, which may have originated in Cornwall and imported sometime during the fourth to the seventh century. It also has some tenuous links with Ireland and it can be speculated that it emerged in Cornwall at a time when the county was inhabited by a group of people who have been called Celts and therefore can be viewed as a ‘Celtic’ sport. It is argued that Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’ could be adapted to include sport in general and Cornish wrestling in particular as a further marker of Celticity. Secondly, with all grips taken on the unique jacket, the criteria for victory and no grappling on the ground, Cornish wrestling exemplifies Cornish distinctiveness. The evidence suggests that this was true from the Elizabethan age, but unfortunately before this period there are no written records. Thirdly, there is evidence from contemporary, mainly non-Cornish writers, presented in this chapter, that Cornish wrestling was an important and distinctive feature of Cornishness, which reinforced the perception that the Cornish were ‘different’. Fourthly, there is also evidence the Cornish saw themselves as ‘different’ and took pride in this, especially their expertise in wrestling. There is more than a hint that for males at least an important part of being Cornish was being able to wrestle and being a good wrestler meant being Cornish. This is illustrated in particular by the very clear description of the sport during the late sixteenth century,

by Carew in his *Survey of Cornwall*, which is especially useful for sport historians as it describes many features that demonstrate a level of sophistication almost three centuries in advance of many other so-called 'modern' sports.

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PART 3: 'SECOND PERIPHERALISM'

CHAPTER 3: The 'Golden Age' of Cornish wrestling, 1700-1850

Introduction

It is the intention in this chapter to examine what became the 'golden age' of Cornish wrestling between 1700 and 1850, which was characterised by three main features. Firstly, the development of Cornish wrestling during this period was closely associated with the growth of the Cornish economy, led by the metal mining industry and accompanied by technological innovation and demographic changes. Although the sport was prevalent during the eighteenth century it developed as a major sporting and commercial enterprise in the early decades of the nineteenth century, reaching its zenith in the 1820s, here characterised by large numbers of wrestlers competing for lucrative prizes in frequent tournaments throughout the length and breadth of Cornwall and watched by thousands of spectators. This was also at a time when copper and tin mining was dominant and it is therefore no surprise that so many wrestlers were miners given the ubiquity of mining; it was the miners' sport. If mining *was* Cornwall and *Cornwall* was mining, then it could be argued that to be a wrestler *was* to be Cornish and to be *Cornish* was to be a wrestler.

Secondly, from the first visit of Charles and John Wesley to Cornwall in 1743, Cornish wrestling was attacked by the Methodists for its association with the excessive consumption of drink and with gambling and therefore for them it was an unacceptable activity. The Methodist attempt at suppression of the sport and its role in its decline in the second half of the nineteenth century is covered in detail in the next chapter.

Thirdly, Cornish wrestling, which had survived from the earlier phase of 'Older Peripheralism', continued to be a part of the Cornish identity, echoing and enhancing the sense of independence and individualism. The Cornish took great pride in their achievements in the wrestling ring, especially when competing against Devonshire wrestlers in tournaments reflected in reports of matches in Cornish newspapers, which glorified the efforts of Cornish wrestlers, none more so than James Polkinghorne in his epic encounter with Abraham Cann in 1826. That match, which is described below in detail, was an important defining moment in the history of Cornish wrestling as it not only led to an increase in the popularity of the sport but also in the months that followed, the campaign against kicking in the Devonshire style, led largely by *The West*

Briton was a factor that helped to crystallise a new sense of Cornishness, one based on the belief that Cornish wrestlers were the best in the world; thus mirroring the ‘Cousin Jack’ myth.

The period between the 1820s and c. 1850 can be described as a ‘golden age’ as it was a relative high point for Cornish wrestling, as the decades immediately preceding the 1820s represented a low point and the years succeeding marked a severe decline. The ‘golden age’ was not characterised by a single factor, but was multi-faceted in nature, with large numbers of wrestlers competing for lucrative prizes at frequent tournaments and challenge matches organised on largely festive occasions during the summer months, with many held over more than one mid-week day and watched by thousands of spectators. The period was also a time when wrestling flourished in London, when entrepreneurial publicans attracted the leading wrestlers from Cornwall to compete against those from Devon, Ireland and north-west England for large prize money.

The state of Cornish wrestling, 1700-1850

There were three types of Cornish wrestling that were prevalent during this period; informal matches, tournaments and challenge matches. Informal matches were arguably the most common and needed less space, time or participants than more formally organised events, and ‘...did not have to wait for holidays to be staged...’¹ They were ‘...the regular sport of summer evenings, either on the village green or in one of the meadows hard by the “kiddley-wink” or small public-house,’² and might have involved a father teaching his son the rudiments of the sport, or the settling of a grudge, or youngsters mimicking their elders. Unfortunately there is an absence in the historical record of these informal matches. Tournaments, by contrast, were formally organised at major holidays, usually by a small committee of local ‘gentlemen’, often publicans, who collected subscriptions for prizes; chose a venue; advertised the event in the local press or on posters; appointed ‘sticklers’ from respectable persons present, usually ex-wrestlers; and appointed ‘matchers’ to pair wrestlers according to ability, to ensure fair wrestling. In order to establish a winner, tournaments were arranged into several rounds; the first round, or ‘single play’ ended with ‘standards’, or standing men, who had beaten two opponents outright, or had beaten one and had shown ‘good play’ against a second; further rounds (‘double play’, ‘triple play’, ‘quadruple play’, etc.) until the number of standing men equalled the number of prizes; and the final round involved the settling of the prizes, the winner being the one wrestler not thrown. The final type of

wrestling, which became popular especially in the nineteenth century, involved leading wrestlers of the day (or their representatives), challenging other wrestlers for lucrative prizes, through local newspapers and by so doing establishing a pecking order; as there was no such thing as an official ‘championship’ in the modern sense, the wrestler who was able to beat most, if not all of his adversaries could claim to be ‘champion’.

A major source of evidence for the prevalence of Cornish wrestling is regional newspapers, which carried announcements advertising Cornish wrestling matches, the reports of those matches, especially tournaments and challenges, letters and editorials. Unfortunately, Cornwall did not have a county-wide newspaper until *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* was first published in 1801, followed by *The West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser* in 1810. However, prior to 1801, readers interested in Cornish issues could read a Dorset based newspaper, *The Sherborne Mercury; or Weekly Advertiser* that first appeared in 1737, and which covered news items from across the south-west counties of England;³ it occasionally included announcements advertising Cornish wrestling tournaments, but never reports of these matches. Although there were not a vast number of items about Cornish wrestling, there were enough of them to show that the sport was a regular component of the holiday calendar and presumably important enough for the editor to choose to include them. However, as the lifeblood of newspapers, then and now was advertising it is most likely that Cornish wrestling advertisements were simply included for the advertising revenue, whereas reports of matches made no direct income and the largely non-Cornish readership would not have been that interested. What can therefore be ascertained about Cornish wrestling in the eighteenth century?

Cornish wrestling during the eighteenth century

Occasions for wrestling

Cornish wrestling tournaments occurred when people were free to either participate or watch, which meant at major holiday times, especially Whitsuntide (see appendix 2). For example, in 1753 a wrestling match was arranged as part of the Maker Green Games, which ‘...were a feature of the summer calendar; being so near Plymouth they no doubt attracted considerable patronage from over the water.’⁴ In early June 1783 wrestling matches were advertised for Monday and Tuesday of Whitsun week, in Millbrook, near the county border,⁵ and in 1786 a match was arranged for Tuesday of Whitsun week, in Redruth.⁶ However according to Rule, although wrestling matches

‘...could be arranged for any holiday, [they] were especially associated with parish feasts.’⁷ Borlase, writing in the mid-eighteenth century, described a typical annual parish feast, which began with a religious service on the Sunday, followed by entertaining friends and relatives, whilst on the Monday and Tuesday ‘...all business is suspended, and the young men assemble and hurl or wrestle, or both, in some part of their parish of the most public resort.’⁸ There was wrestling in July 1776,⁹ on the feast of St James, as part of the Saltash ‘Annual Diversions’, and again in 1777.¹⁰ As the feast day fell on a Friday in 1783 (ie 25th July), making it ‘...inconvenient to continue the said fair three days as usual, Sunday intervening...’ it was decided that ‘...the said fair is put off to, and will be held on Monday the 28th instant, and the two following days, by order of the mayor.’¹¹ At the parish feast of Lanteglos, near Camelford, on Easter Tuesday 1757, the wrestling was advertised ‘for the good of the poor;’ all wrestlers had to ‘...work six hours in preparing the [parish] ground for turnips...’ before the sport could begin and the seeds had to be purchased by those who chose not to offer their labour.¹² Although this proposal was intended to alleviate poverty in a year when it was at its most intense, and which led to the cancelation of wrestling at other parish feasts, notably at St Austell and Probus, ‘...it probably received little sympathy from the usual visitor to Lanteglos Feast and none whatever from the local publicans.’¹³ However, wrestling at the Liskeard Riding was held in the same year, over three days from Whitsun Monday to Wednesday.

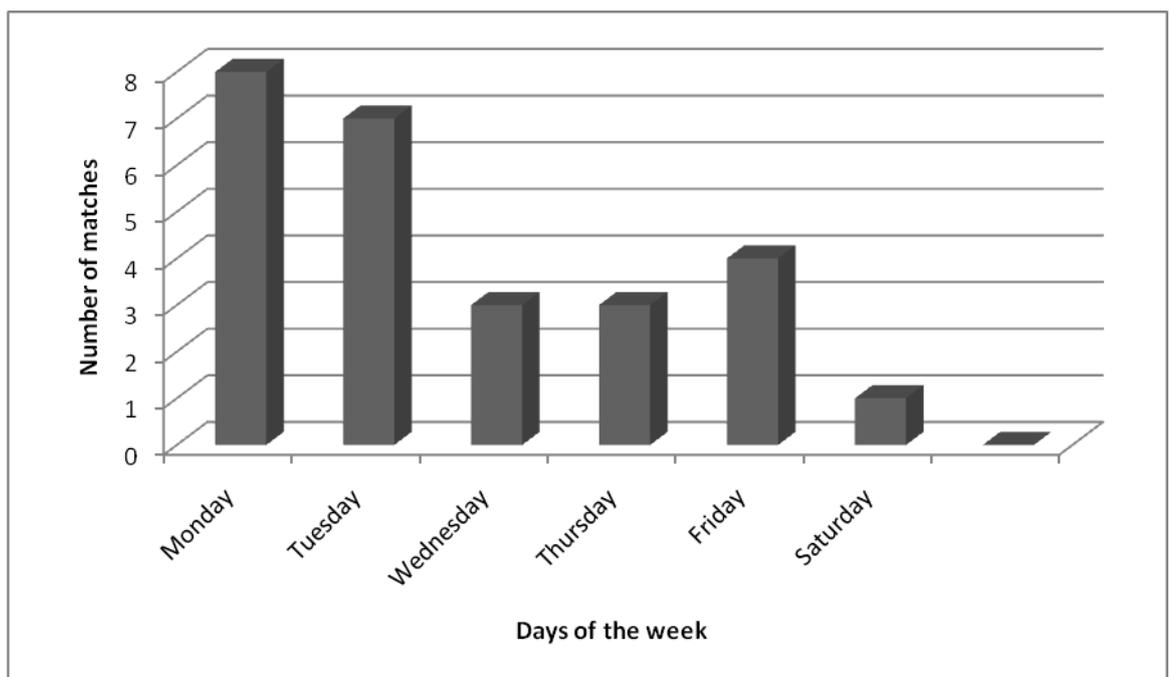


Fig 3.1: Days of the week when wrestling took place in the eighteenth century¹⁴

The Riding was so named as the central feature was a horseback procession around the town, which may have had pagan associations or Saxon bounds-beating origins; there were similar events at Bodmin and Lostwithiel.¹⁵ Cornish wrestling appears to have been a mid-week activity during the eighteenth century, with matches held on Mondays and Tuesdays most often, on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays less often and none on Sundays, which mirrors Brailsford's findings in his study of eighteenth century sport¹⁶ (see fig 3.1). Wrestling rarely took place on Saturdays, although an exception seems to have been Ruan Laniorne, where the vicar, the Reverend John Whitaker (1777-1808), who talked to Billy Simons, one of the oldest inhabitants of the village about wrestling at the beginning of the eighteenth century, observed in one of his notebooks, that the local farmers,

...made it a regular custom to give their men servants a holiday on the Saturday afternoon, to take them to [the traditional wrestling field, called the ring-close], and yet to allow them their wages. As soon as ever dinner was finished, each master set out with his men to the ring; and there the latter exercised themselves in wrestling, under the encouraging eye and voice of the former. We thus see the love for wrestling that was active in the parish, and was called out into activity every Saturday.¹⁷

It is not clear to what extent this practice was unusual or if it was common with other farmers in other parishes in Cornwall, however, Whitaker does add that '...the grand display of spirit and vigour in the parish was the parish-feast,'¹⁸ which he provides a depiction, when he states that,

[t]hen the ring-close was a busy scene of life. Standings [first round winners] ranged under the upper hedge. The ring was hemmed round by stakes driven into the earth, and by a rope let through the tops of them. Within this rope stood the foot persons. Without stood the horsemen. These looked over the heads of those, and those were guarded from the horses of these by the rope and the stakes.¹⁹

Prizes

Prizes awarded to successful wrestlers '...were usually of a kind to which only the gentry could aspire [...] which were then fashionable among the upper orders of society,'²⁰ and '...until late in the eighteenth century [...] were emblems of honour.'²¹ (see appendix 3) For example, in May 1753 and in the following year the first prize at the Maker Green Games was '...a fine new buff waistcoat trimmed with gold lace...'²² Gold-laced waistcoats were also first prizes at Millbrook in June 1783 and Saltash in July 1783. The prizes intended for the best three men at Liskeard in May 1757 included, '...a superfine scarlet broadcloth waistcoat, full trimmed with gold lace, the value of four pounds; a very handsome gold-laced hat, and a pair of breeches; a silver horse and

a silver lion.²³ The prize for the best man at Lanteglos in Easter 1757 was ‘...a good hat, made by Francis Trelevan of Camelford,²⁴ who was ‘...of the famous hat-making family...’²⁵ At Ruan Lanihorne, Whitaker states that the ‘...prize was always a gold-laced hat to him who had what was called the honour of *holding the ring*.’²⁶ It appears that one advantage of owning a gold-laced hat was that it offered some protection against capture by a press gang, presumably because it resembled something that a member of the gentry might have worn.²⁷ Interestingly a press gang and a wrestling match features in a ballad, written about the time of the Napoleonic Wars, which includes the following verses:

When I went down to Plymouth town,
 There to a inn a –ostlin’.
 I went right over to Maker Green
 To ha’ a scat to wrastlin’;
 A leatheren britches was the prize,
 A little the wuss for weer;
 Jan Jordan an’ me draw’d two valls a-piece
 An’ Dick Simmons cum’d in for a sheare.
 Hi! Too-ra loo-ra loo-ra loo!
 Too-ra loo-ra loo-ra lay!

An’ jist as the double play ‘ad began,
 An’ Maker clock’ad nack’d “six”,
 Up cum a passel o’ ugly chaps,
 Wi’ lots o’ soards an’ sticks;
 They ‘bused Dick Simmons, an’ darn’d ‘is eyes,
 An’ coall’d ‘un oall soarts o’ names;
 “Why, blamm ‘ee!” ses I, “Dick Simmons,” ses I,
 “They’ve purfeckly spooil’d the games!”
 Hi! Too-ra loo-ra loo-ra loo!
 Too-ra loo-ra loo-ra lay!

Then in cum’d a chap weth a great cock’d ‘at,
 That seem’d to be the King;
 “Blamm ‘ee!” ses I, “if you’ve a consait,
 Will ‘ee stap wi’ me in the ring?”
 So ‘ee turn’d inside, an’ I draw’d the soard
 Direckly out o’ ‘is ‘and’
 When a veller behind me knack’d me down,
 An’ another ‘ee towld me to *stand!*
 Hi! Too-ra loo-ra loo-ra loo!
 Too-ra loo-ra loo-ra lay!

Then among ‘um oall they took me up,
 An’ lugg’d me down to a boat,
 When ses the meaester to the men,
 “Let’s set the rascal afloat!”
 But then I begg’d ‘um in good stid—

An' I look'd like anything—
That they shudd'n tep me in the say,
But send me to serve the King.
Hi! Too-ra loo-ra loo-ra loo!
Too-ra loo-ra loo-ra lay!²⁸

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century money emerged as a popular prize form, although it did not eradicate material goods; for a time there was a mixture. For example, at Saltash in July 1776 the prize for the best man was two guineas and for the runner up, a pair of buckskin breeches worth a guinea,²⁹ and in the following year at the same place, the first prize was 'a pair of buckskin breeches, of twenty seven shillings price, and a guinea in the pocket [...] and a guinea for the second best man.'³⁰ The prizes on offer at the Maker Green Games in June 1784 included '...a large elegant bowl, six guineas value, for the first best man; two guineas for the second; and one guinea for the third;'³¹ the first standard in each bout was to be awarded five shillings and the remainder two shillings and sixpence. A similar set of prizes were offered in the following year, with the exception of the second prize, which was a silver cup worth two guineas.³² The prizes awarded to the successful wrestlers at Cokesland Common, near Bodmin in October 1786, amounted to ten guineas; five for the first best man, three to the second and two to the third.³³

Role of publicans

There is evidence that some tournaments were promoted by local publicans and according to Douch '...it seems probable that nearly all the wrestling was organised by the publicans.'³⁴ For example, in October 1781 the wrestling was organised to take place at the *Ship Inn*, in Stratton,³⁵ and in June 1782 the tournament in Torpoint was promoted '...by Mr Francis Hill, of the *Prince William Henry Inn*, and the rest of the publicans and gentlemen in the neighbourhood.'³⁶ In June 1783, at the wrestling tournament organised in Millbrook '...at the house of Mr William Fry, the *Rose and Crown*...' ³⁷ the prize winners were expected to spend five shillings each on drink. For Douch, this '...confirms the suspicion [...] that the winners of prizes at many of these public-house competitions were compelled to spend a proportion of their winnings at the houses which organised them.'³⁸ Douch also observed that '...a sport which gave so much profit to generations of Cornish landlords does not seem to have given its name to any Cornish Inn...' ³⁹

In order to exploit the maximum commercial potential from a holiday crowd, especially when an event was spread over two or three days, the promoters, whether publicans or not, often organised other activities or ‘diversions’; in fact it is entirely possible that wrestling was never an attraction on its own. Cudgelling⁴⁰ seemed to be a favoured activity at Maker in 1753⁴¹ and 1754;⁴² at Saltash in 1776,⁴³ 1777⁴⁴ and 1783;⁴⁵ at Millbrook in 1783;⁴⁶ and at Liskeard in 1791.⁴⁷ It also featured with wrestling at Maker in 1784 and on each of the three days there was ‘...running for pigs, racing by asses, running for smocks, and jumping in bags, with several other kinds of diversions.’⁴⁸ Also in Maker in the following year, bull-baiting was added to the list of activities of the ‘Games’, which according to Douch, was an ‘...even more ambitious affair, with each event designed to attract and excite a hard-drinking, money-spending crowd.’⁴⁹ There was running for women at Maker in 1753⁵⁰ and 1754,⁵¹ and there was rowing for watermen at Torpoint in June 1782, when the first prize was a silver oar worth one guinea.⁵²

Wrestlers

There is no evidence of the numbers of wrestlers that entered Cornish wrestling tournaments in the eighteenth century however it is possible to make a number of assumptions. Firstly, as communications and transport at this time were poor it is likely that most, if not all wrestlers came from the same locality as the tournaments were held and unlikely to have travelled far to attend; therefore as most venues were relatively small places the numbers of entrants were likely to have been limited. Exceptions to this were tournaments held in venues close to the county border, such as Maker, Saltash and Torpoint, where wrestlers from Plymouth and surrounding areas could have travelled across the Tamar by ferry relatively easily. Secondly, not all Cornish wrestling tournaments were announced in the press, some may have been advertised by posters distributed around a local area, but what is more likely is that they took place at the same occasion each year, such as the parish feast and therefore made advertising unnecessary; for example, Whitaker’s notes on Ruan Laniorne suggest wrestling was a ‘traditional’ activity and yet no advertisements exist for that place. Thirdly, a factor which suggests that promoters of tournaments only expected small numbers of entrants is the late start times, even those intended to last only one day; for example, at Falmouth in September 1764, it was announced that the ‘...gentlemen are determined to begin rather before three of the clock than after.’⁵³ As individual matches at this time were not governed by time limits, continuing until the first successful ‘back’ occurred, many

could have lasted a long time, therefore large numbers of wrestlers would have made it impossible to complete a tournament in one day, if it also started late. Those events that were organised over two or three days, such as those at Maker in June 1784⁵⁴ and 1785,⁵⁵ had a reasonable chance of completing, as the wrestling could have been postponed until the following day. Despite this, it is interesting to note that the tournament at Maker in May 1785 was arranged to start at nine in the morning, which was an hour earlier than the previous year; it is entirely possible that the organisers had difficulty completing the wrestling in 1784. In June 1783 at Millbrook, not only was it announced that the wrestling would not continue after nine o'clock at night, but also, '[e]ach man to throw two men a fair back fall on the back, and to be eight standers...' thus limiting it to small numbers.⁵⁶ It also announced that the '...man that wins the prize the first day is not to play the second day,'⁵⁷ thus ensuring that potential wrestlers would not be intimidated by a skilful exponent and fail to enter the fray. This may also have been the case at Liskeard in May 1757, when the advertisement for the tournament stated that wrestling was '...free for any person to play for (Mr George Draydon only excepted);'⁵⁸ or he may have been barred for cheating in a previous tournament.

Decline of Cornish wrestling

There are a number of commentators who noted the decline of Cornish wrestling during the eighteenth century. Borlase, for example, writing in the mid-eighteenth century observed that wrestling and the other indigenous Cornish sport, hurling were '...formerly much more used than at present,'⁵⁹ an anonymous visitor to West Cornwall in 1755, noted that the St Erme feasts '...used to be attended with wrestlings, hurlings and other robust exercises, wch (sic) [...] have been happily laid aside;'⁶⁰ a writer in 1802 commented that, '...every old inhabitant of this county can tell you how very much [wrestling] has declined;'⁶¹ and the Reverend Richard Warner, writing in 1808, noted that many of the former customs of Cornwall, including wrestling '...are now of very rare occurrence...' ⁶² It is unclear not only what these individuals are using as a baseline for comparison, but also what they mean by decline; are they referring to the overall numbers of wrestlers in Cornwall, or those entering tournaments, or simply the absence of informal wrestling so prevalent in Carew's day? Another possible interpretation is that these writers were referring to a decline amongst men of their own class. Although there are references to wrestlers who are clearly not working class, such as Richard Rowe and his son, who were both wrestlers and botanists,⁶³ Strutt noted that

the ‘...art of wrestling, [is] in the present day [...] chiefly confined to the lower classes of the people...’⁶⁴

Despite this apparent decline, Cornish wrestling was given a considerable boost in the early eighteenth century by Sir Thomas Parkyns (1664-1741), who did much ‘...to make wrestling both more respectable and better organised [when] for most of the gentry, wrestling was scarcely removed from brawling.’⁶⁵ In 1713 he published *The Inn-Play or Cornish-Hugg Wrestler*,⁶⁶ in which he described the rules, the basic holds and throws, and suggested the sport was reducible to a mathematical formula. He was a man of letters, had a good knowledge of mathematics, architecture and hydraulics, and was an active JP. Whilst a student at Cambridge University he witnessed Norfolk ‘out-players’, whose techniques he was not impressed with, as for him it involved too much time fighting for a grip and shin-kicking, he much preferred the close quarters of Cornish ‘in-play’, which he had learned whilst a student at Gray’s Inn.⁶⁷ Not only did Parkyns champion Cornish wrestling, but he also initiated from 1712 annual wrestling matches at Bunny Hall, his family seat in Nottinghamshire, that lasted until 1810, which were one of the ‘...great sporting draws in the Midlands during the eighteenth century.’⁶⁸ He also kept two wrestlers permanently in his employ at Bunny Hall, in order to wrestle with and had a statue of himself posing as a *luctor*, or wrestler, erected in the chancel of St Mary’s church, Bunny.⁶⁹

At about the same time that Parkyns wrote *The Inn-Play or Cornish-Hugg Wrestler*, Zachary Wilde produced a martial arts manual entitled, *The English Master of Defence*, in which he describes various wrestling holds and throws, including the Cornish hug. He says of this, ‘I do really believe, the Cornishmen performs this hold the best of any man in Christendom, we borrow it from them.’⁷⁰ Although it is unlikely that this was widely read, it probably raised the profile of Cornish wrestling amongst the educated, literate classes and was undoubtedly known to Parkyns.

Wrestling rules

It is likely, that given the poor level of literacy in the eighteenth century, regulations governing each tournament were verbally communicated to the wrestlers at the venues, although there does exist a set of basic written rules for a wrestling match in 1778, within a bundle of papers belonging to the Buller family of Morval, and deposited in Cornwall Record Office.⁷¹ For example, the advertisement for the tournament at

Liskeard in May 1791 announced that ‘[c]onditions to be seen at the field;’⁷² and the tournament at Helston in September 1792, which was intended to start at ten in the morning, when ‘[t]he rules will be then fixed...’⁷³ The rules would also have been reiterated to the wrestlers by sticklers who appear to have been a feature of tournaments to control each match from a relatively early date. For example, at Falmouth in September 1764 it was not only announced that ‘[p]roper waistcoats [jackets] will be provided...’ but also ‘...every stranger will have fair play, it being proposed to fix on three indifferent people then present as sticklers, to determine whether it’s a fall or not.’⁷⁴ In August 1791 at St Columb Major, it was announced that ‘[t]hree impartial sticklers will be appointed...’⁷⁵ and again in June 1792 in the same place, ‘[t]here will be three proper sticklers appointed...’⁷⁶ In order to convince wrestlers of the impartiality of those conducting tournaments, promoters felt it necessary to include assurances such as, ‘...strangers may depend on having fair play.’⁷⁷ Comments such as this are interesting not only for what is stated, but also what is not; was it necessary to include words such as, ‘indifferent, ‘impartial’, ‘proper’ and ‘fair’ because there were tournaments that were not; who were the comments aimed at, wrestlers or gamblers; what kind of persons were regarded as suitable as sticklers; and who appointed them? Another example, taken from an advertisement announcing a tournament at Stratton in October 1781, stated that,

[a]s this wrestling is intended for the amusement of the subscribers and the benefit of the wrestlers only, wrestlers from every part of the county may depend on fair play and proper encouragement, and that the prizes will be delivered to the winners free from any kind of expense.⁷⁸

This implies that gambling was discouraged and that the winners of prizes were not expected to spend a proportion of their winnings in the *Ship Inn*, or it was usual for wrestlers to pay an entrance fee, which contributed towards the prize-money. The prevalence of gambling is hinted at in the announcement for wrestling at Maker in June 1784, when it stated that it was ‘...free for all gamesters who choose to attend, and good encouragement will be given to the adventurers,’⁷⁹

A feature of Cornish wrestling which would receive a much higher profile in the nineteenth century was the issue surrounding the wearing of a shoe in order to kick an opponent, as was the practice in Devonshire wrestling. At Saltash in July 1776, the advertisement announced that ‘[a]ll gentlemen wrestlers are to take notice that they are to play in pumps, or without shoes,’⁸⁰ which according to Douch was ‘...a reflection on

the town's proximity to the 'kicking' county.'⁸¹ It is not known how common it was for promoters of Cornish wrestling tournaments, especially those at venues bordering Devon, to discourage the practice of kicking, as was the case at Saltash, or whether Devonshire wrestlers participating in tournaments in Cornwall were generally allowed this proclivity. What is known is that Devonshire wrestling became deeply unpopular among the Cornish wrestling fraternity by the early nineteenth century.

The first half of the nineteenth century

The decline of Cornish wrestling noted in the eighteenth century continued into the nineteenth century; for example at a tournament in Helston in August 1802 it was reported that the wrestling was, '...very inferior to what we have witnessed. Indeed, this athletic amusement, for which the Cornishmen were once so famous, is on the decline.'⁸² Again in May 1806, the same newspaper reported that wrestling '...has been some time on the decline.'⁸³ However, by the 1810s there were signs of a revival; for example in June 1811 it was reported that the '...athletic sports at Helston [...] exceeded any thing of the sort in that place for many years past.'⁸⁴ The revival continued into the 1820s and 1830s, when the sport reached its zenith, partly in consequence of one iconic match held in 1826, between James Polkinghorne of Cornwall and Abraham Cann of Devon, the 'champions' of their respective counties, which was followed by a slight decline again in the 1840s. The evidence for these fluctuations are manifested by the number of tournaments and challenge matches reported in the newspapers; the numbers of wrestlers that entered tournaments; the numbers of spectators attending matches, together with the type of facilities provided for their comfort; the type and amount of prizes; and the proliferation of wrestling matches in London, in both Cornish and Devonshire styles.

Number of tournaments

A decennial analysis of Cornish wrestling reveals that between 1801 and 1809 there were 32 tournaments or challenge matches either advertised or reported in *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* (see fig 3.2). This is similar to the period between 1810 and 1819, when there were 31 matches advertised or reported in either *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* or *The West Briton*. However, in the 1820s there was an increase to 49 matches and in the 1830s and 1840s there were 38 and 39 matches respectively. Although it is acknowledged that not all Cornish wrestling matches were either advertised or reported,

the number of matches that were covered, the amount of coverage and the style of reportage does provide a good indication of the sport's popularity.

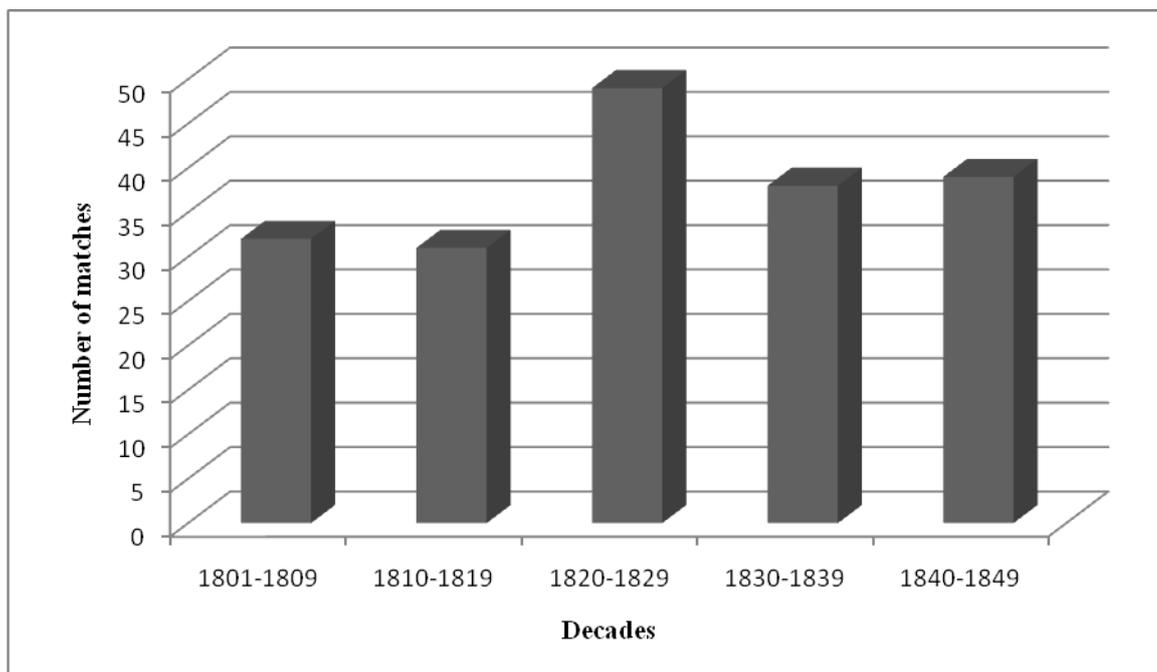


Fig 3.2: The prevalence of Cornish wrestling, 1801-1849⁸⁵

It is also worth noting that a considerable amount of coverage during the mid-1820s was devoted to the match between Polkinghorne and Cann, which was held in October 1826, with a plethora of both letters and editorials published months before and after their encounter. It can be speculated that this coverage may have consumed space that might have otherwise been devoted to other matches.

Number of days

Another indication of the revival of Cornish wrestling, is that during the period from 1801 to 1849, just over half of the total number of matches reported lasted more than one day, with the majority of these held in the period 1820-1849, which were equally divided between each of the three decades (see fig 3.3). This is in complete contrast to the eighteenth century, when none of the matches reported in *The Sherborne Mercury* lasted more than one day. The majority of the longer matches were held over two days, with five held over three days, although three of these were carried over to an additional day, due to inclement weather. For example, at a match in Liskeard in September 1829 that started on the Tuesday, the bouts were continually interrupted for the following two days by heavy rain and the tournament was not finally completed until the Friday. Between 1801 and 1849, the most popular day for wrestling was a Tuesday, followed

by a Monday and then a Wednesday, and although it featured on other days of the week, including Saturdays, a precursor to the weekend holiday that became widespread later in the century, there were never any matches on a Sunday.

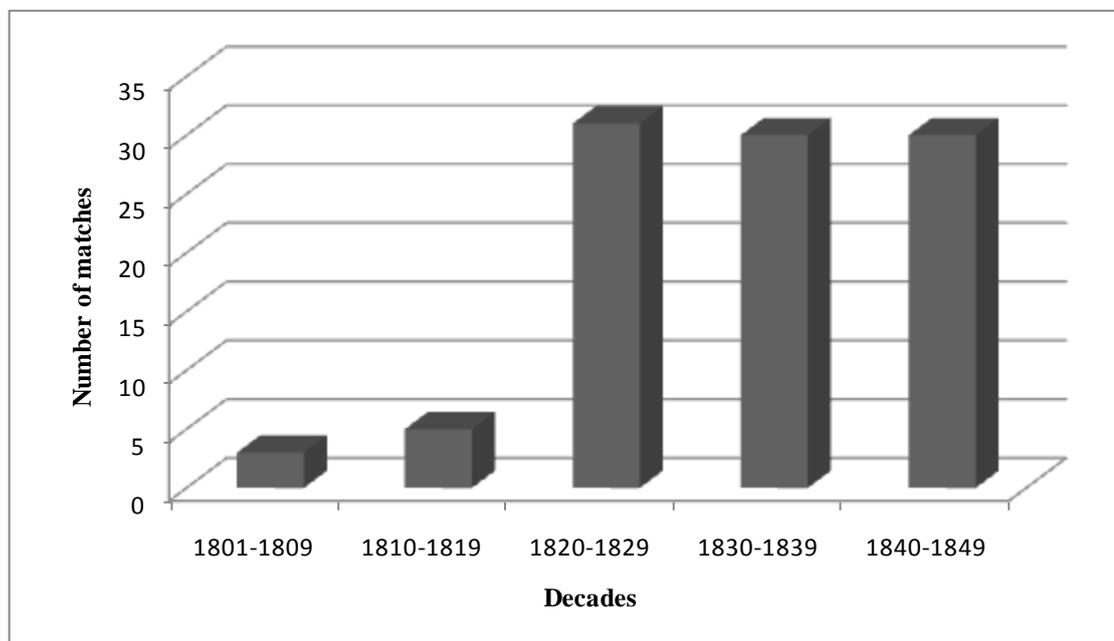


Fig 3.3: Cornish wrestling matches that lasted more than one day, 1801-1849⁸⁶

This suggests that not only were there enough wrestlers available in mid-week, but there were also sufficient spectators to make it worthwhile for promoters to organise matches. However, occasionally matches in mid-week were affected by other demands; for example, at St Columb Major in August 1828, attendance was lower than expected as many men were involved in the local harvest;⁸⁷ at Liskeard in July 1829, the start of the first of three days of wrestling was delayed by three hours in order to allow people to attend the monthly cattle market;⁸⁸ and at Penzance in August 1839, the wrestling on the final of three days was delayed as several wrestlers were ‘...miners, which gave them the opportunity of working at their respective mines in the early part of the day, and of returning again to the ring.’⁸⁹ On another occasion, in September 1849, local magistrates cancelled the wrestling at Truro, due to an outbreak of cholera, as ‘...any public amusement that is likely to lead to intemperance and therefore predispose to disease, could not be allowed.’⁹⁰

Wrestling calendar

A closer examination of the days when wrestling took place reveals that at the beginning of the nineteenth century there appeared to be a regular calendar of events,

with many towns and villages holding their ‘annual games’ at corresponding dates each year. When the dates of the advertised or reported matches from the local newspapers are compared with known dates of various contemporary holidays (see appendix 2 and 4), the evidence suggests that, similar to the eighteenth century, a popular time for wrestling was at the parish feast; for example, St Just-in-Penwith feast was held on the nearest Sunday to All Saints’ Day (ie 1st November) and on the following day it included many activities including wrestling, with Courtney noting that ‘...St Just men are proverbially pugnacious, the sports often ended with a free fight.’⁹¹ Polperro feast was held on 10th July, with the fair on the following two days, on the second of which ‘...a wrestling-match [was held] on the Strand...’⁹² Lanivet feast and the wrestling that takes place the following day are commemorated in the following local verse:

On the nearest Sunday to the last Sunday in A-prel,
Lanivet men fare well.
On the first Sunday after the first Tuesday in May,
Lanlivery men fare as well as they.⁹³

Morvah feast took place on the nearest Sunday to Lammas Day (ie 1st August), which was ‘...said to have been instituted in memory of a wrestling-match, throwing of quoits, etc, which took place there one Sunday, “when there were giants in the land”.’⁹⁴ Wrestling also took place at local fairs such as those at Camborne, Penzance and Saltash; major religious holidays, such as Whitsuntide as at Falmouth and Liskeard; and during Midsummer such as at Redruth. The fair at Goldsithney on 5th August was, according to Hunt, originally held at Sithney, where legend has it that *St Perran the Little* gave the wrestlers a glove as a prize, which one year was won by a Goldsithney miner; since then the fair has been held in that village.⁹⁵ Wrestling at Truro Fair is commemorated in a ballad which includes the following verses:

Four friends were bent on a holiday,
A holiday,
A holiday,
So to Truro town they made their way
One early Whit-sun morning,
One early Whit-sun morning.

There was Jim, and Josh, and Ginger Jan,
Three Cornishmen
Jim, Josh and Jan,
With Bill Penelewey to lead the van
So early in the morning,
So early in the morning.

The Fair takes place at Whitsuntide,
At Whitsuntide,
At Whitsuntide,
And is held on the Green by the river side
Quite early in the morning
Quite early in the morning.

Now old Josh Bassett did bowl for a pig,
Bowl for a pig
All in his best rig,
Was the first to join in the whirligig
So early in the morning
So early in the morning.

But Josh had a squint and could'nt see straight,
Could'nt see straight-
'Twas just like fate-
For he throw'd his bowl like a figure of eight
And broke a couple of winders!
And broke a couple of winders!

A wrestling booth did draw them in,
Did draw them in,
Did draw them in:
Here was sum'mat, surely, they stood to win
So early in the morning,
So early in the morning.

But each of them had a terrible bout,
A dreadful rout,
A sick'ning clout:
For the wrastler threw the whole lot of them out
So early in the morning,
So early in the morning.⁹⁶

Other matches were associated with a particular local custom; for example, Bodmin 'Riding', which seems to have been related to old Midsummer's day (ie 5th July) and dating back to at least the fifteenth century. It included religious observance on the first day (ie the Sunday after 7th July), a horseback procession around the town on the following day, together with wrestling and other games⁹⁷ The event became obsolete at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but in July 1824 it was revived and spread over an additional day, '...with a marked emphasis on the sports which included wrestling and [bell] ringing.'⁹⁸ A similar custom was held in Liskeard at Whitsuntide, which also included wrestling. Another example of a local custom worthy of note is the John Knill Ceremony, held just outside St Ives every five years

on St James's Day (ie 25th July), which was named after a former Collector of Customs and mayor of St Ives. He left a number of legacies in his will, including a sum of money for a ceremony, which involved a procession, accompanied by music and dancing to the site of his mausoleum, a pyramid-shaped granite obelisk erected on Worvas Hill near St Ives. The ceremony, which first took place in 1801, included a wrestling match, which became a regular feature.⁹⁹ A further example is 'Hocktide', held on the second Monday and Tuesday after Easter, which in some places in Cornwall was associated with traditional sports including wrestling.¹⁰⁰ Interestingly the eighteenth century poet Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770), who wrote about the Battle of Hastings in his pseudo-medieval *Rowley Poems*, refers to Cornish wrestling at Hocktide in the following verse:

Duke Wyllyam gave commaunde, eche norman knights,
 That been war-token in a shielde so fine,
 Shoulde onward goe, and dare to closer fyghte.
 The Saxonne warryer that did so entwyne,
 Like the nesh bryon and the englantine,
 Or Cornish wrastlers at a hocktyde game.
 The Normannes, all emarchailld in a lyne,
 To the ourt arraie of the thight Saxonnes came;
 There 'twas the whaped Normannes on a pare
 Dyd know that Saxonnes were the sonnes of warre.¹⁰¹

Wrestling venues

An analysis of venues used for wrestling matches between 1801 and 1849 and advertised and/or reported in *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* or *The West Briton* clearly shows that the sport was popular in towns and villages throughout Cornwall, from Penzance in the west to Stratton in the east (see appendix 5 and 6), with slightly more matches taking place in the east of the county. There were 54 places where wrestling tournaments or challenge matches occurred, however, these were not evenly distributed throughout the county, with the most popular mainly in the larger urban locations, presumably as they were relatively easy to get to, for both wrestlers and spectators, even during the early nineteenth century, particularly St Austell, Helston, Redruth, Penzance, Truro, Bodmin and Falmouth. The figures also suggest that places such as Bodmin and Falmouth were by the 1840s diminishing in importance as wrestling centres, whereas St Austell and Truro were increasing. Within these locations a variety of sites were used for matches, many of which were traditional, such as the bowling green at Falmouth;¹⁰² '...upon the Race Down...' near Helston;¹⁰³ in the '...ancient circular green...' at St Stephen-in-Brannel;¹⁰⁴ on the '...Old Green, Plain-an-Gwarry...' in Redruth;¹⁰⁵ and

‘...a beautiful spot of the “Marsh” adjoining the town’, at Wadebridge.¹⁰⁶ Several papers deposited at Cornwall Record Office also contain references to traditional wrestling sites; for example a lease, dated 10th December 1839, describes an area of uncultivated land near Porthleven, which includes a field ‘...commonly called the Wrestling field;’¹⁰⁷ another dated 1845 not only lists the scope and content of land to be leased in the parish of St Austell, but also includes a sketch of the area, which names one field as ‘the wrestling ground’.¹⁰⁸ Some wrestling sites were also situated near public houses, usually a field adjacent to the buildings and likely owned by the publican, which was particularly the case from the late 1830s onwards. For example, the venue used for the wrestling tournament at Camborne in July 1839, was a field ‘...belonging to Mr John Martin, of the *White Hart Inn*;’¹⁰⁹ at Penzance in June 1842, the venue was ‘...in the field adjoining Messrs Pentreath and Co’s Brewery;’¹¹⁰ and at Gwennap, also in July 1849, the venue was ‘...in a field adjoining the *Steam Engine Inn*.’¹¹¹

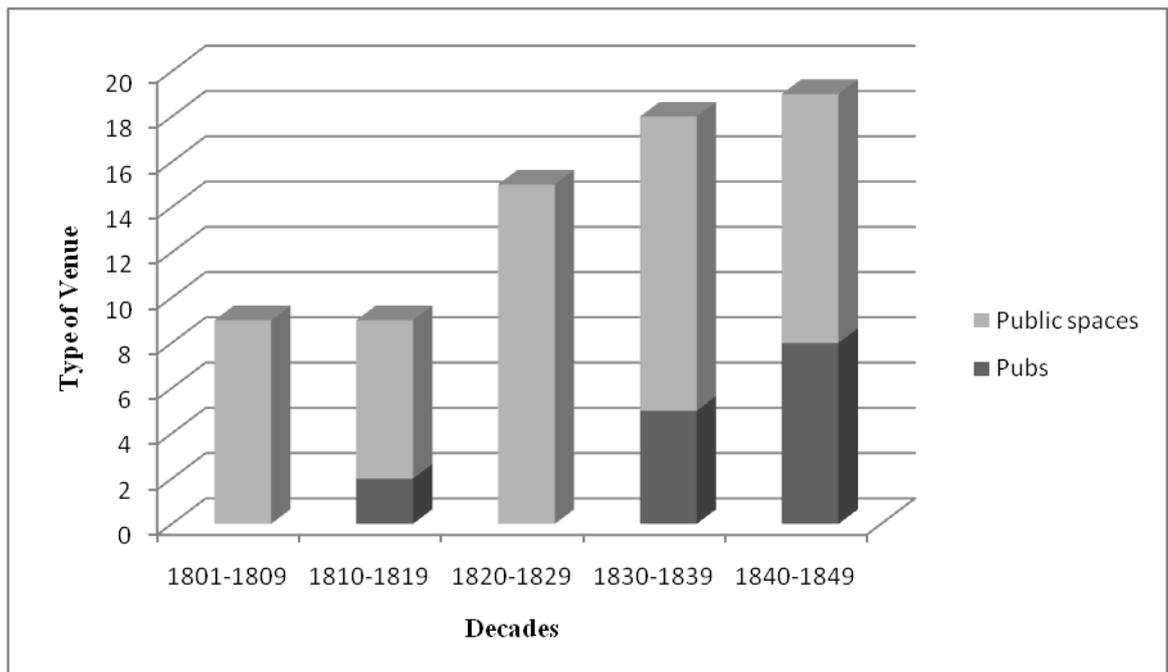


Fig 3.4: Type of Cornish wrestling venues, 1801-1849¹¹²

Publicans not only allowed their land to be used, but they were also alive to other financial possibilities by promoting wrestling matches, organising subscriptions from gentlemen for prizes and providing refreshments. For example, at Stratton in May 1828 ‘...every accommodation was afforded by Mr Lyle, of the Tree Inn, who spared no expense, and used every exertion in procuring the best men from both counties;’¹¹³ at Falmouth in June 1829, the ‘...prize ...was given by Mr Burrall, of the King’s Arms

Hotel;'¹¹⁴ and at St Stephen-in-Brannel in August 1812, the wrestling was '...conducted under the inspection of Messrs Lark and Truscott, innkeepers of St Stephen, whose houses were well filled with the lads and lasses of the neighbourhood, who amused themselves with dancing after the wrestling was over.'¹¹⁵

Type and amount of prizes

An important indicator of the popularity and state of Cornish wrestling during the first half of the nineteenth century was the type and amount of prizes awarded, which was clearly linked to conditions prevalent in the Cornish economy (see appendix 3). The tendency for organisers of wrestling tournaments to award material goods as prizes, as was the case in the eighteenth century, continued throughout the period 1801-1849 (see table 3.1)

Table 3.1: Types of material goods awarded as prizes in Cornish wrestling tournaments, 1801-1849¹¹⁶

Material goods	Number of times awarded
Hats	
Gold-laced hat	50
Silver-laced hat	24
Plain hat	7
Other hat	7
Clothing	
Pair of gloves	1
Waistcoat	1
Pair of breeches	2
Silver/gold objects	
Silver cup	13
Silver goblet lined with gold	2
Silver basket lined with gold	1
Silver cream jug	2
Silver milk cup	1
Silver watch with chain	8
Piece of plate	3
Gold watch and chain	2
Silver goblet	5
Pair of plated candlesticks	1
Waiter [a salver or tray]	1

The most popular of these were articles of clothing, in particular the traditional gold- and silver-laced hats, together with pairs of gloves, pairs of breeches and waistcoats, although silver objects such as cups, goblets and watches were also common.

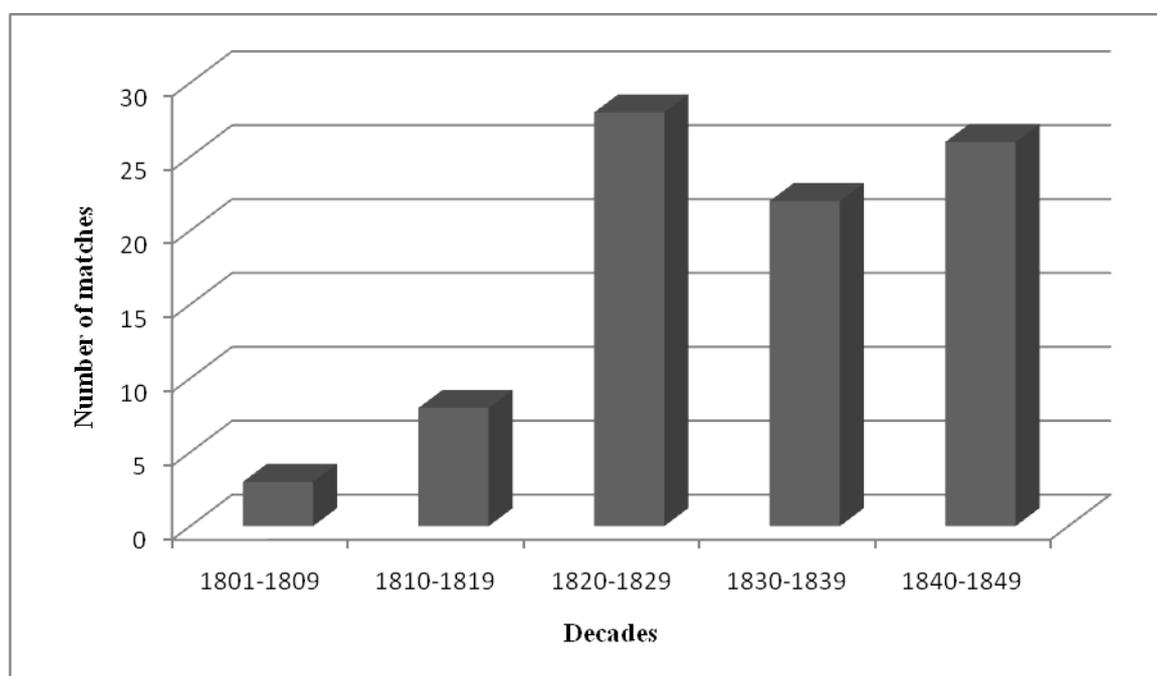


Fig 3.5: Cornish wrestling tournaments that awarded only money as prizes¹¹⁷

However, the 1820s witnessed a major shift in the type of prizes awarded at the majority of tournaments and challenge matches, with money becoming more widespread and dominant. The majority of the matches that took place between 1801 and 1849, where prizes were reported in the press, awarded only money (see fig 3.5), whereas only a few matches awarded only material goods and mostly in the first two decades (see fig 3.6)

A significant minority of matches awarded both money and material goods (see fig 3.7) with the latter largely relegated to the status of minor prizes, such as the tournament at Penzance in September 1827, when the sixth and seventh prizes were a gold-laced hat and a silver-laced hat respectively;¹¹⁸ or were offered as a prize for men thrown in earlier rounds, as at St Columb in July 1828;¹¹⁹ or in matches for boys, as was the case at Bolingey in August 1829, when the main event began, ‘...after some youths had contended for a gold-laced hat...’¹²⁰

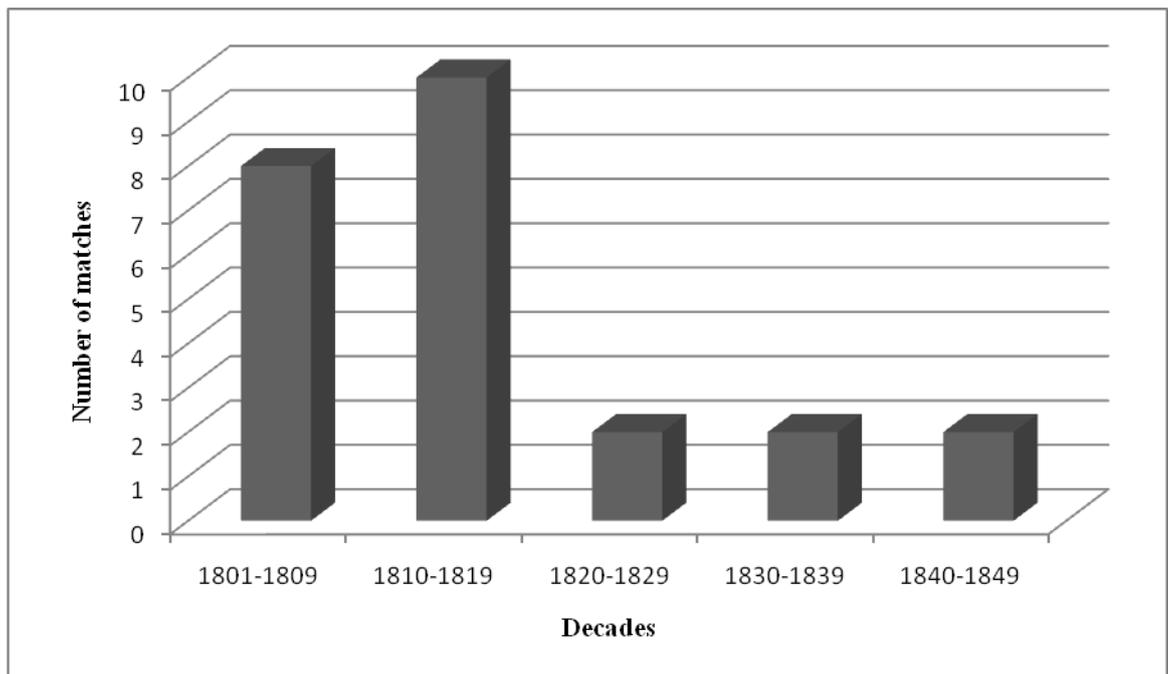


Fig 3.6: Cornish wrestling tournaments that awarded only material goods as prizes¹²¹

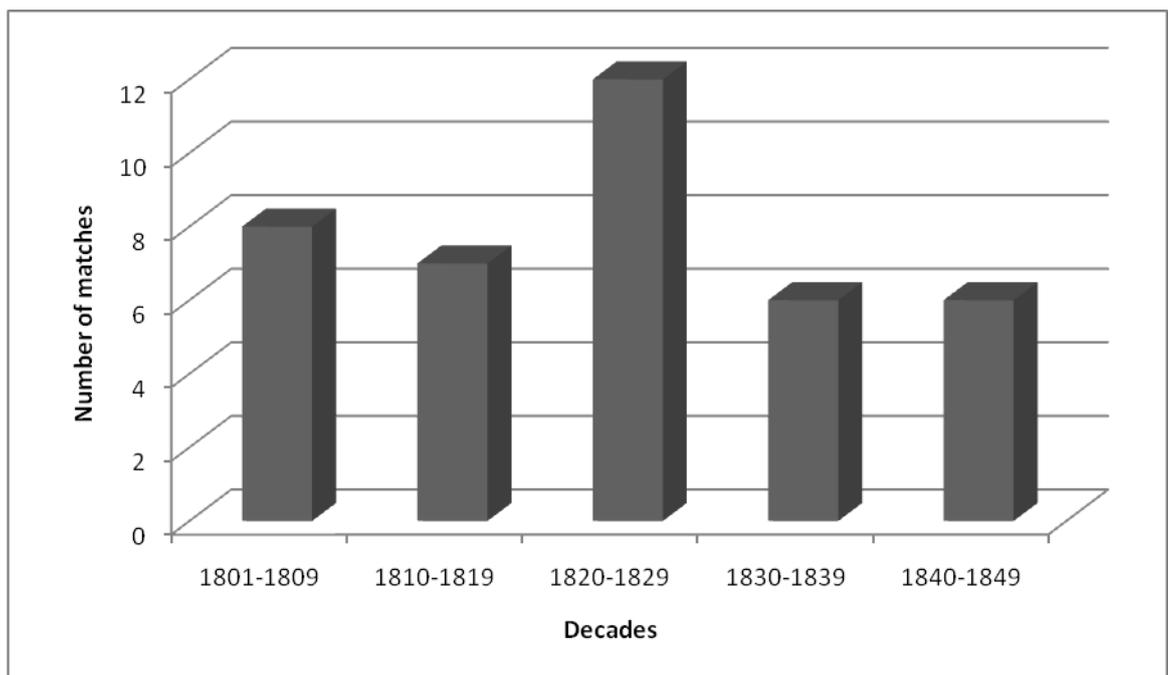


Fig 3.7: Cornish wrestling tournaments that awarded a mixture of money and material goods as prizes¹²²

Another notable feature was the increase in value of those prizes awarded to wrestlers in first place (see fig 3.8); in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, money prizes awarded to the winning wrestlers averaged £5, but by the 1820s it had doubled to £10, with some being significantly larger than this. For example, at St Stephens, near Launceston, in July 1827, the first prize was £20, which was a considerable portion of a purse that totalled £50 for all prizes;¹²³ at Wadebridge in June 1828, the first prize was

£20 from a total purse of over £40;¹²⁴ and at Truro in July 1829, the first prize was £20, which the advertisement claimed was ‘...the highest yet offered in the County.’¹²⁵

The 1820s also saw the widespread adoption of awarding money prizes to those wrestlers thrown in earlier rounds (see fig 3.9). For example, at Liskeard in July 1829 all standards (ie those wrestlers who had not progressed further than the second round) received two shillings and sixpence, all doubles (ie those wrestlers who had not progressed further than the third round) received five shillings and ‘...those in the triple play [third round] who contend for the four prizes and are thrown (if their conduct and exertions are approved of by the Committee) will be rewarded accordingly.’¹²⁶ At Saltash in July 1840, wrestlers were given the added incentive that if they did not win a prize and they came ‘...from a distance of more than six miles, will receive one penny per mile expenses, and beds will be provided.’¹²⁷ The practice of awarding money prizes to thrown men became so commonplace that when it did not occur wrestlers objected. For example, at Truro in July 1843,

[t]here was some difficulty in getting the players to enter the field, as the committee of management had failed to obtain funds enough to afford standard money. This however, was an obstacle for a short time, as the objecting parties gave way, and subsequently entered the field, though not without grumbling that while the prizes were liberal, there was no provision made for the standards.¹²⁸

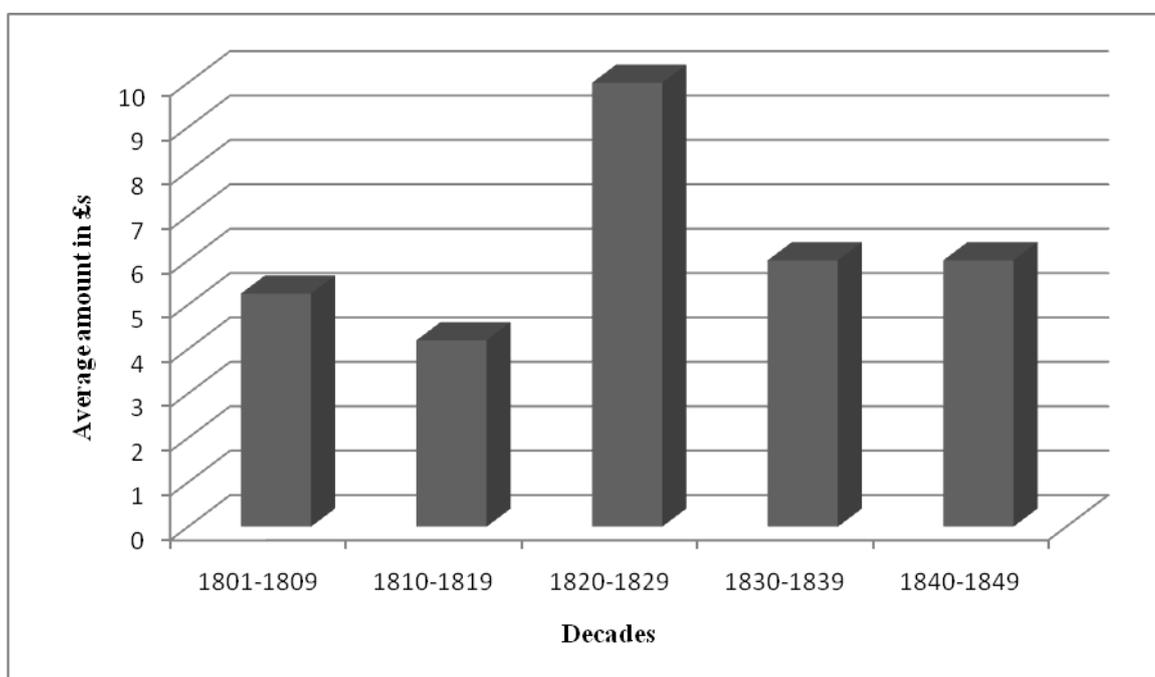


Fig 3.8: The average money prize awarded to the winning wrestler in Cornish wrestling tournaments, 1801-1849¹²⁹

The editor felt compelled to suggest that this situation ‘...ought, in future, to be avoided, even if it be necessary to reduce the prizes.’¹³⁰ Organisers of wrestling tournaments must have been aware of this problem, as the paying of standard money became the norm in the 1830s and 1840s, whilst at the same time the average prize for first place was reduced to £6.

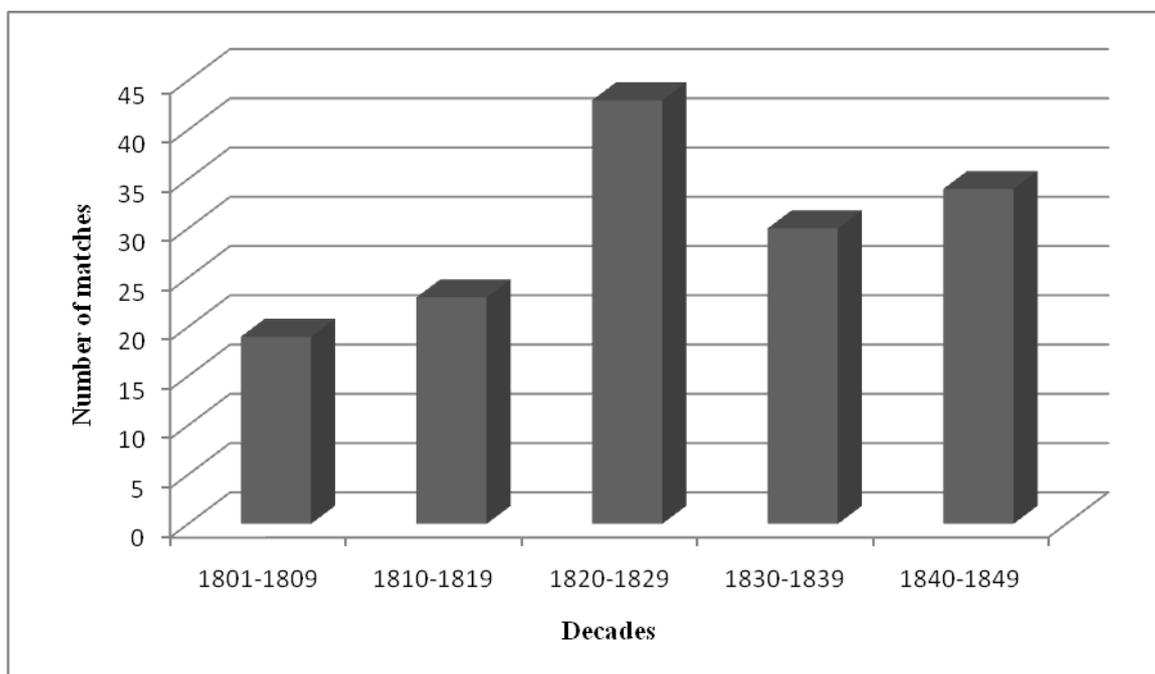


Fig 3.9: Cornish wrestling tournaments that awarded money and/or expenses to thrown men, 1801-1849¹³¹

Subscribers

The promoters of wrestling tournaments usually obtained money for prizes through ‘subscriptions’ from local gentlemen, who either saw it as one of the responsibilities to their communities, or would get a return on their ‘investment’ in the form of fees charged to spectators or through placing bets on individual wrestlers. It is clear, using prize money as a guide that promoters had no difficulty in obtaining ‘subscriptions’ throughout the period 1801 to 1849, which suggests that Cornish wrestling was supported or tolerated by the gentry. Material deposited in Cornwall Record Office is revealing in this regard. Amongst the Tremayne family papers is a letter dated 1834 from John Allen to J.H. Tremayne, in which Allen complains about the behaviour of people at St Austell feast (28th June) and Charlestown boat race and reprimands Tremayne for his encouragement of wrestling and for not stopping the events. In his reply Tremayne makes it clear that both events are part of tradition which he could not stop even if he wanted to; he suggests the behaviour of the crowds was under control

and other forms of activity would lead to worse behaviour; and he claims he did not see any drunkenness and immorality as Allen had intimated. Tremayne further shows his support for traditional activities by stating:

...it is greatly to be lamented that the higher classes mix so little as they do with those who [...] may be considered their inferiors. It is my Pride and my delight to mix myself with my neighbours in their affairs either of Business or Pleasure and evermore and on all occasions to consider their Interests as my own.¹³²

It is not clear how widespread the gentry's support for wrestling was, although it may not have been that rare; for example in October 1823 a wrestling match was held at Carhayes, the seat of J.B. Trevanion, Esq.,¹³³ and there are constant references throughout the first half of the nineteenth century to 'gentlemen' committee members.

Thomas Gundry

For those individuals who were talented wrestlers it was possible to make a substantial amount from prize money. Arguably the most successful Cornish wrestler in the nineteenth century was Thomas Gundry, a miner from Sithney, who first came to prominence in 1835 at the age of 20, when he came second at a tournament in Helston.¹³⁴ Using the reports in *The West Briton* as a guide, it is clear that during his fifteen year wrestling career he amassed well over £200 in prize money, and it is likely that it was much more than this as not only were some tournaments not reported by that newspaper, but also at others the size of the prizes were not recorded (see appendix 7). On other occasions he was prevented from winning any prizes as he was excluded from entering tournaments due to accusations of cheating in previous matches.¹³⁵ In fifteen years he won most of the principal prizes in Cornwall and Devon, and also in London, gaining the first prize on 24 occasions, the largest being £25, at Truro in July 1850, which was the last time he wrestled following a break from competitions of over three years.¹³⁶ Gundry was so popular in Cornwall that according to Hooper, '...people would walk twenty miles to see his incomparable play.'¹³⁷ Despite not being a particularly large man at five feet, eight inches in height (1.73m) and fourteen stones, nine pounds in weight (93kg), such was his prowess that the organisers of the Redruth tournament in August 1843 announced that he

...will be excepted from contending for any of the [...] prizes, as he (Gundry) has not for a succession of years met with anything like an equal match, at any of the wrestlings he has attended, from which circumstances, his presence as a player, has had a disparaging effect on the generality of wrestlers, therefore justice demands for him the well-earned title of "Champion of all the English Wrestlers".¹³⁸

It appears the only occasion that Gundry was thrown was by William Chapple, the Devonshire ‘champion’ when they met at Tavistock in September 1844, and *The West Briton* loyally suggested he ‘...underrated his antagonist, and was caught unexpectedly.’¹³⁹ The defeat was deemed such a noteworthy event that Chapple and his compatriot Snell, who won second prize, together with a group of supporters paraded the streets of Tavistock for three hours behind a brass band playing *See the Conquering Hero Comes*, whilst carrying a long pole with a Cornish wrestling jacket symbolically suspended in a supine position under a Devonshire jacket.¹⁴⁰ However, Gundry got his revenge in June the following year when he defeated Chapple at Exeter and in recognition of this event his supporters presented him with an oil painting of himself in wrestling costume.¹⁴¹ Gundry eventually retired from wrestling in 1853 when he became a mine captain at Camborne Consols and North Wheal Basset.¹⁴²

Numbers of wrestlers

The lucrative prizes offered for the top places, together with the opportunity to earn standard money for the less successful, were clearly a financial incentive for wrestlers to enter tournaments, especially in an age when incomes were low. Unfortunately, it is difficult from the available evidence to accurately estimate the numbers of wrestlers who entered tournaments, as in the first two decades of the nineteenth century no figures are recorded, and from the 1820s only the number of standards created in the first round is noted. The only tournament where an indication of the total numbers of wrestlers that entered is recorded is at Truro in July 1829, when there ‘...were upwards of 160 competitors...’¹⁴³ which is likely to be exceptional rather than typical.

This match also indicates how using the number of standards, who had beaten two opponents outright, or had beaten one and had shown ‘good play’ against a second in order to progress into the next round (or ‘double play’), as an estimate of total numbers, is unreliable; for example, the report noted that 105 men were thrown and 56 standards made. What can be confirmed from the available evidence is that the average number of standards made in tournaments in the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s was 33 and therefore the total number of wrestlers who entered each tournament must have been considerably more than this (see fig. 3.10).

Traditionally wrestlers would signal their intention to enter a tournament by throwing their hats into the centre of the ring and the owners of the two hats lying next to each other would be matched against one another; the same procedure was repeated for each round.¹⁴⁴ However this process was unsatisfactory as most spectators and gamblers preferred to see the best two wrestlers emerge in the final round, which did not always happen, therefore organisers of tournaments in the nineteenth century introduced matching by weight, height, age and known expertise. This appeared to be more acceptable; for example at St Austell in June 1827 the matching was reported to be ‘...done with great judgement and impartiality, giving perfect satisfaction to the wrestlers themselves, as well as the spectators.’¹⁴⁵ Occasionally wrestlers would object to the person they were matched with and refused to wrestle; for example at Penzance in October 1827 Clemence, Trezise and Friggins were winners in the quintuple play but, ‘...declined wrestling with each other; it being agreed between them that Clemence was the best man.’¹⁴⁶

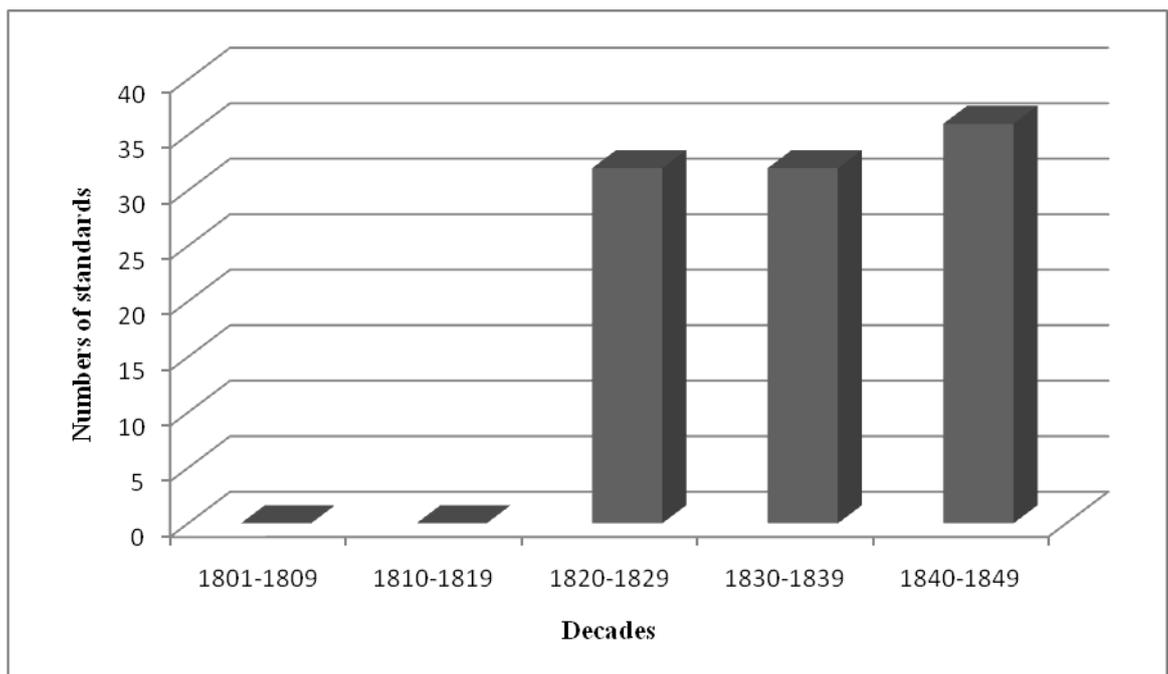


Fig 3.10: The average numbers of standards entered in Cornish wrestling tournaments, 1801-1849¹⁴⁷

Duration of tournaments

The numbers of wrestlers entering tournaments is also clearly linked to their duration, as with no time limits on individual bouts, the whole of one day usually comprised of making standards, requiring a second day to complete the remaining rounds, which thus avoided the situation at Bodmin in October 1811, when the wrestling ‘...continued by

moonlight till near midnight.¹⁴⁸ A typical tournament was at Mawgan-in-Pydar in July 1843, when the organisers decided that standards ‘...will be made on the first day [Tuesday], and until Twelve o’clock on the Wednesday, immediately after which the standards will commence playing.’¹⁴⁹ Organisers of tournaments were also compelled to start matches early in the day, to ensure the wrestling was completed in the available time; for example at Helston in September 1826, when the first prize was £10, it was announced that wrestling would start at 10.00am each day and standards ‘...who are not present at that time will lose their chance’¹⁵⁰ (see table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Frequency of start times in Cornish wrestling matches, 1801-1849¹⁵¹

	1801-1809	1810-1819	1820-1829	1830-1839	1840-1849
08.00	0	0	2	1	0
09.00	0	1	2	1	3
10.00	2	1	16	9	12
11.00	0	0	4	0	2
12.00	0	0	1	1	4
13.00	0	0	1	2	1
14.00	0	2	0	0	4
15.00	0	1	0	0	0

Injuries

Given the prevalence of wrestling during the first half of the nineteenth century, the numbers of wrestlers entering tournaments, the hardness of the grass surfaces in high summer and the sheer physicality involved, there were remarkably few injuries.

Although the type and site of the injuries are not surprising, with wrists, collar bones, shoulders and ribs featuring most often, none of them were serious or life-threatening, but might have involved taking time off work (see table 3.3). Williams suggests that one reason why money prizes were lucrative was to compensate wrestlers for any time they needed to take off work if they sustained any injuries.¹⁵²

However for those injured but not winning prizes, collections were occasionally made for them; for example, at Bodmin in July 1827, the celebrated Devonshire wrestler Jordan broke his ribs and as ‘...his conduct was fair and manly; so fully satisfied were the persons present with his conduct [presumably as he made no attempt to kick], that upwards of £4 was collected for him.’¹⁵³ Several reports, such as those for Helston in 1825, 1826 and 1827,¹⁵⁴ made a point of noting that no accident had occurred, however,

it is not clear whether these comments were made because it was unusual, or if promoters were attempting to portray wrestling, especially at Helston in a good light.

Table 3.3: Injuries sustained in Cornish wrestling matches, 1801-1849¹⁵⁵

Type of injury	Numbers
Broken collar bone	3
Broken rib/s	2
Concussion	1
Dislocated shoulder	1
Dislocated wrist	1
'Hurt'	2
'Injured' knee	1
'Kicked' legs	1
'Severely injured' spine	1
'Sore leg'	1
Sprained wrist	1
'Wounded' shoulder	1

The dangers of wrestling were recorded in the following ballad, entitled *The Wrestling Match*, which was collected by Baring-Gould in 1890 from James Olver of Launceston, who said that he had heard it sung in 1823 at Liskeard wrestling matches:

Twas of champions bold,
 They wrestled for a sum of gold,
 And all the cry was Will Trefry,
 That he should win the day.
 So, Will Trefry, Huzzah!
 The Ladies clap their hands and cry,
 Trefry, Trefry, Huzzah!

Then up sprang little Jan,
 An undersized man,
 And I will be thy conqueror
 Where thou dost stand.
 So will I fight with thee
 I'll let thee knowed I can do so
 Today I'll fight with thee

They wrestled on the ground
 His match Trefry had found,
 And back and back he bore
 He felt his force give way,
 So little Jan huzzah
 So some did say – but others nay,
 Trefry, Trefry, Huzzah.

Then with a desperate toss,
Will showed the flying hoss,
And Jan, he fell to the ground
And Jan ceased to move.
O little Jan – alack!
The Ladies say, O woe’s the day
O little Jan – alack!

If killed he hadn’t been
A wedding there’d have been
But Jan died aged eighteen
Leaving his love behind.
Oh little Jan – alas.
The Ladies went in mourning all
For little Jan – alas.¹⁵⁶

Wrestlers

By recording the forenames, surnames of all individuals who were present at Cornish wrestling tournaments (organisers, promoters and wrestlers) reported in *The West Briton* between 1835 and 1905 (see appendix 8), and comparing these with census returns it is possible to reveal information about their parishes of residence, occupations and ages. The 1841 Census Returns, the first set to provide useful information apart from mere head counts (see appendix 9) shows that wrestlers came from a total of 66 parishes, from across Cornwall and despite St Austell featuring strongly, places such as Redruth, Sithney, Kenwyn and Camborne were more prominent, with the west of the county providing significantly more wrestlers overall than the east. The dominance of the west is also the case when an analysis of all known prize winners from 1801 to 1849 is conducted, which clearly shows that almost two thirds of wrestlers resided in the west of the county, with places such as Sithney, Gwennap, Redruth, St Just-in-Penwith, Wendron, Stithians and Camborne dominating, and only St Austell and St Columb in the east with significant numbers (see appendix 9 and 10). An analysis of occupations from the 1841 Census Returns makes it clear that, although wrestlers were employed in different areas, mining dominated. It should also be noted that the second largest category of occupations is ‘unknown’, which is comprised of either those where the Census Enumerator failed to record an occupation, or those where individuals share forenames, surnames, live in the same parish and it is not unreasonable to suppose their ages would allow them to wrestle. In some cases, such as James Moyle, nine individuals could have been the wrestler mentioned in the newspaper reports, and as eight were miners and one a stonemason, it would be reasonable to assume that ‘miner’ was the correct occupation, but he was recorded as ‘unknown’. However, there were several

individuals, such as John ‘Tabby’ Bray from Redruth who shared the same forename, surname, parish and age group, and also shared the same occupation, and therefore these were included in the appropriate occupational category; in this case miner. It is also possible that several individuals, who are recorded as apprentice, carpenter, labourer, and roper, worked either directly or indirectly in the mining industry (see table 3.4).

Using the evidence of the Census Returns it is also possible to confirm the ages of wrestlers. The oldest wrestler that can be positively confirmed is Wearne Gundry, who was recorded as 45 and there were several who were at 15, the youngest. However, it must be recognised that the 1841 census returns recorded actual ages up to 15, but for all those over that their ages were rounded down to the nearest five, therefore Gundry might have been 45 or even 47, and the youngest might have been 15 or 17. The average age of those individuals who can be positively identified is 23, which confirms that wrestling was not surprisingly a young man’s sport.

Table 3.4: Occupations of Cornish wrestlers taken from the 1841 Census

Occupation	Numbers
Agricultural labourer	2
Apprentice	1
Carpenter	1
Farmer	3
Hatter	1
Innkeeper	6
Labourer	1
Miner	29
Mine captain	1
Roper	1
Servant	1
Unknown	28
Totals	75

Spectators

Another important indicator of the popularity and state of Cornish wrestling during the first half of the nineteenth century is the number of spectators that gathered to watch tournaments or challenge matches. Although very few newspaper reports include precise numbers, and those that do have to be treated with scepticism, as it is unlikely that there were any accurate methods available to conduct head counts, there is enough

evidence to suggest that crowds were sizable. Unfortunately, the majority of reports were vague about numbers, for example, at Bodmin in July 1815, the tournament ‘...called together a great concourse from the neighbouring parishes;’¹⁵⁷ at the same place nine years later ‘...the concourse of people [was] greater than was remembered on any similar occasion;’¹⁵⁸ and at St Austell in May 1837 there was a ‘...dense mass of spectators.’¹⁵⁹ However, occasionally numbers were given, for example, at Probus in July 1818 there were 6,000;¹⁶⁰ at Wadebridge in July 1828 there were 5,000;¹⁶¹ and at Helston in July 1843 there were 4,000;¹⁶² and the largest crowd ever recorded at a tournament in Cornwall was at Penzance in September 1827, when 5,000-6,000 people attended on the first day and 10,000 on the third day, the second day being postponed due to heavy rain. *The West Briton* noted that ‘[a]lmost all the men from the neighbouring mines, except those engaged in working the engines were present; numbers of them were unable to obtain beds.’¹⁶³ It appears that for some individuals the attraction of wrestling was overwhelming. Whilst the tournament at Penzance was in progress a young woman whose wedding day it was came looking for her intended bridegroom, who she found amongst the spectators and upon seeing her, he decided to escape by running across the ring. Whilst pursuing him,

...the spectators resolved that the damsel should have fair play, prevented the fugitive from escaping; the wrestling was suspended and all eyes were fixed on the parties, who kept up the race with spirit amidst the astounding cheers of the multitude. After a devious chase, now round and now across the ring, the swain gave in and left the place with his fair pursuer.¹⁶⁴

A significant feature of wrestling crowds in the nineteenth century was that they were generally well behaved, whereas in the previous century they were noted for their poor behaviour. For example, Borlase, writing about wrestling and hurling in 1758, stated that ‘... ‘tis a great pity that frolicking and drinking immoderately (if what is said is true) at the parish festivals should take place of such ancient, and (under a few regulations) such laudable and manly recreations.’¹⁶⁵ There were occasional examples of this type of behaviour also occurring in the nineteenth century. In April 1816, Lanivet was the

...scene of one of these disgraceful broils, formerly so prevalent in Cornwall; but against the recurrence of which it was hoped, the improved moral feeling of the lower classes, had erected an effectual barrier...

The sports of Monday passed without any serious disturbance; but on Tuesday the attraction of wrestling brought out a number of young persons from Bodmin; one of whom entered the ring and threw two Roach [sic] men. This success was immediately followed by an attack on the Bodmin men, and a general battle commenced. After having for some time contended in the pugilistic style, the combatants armed themselves with bludgeons from a large wood-rick in the

Church-town; - thus equipped, the fight was renewed with fury; heads were laid open; teeth knocked out, and the field of battle was quickly strewn with the maimed. After the contest had continued about two hours, and when twilight had commenced, victory still being doubtful; but about this time, the Roach and Luxillian [sic] men were reinforced by a considerable detachment from the neighbouring mines. This fresh body of forces soon decided the fate of the day; the Bodmin men were forced to fly in disorder, pursued by the shouting victors, being unable even to cover the retreat of their wounded, who were forced to limp off as well as they could. – So ended the battle of Lanivet. Happily the state of the wounded does not render it probable, that a Coroner's Jury will have to give an opinion of the occasion.

We trust this disgraceful scene will induce the Magistracy of the County, to adopt precautions against a similar occurrence at future Revellings.¹⁶⁶

This type of incident was unusual as the majority of comments in newspapers, between 1801 and 1849, referred to the good behaviour of wrestling crowds. For example, at Helston in September 1827, although there were large numbers present, '[t]he utmost regularity and order was preserved, nor was the gratification of the company diminished by a single ebullition of ill temper;'¹⁶⁷ at Wadebridge in July 1828 even with 5,000 people present, '...the greatest order and regularity prevailed;'¹⁶⁸ and at Truro in July 1829 '...so effectual were the measures adopted for preserving order, that not a single instance of riot or disturbance occurred, nor was the presence of a single peace-officer required...'¹⁶⁹ Unfortunately, it is not clear what motivated these kind of comments; was the journalist simply reporting what he saw, or was he commenting on a situation which was unusual or unexpected of such a large crowd? Was the journalist a member of the wrestling fraternity and therefore wished to give a good impression of the sport to counter the attacks by its opponents, who often criticised the behaviour of crowds? Can it be assumed from this that reports of matches that did not include comments of good behaviour of crowds, implied the opposite was true?

In order to gain some return on their investment, Cornish wrestling promoters provided a number of features to make a profit from spectators attending either tournaments or challenge matches; wrestling had become a commercial enterprise. A clear picture of facilities for spectators and their costs can be gained from a tournament at Truro in July 1829, although it is likely that these were only provided at the larger wrestling centres:

A ring about 370 feet in circumference was roped in. On one side was a booth for the Committee, which was composed of Gentlemen from different parts of the County, and on either side of it was a booth for Gentlemen, for admission to which two-shillings for each individual was charged. Beyond these, six large booths – three on each side – and having seven tiers of seats, were erected; the price of admission to them was fixed at one shilling. Under the latter booths

places for obtaining refreshment was fitted up, and which were occupied by different innkeepers belonging to the town. The remaining space was occupied by seats let at six-pence each; there were also booths erected in different parts of the field.¹⁷⁰

Although in contrast with the eighteenth century, wrestling generally was the main focus of attention, with few competing amusements, occasionally other diversions were arranged in order to entertain people between wrestling bouts; for example at the tournament above a band played in the intervals.

Sticklers

The practice of selecting respectable and impartial men to act as sticklers in Cornish wrestling matches, as was the case in the eighteenth century, was continued into the nineteenth; for example at Redruth in June 1828 ‘...[r]espectable umpires [were] chosen to award fair play to all parties...’ However, it became common practice not only to appoint three men in order to ensure a decision, but also to use respected ex-wrestlers. For example, at Falmouth in June 1808 one of the sticklers is named as Absalom Bennetts, from Gwennap, who is reported to have won 22 gold-laced hats in his wrestling career, including winning the Probus games seven years in succession, together with many other prizes. Mine captains also acted as sticklers, presumably because of their standing within their communities and the respect shown to them by most of the wrestlers; for example at Truro in July 1829, two of the three sticklers were mine captains, Captain Chenalls from St Just and Captain Henry Michell from Gwennap.

Challenge matches

Challenge matches were also a feature of the ‘golden age’ of Cornish wrestling, especially between leading exponents of the sport, who fought not only for the lucrative prizes, but also for the prestige of being regarded as the best wrestler, which is exemplified by the contest for the ‘Championship of the West of England’ between Abraham Cann, the ‘champion’ of Devon and James Polkinghorne, the ‘champion’ of Cornwall. As it was arguably the largest sports event ever held in the south-west of England, a major national sporting occasion and was covered by both regional and national newspapers, there is a wealth of evidence of how these matches were organised and is therefore presented here in detail to illustrate challenges in general, although it is recognised that it was also exceptional in scale.

The encounter was not the first inter-county match between Cornwall and Devon and one source suggests that it was in Cornwall that ‘...the first real championships were organized in England, with the advent of the Cornwall versus Devon competitions.’¹⁷¹ It was also common practice for wrestlers from the two counties to cross the River Tamar to wrestle in smaller encounters. The match itself was preceded by a lengthy exchange of correspondence between the two parties, carried in the local newspapers, which was necessary in order to arrive at an agreement over such issues as the date, time, venue and stakes. However, the major problem that had to be resolved was in accommodating the differences in wrestling styles between the two counties. Following approximately fourteen months of at times hostile negotiations, the match for the best of three fair back falls and £100 a side was held on Monday 23rd October 1826, at New Passage, Tamar Green, in Morice Town, a village approximately a quarter of a mile from Devonport, very close to what today is used as a slipway for the Torpoint ferry. The wrestling took place on ‘...an expanse of level springy turf...’ within a large coal-yard, surrounded by high walls, which formed, ‘...in time of war, part of a large government establishment.’¹⁷² At one end of this arena there was an extensive array of warehouses, which were fitted up as an inn selling alcohol and refreshments, by Mr Elliott, the proprietor of the *Royal Hotel*,¹⁷³ who was also responsible for holding the stake money. There was also a booth at the head of the ring where the Devonport Amateur Band played music ‘...to charm the enterprising scene, and while away the tedious intermediates.’¹⁷⁴ Temporary tiered seating was placed around the walls of the arena in order to accommodate the spectators. At the east and west ends there were two amphitheatres, each 80 feet long and containing 16 tiers of seats, whilst at the south end there were 10 tiers, and at the north end 7 tiers.¹⁷⁵ Amongst the spectators, estimated at approximately 10,000 on the surrounding hillsides together with well over 8,000 people within the arena itself,¹⁷⁶ were ‘...a number of the Nobility and Gentry of both counties...’ who occupied seats in covered boxes, paying 5s. for the privilege. The price of all ‘...those not covered in were let at half-a-crown for each person’¹⁷⁷ and towards the end of the day the ‘...price of admission having been reduced to 1s.’¹⁷⁸

Four sticklers were appointed from a committee for each county, formed from those gentlemen present at the ground; Mr Nicholas Grose of Lanivet, and Mr Jonathan Higgs of St Kew, described as ‘respectable farmers,’ representing Cornwall; Mr William Snell, a ‘respectable farmer’, from Coldford, near Colebrook, and Mr Rendell, an auctioneer

from South Zeal, representing Devonshire.¹⁷⁹ The conditions of play which were read to and signed by both wrestlers prior to the match, included, a one minute break between a ‘foil’,¹⁸⁰ and 15 minutes between each fall; no restrictions on kicking; and all holds were to be taken on the jacket, above the waistband.

The wrestlers differed markedly in their age, appearance, and weight. James Polkinghorne, who was the innkeeper of the *King’s Arms*, in St Columb Major, was 38 years of age, 5 feet 10½ inches in height (1.8m) and was considered to be overweight and twice as stout as Cann, at 15 stone 11lbs (100kg), although, ‘[h]is whole appearance was that of uncommon strength; his hand and arm are particularly fine, and shew great muscular powers.’¹⁸¹ There was some question as to whether Polkinghorne was the most suitable person to uphold Cornwall’s honour, as his wrestling career had been brief, his reputation based on a few matches against prominent men and he had not wrestled for about eight years; he simply accepted Cann’s challenge issued in an Exeter newspaper. Abraham Cann, who was described as a licensed victualler, but seems to have made his profession from wrestling, was about 31 years of age, 5 feet 8½ inches in height (1.74m), athletic in appearance and famous ‘...for the power of grasp and the severe application of his toe (*kicking*); he paws as does the lion and kicks like a *donkey*.’¹⁸² Polkinghorne wore a strong canvas jacket with the letter C to denote Cornwall sewn on the back, loose white trousers, no shoes, a pair of light stockings ‘...over which he buttoned a pair of leather leggins, to shield him as far as possible from the kicks of Cann.’¹⁸³ Cann wore a strong canvas jacket with the letter D for Devon sewn on the back, fawn breeches, a single pair of white stockings, and on his left foot he wore a shoe weighing nearly four pounds, with a sole that projected, ‘...so as to inflict very severe wounds on the legs of the person kicked by the wearer.’¹⁸⁴ Cann was decidedly the favourite with the gamblers, being 5:2 on.¹⁸⁵

The contest lasted for approximately three hours, interrupted by a dispute which took one hour to resolve and finally ended when Polkinghorne threw Cann a second time on to his back, but before the sticklers could make a decision he threw his jacket on the floor as a token of victory and left the ring. There then followed a lengthy argument between the two sides, which lasted late into the evening and resumed the following day when it was finally agreed that the stakes should be returned, all bets should be cancelled and the match declared a draw. This unsatisfactory and inconclusive ending led to acrimonious recriminations in the immediate aftermath of

the match, which was predictably polarised along county lines, with both sides claiming victory. The Cornish argued that Polkinghorne had been unfairly treated, as he had thrown Cann with the best of three fair back falls; he would easily have won if Cann had not kicked; the conditions of play were drawn up so as to give Cann an advantage, as unanimity was unlikely with two sticklers from each side, and no umpire; and the Devonshire sticklers had large bets themselves, and were therefore incapable of acting impartially. Not surprisingly *The West Briton* was in no doubt who had won when it announced ‘Victory gained by Cornwall!!!’¹⁸⁶ and also carried an advertisement requesting subscriptions for Polkinghorne’s benefit, ‘...as an honourable Testimony of his Deserts, and as some remuneration for his exertions in sustaining unsullied the character of Cornish Wrestlers.’¹⁸⁷ The money raised was used to purchase a silver punch-bowl and ladle, weighing 8 lbs 7 ozs, decorated with the Cornish Arms and motto,¹⁸⁸ which cost £75.¹⁸⁹ An anonymous composer of the ballad entitled *A New Song on the Wrestling Match Between Cann and Polkinghorne* (see appendix 11), was also in no doubt that the Cornishman had won.¹⁹⁰ Conversely the Devonians argued that Cann was the true victor, as Polkinghorne by leaving the ring before the sticklers had unanimously declared the result had violated one of the agreed conditions of play; Cann was unfairly treated as he should have been awarded a fair back fall in the ninth round, when it was decided it was a foil on the toss of a coin; the use of a shoe was justified as Polkinghorne had superior weight and size; and Polkinghorne was afraid to continue.

Devonshire kicking

Over the next three years several unsuccessful attempts were made to arrange another match, to evince a more satisfactory and conclusive result than the original meeting, but to no avail. A major source of contention, which contributed towards an unsuccessful attempt at arranging another match, and which served to raise and further heighten the traditional antagonism between the two counties, was the issue surrounding the wearing of a shoe in the Devonshire style of wrestling. *The West Briton* was in the vanguard of a movement which sought to discredit the Devonshire wrestling shoe, in order to have it barred from every wrestling ring, in which Cornishmen entered. The Cornish position can be summarised in a threefold argument: the shoe was considered a barbaric, brutal and unmanly relic of the past; the shoe gave the wearer an unfair advantage over the non-wearer, who remained virtually undefended against a vicious attack; and the Devonshire style was inferior in its range of techniques, and in overall skill level, which

simply relied upon kicking to distract an opponent, by causing pain and injury. The Devonians, by contrast, simply regarded kicking with a shoe as a legitimate tactic. Despite the use of the shoe, matches between Cornish and Devonshire wrestlers continued to take place, however, especially in towns close to the county border, or where there were lucrative prizes, but they were often acrimonious.

Of relevance here is an article printed in *The West Briton*, purporting to be a conversation overheard between a Cornishman and a Devonian in a London coffee-house, on the merits of the two wrestling styles. In response to the assertion made by the Devonian that Devonshire wrestlers, especially Cann, were superior, the Cornishman argues that not only are Devonshire wrestlers afraid to wrestle without shoes but they also rely upon a second-rate or 'pig system of wrestling' in conjunction with the 'battering-ram system' of kicking, and '...can any man in his senses pronounce it to be wrestling...' whereas '...the science of the Cornishmen is superior in the ratio of three to one.'¹⁹¹ This is likely to be indicative of the prevailing attitude towards Cornish wrestling in Cornwall during this period.

The significance of the Cann versus Polkinghorne match rests not so much on the result, but in what it represented; for both wrestling styles, it proved to be a watershed. For Cornish wrestling the immediate effect was an increase in popularity, reflected in large numbers of wrestlers entering numerous tournaments throughout the county, attracted by sizable prize money, and watched by huge crowds of spectators. In contrast, for Devonshire wrestling the match proved to be the sport's zenith, which soon afterwards went into serious decline and according to Porter, by the time of Cann's death, in 1864, Devonshire wrestling had all but disappeared, although there were abortive attempts to effect revivals during the 1860s and the 1870s.¹⁹² By the end of the nineteenth century Devonshire wrestling had disappeared, becoming completely subsumed into the Cornish style, which for the Cornish merely confirmed the perception that Cornish wrestling was superior.

Interestingly in the 2001 novel, *A Revolution of the Sun*, by Tim Pears, one of the characters is named James Polkinghorne, who not only develops into a Cornish wrestler, but also is supposedly a descendent of the original person with the same name. Another of the characters is also named Abraham Cann, who runs the Bodmin wrestling club that James Polkinghorne attends as a young man.¹⁹³

Cornish wrestling in London

Another notable feature of the ‘Golden Age’ of Cornish wrestling was the promotion by publicans in London of tournaments and challenge matches with lucrative prizes, which was partly generated by the Cann versus Polkinghorne encounter, but also by the interest taken by Pierce Egan, the editor of *Bell’s Life in London*, a weekly sporting newspaper. According to Brailsford, the popularity of wrestling ‘...reflected a thirst for sporting entertainment in an age when it was scarce rather than a long-term and widespread interest.’¹⁹⁴ Although a society for Cumberland and Westmorland wrestlers had been created in 1820,¹⁹⁵ the first reference to a tournament for Cornish and Devonshire wrestlers who were resident in London was in September 1826, which was organised by a former wrestler, Thomas Rouse of the *Eagle Tavern*,¹⁹⁶ City Road. *The West Briton* noted, ‘...there is no doubt that these sports, if properly conducted, will become extremely popular.’¹⁹⁷ This prediction was proven correct, as Cornish and Devonshire wrestling became a popular fixture in the capital at a number of venues, throughout the period from the 1820s to the 1840s, which drew crowds from all classes; for example, at the Wellington cricket ground, Chelsea in July 1828, there were 1,000 spectators, 100 of whom were ‘...noblemen and gentlemen of the first distinction,’¹⁹⁸ who subscribed towards the prizes. In recognition of the controversy surrounding kicking, the London promoters organised tournaments in the ‘Cornish system’ stipulating as one of the conditions that ‘...no person should play with his shoes on...’¹⁹⁹ although they also realised it was not good business to ignore the Devonshire kickers completely, and matches were also regularly organised to accommodate them. For example, in June 1847 wrestling in the Devonshire style was organised on the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Whit week and the Cornish style was on the Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Thomas Gundry won the first prize in the latter tournament and the organisers announced that he ‘...may now be considered the champion wrestler of the world.’²⁰⁰ A notable feature of these London matches introduced in 1845 was the innovative idea of dividing wrestlers into two classes; ‘...eleven stone and above to be called the “heavy weights”, and under that weight to be entitled to play as “light weights”.’²⁰¹

R. D. Blackmore, who was clearly interested in wrestling (see previous chapter), includes a scene of a match held in London in his novel *Clara Vaughan*, between a Devonshire farmer Jan Huxtable, a friend of the heroine, and a northern man, which

took place under canvas and on sawdust. From his description of the wrestlers and their moves it is clear they are adopting Cornish rules, with no shoes. At first Clara, who had come to find Huxtable for help, was not keen to watch believing it was not the place for a lady, but once inside the marquee she became ‘...so absorbed at once I became in this rare and noble probation of glorious strength, trained skill, and emulous manhood.’²⁰² Following some biased decisions against him, Huxtable eventually throws his adversary with an ‘Abraham Cann’s staylace’²⁰³ and vows never to venture to London or wrestle again.

Another notable publication during this period was *Defensive Exercises*, with sections on Cumberland and Westmorland, Cornish and Devonshire wrestling, boxing, fencing and broad sword, written by Donald Walker, in which he not only describes in detail the clothing worn in Cornish wrestling, but also some of the principal moves. It is in effect a coaching manual, the first of its kind, which is also illustrated with line drawings. He suggested that Cornish wrestling

...depends rather more on strength and endurance than the Cumberland. Nevertheless, great art and quickness are required in it; and a moderate degree of strength, seconded by art, will be surer of success than much greater strength without it.²⁰⁴

Conclusion

The intention in this chapter was to provide a detailed examination of Cornish wrestling tournaments and challenge matches between c. 1700 and 1850 within the context of ‘Second Peripheralism’, the second phase of peripherality in Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’. It was argued that this period represented the ‘golden age’ of Cornish wrestling when it developed into a major spectator and commercial activity, especially in the early decades of the nineteenth century, reaching its zenith in the 1820s, thus reflecting the growth of the Cornish economy, led by the mining industry. This development, which was largely promoted by publicans both in Cornwall and in London, was characterised by a large number of wrestlers, the majority of whom worked in the mining industry, entering numerous tournaments for very lucrative money prizes, making it possible for some talented individuals to become relatively prosperous by the standards of the day. Cornish wrestling was truly a county-wide sport, with tournaments held throughout Cornwall from Penzance to Stratton, with wrestlers coming from parishes as far west as St Just-in-Penwith and as far east as South Caradon; although the locus for tournaments and wrestlers was skewed towards the west of Cornwall. Cornish wrestling tournaments

and challenge matches were held at times when both wrestlers and spectators were free, during major holidays such as Whitsuntide and parish feasts, other events such as fairs and 'Ridings', and always during mid-week days. A further indication of the popularity of wrestling during this period is that not only were tournaments always well attended by both wrestlers and spectators, but also over half lasted more than one day. Although the evidence is fragmentary and confined to newspaper reports, it is possible to suggest that the large crowds that gathered to watch wrestling were largely well behaved, much to the chagrin of the Methodist church.

The success of Cornish wrestlers in tournaments and challenge matches throughout Cornwall, in Devon and in London, especially against the Devonshire kickers, gave Cornishmen everywhere a sense of pride, and demonstrated that the distinctive Cornish style was superior to any other, in its range of techniques and level of skill.

In the second half of the nineteenth century Cornish wrestling suffered a gradual decline, so much so that by the turn of the twentieth century the sport had almost died out completely, which must be seen against the backdrop of social and economic marginalisation in Cornish society that characterised the mature manifestation of 'Second Peripheralism' in Payton's 'centre-periphery model'. The following chapter will examine the decline of Cornish wrestling from 1850 to the outbreak of the First World War and offer reasons for its demise.

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CHAPTER 4: The Decline of Cornish Wrestling, 1850-1919

Introduction

Cornish wrestling tournaments and challenge matches continued to be practiced during the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, but with a marked decline in popularity, especially from the late 1860s onwards, which was characterised by amongst other things, a decrease in the number of tournaments that attracted fewer active wrestlers for smaller monetary rewards and a consequent reduction in spectator support. Despite the outbreak of the First World War, which temporarily halted progress, the first two decades of the twentieth century, witnessed a minor revival, although it never regained its former pre-eminence as Cornwall's most popular sport, its place being usurped by rugby football.¹

It is argued in this chapter that the decline of Cornish wrestling was due to five interrelated factors. Firstly, the number of active wrestlers regularly competing in tournaments declined markedly as a significant proportion of them left Cornwall in order to find work, either to other regions of Great Britain or overseas, as part of what became known as the 'Great Emigration'. Secondly, almost from the first footholds that John and Charles Wesley made into Cornwall, they and other itinerant Methodist preachers attacked Cornish wrestling for a variety of reasons but especially for its perceived brutality and its association with drunkenness and gambling.² As a result some wrestlers renounced wrestling completely and many spectators sought more morally uplifting activities to occupy their leisure time. Thirdly, Cornish wrestling declined at the same time that a wide variety of other recreational activities became popular, both for participants and spectators, which was consistent with developments in other parts of the country; there simply were more counter-attractions, especially cricket and rugby football. Fourthly, one feature of Cornish wrestling in evidence throughout the nineteenth century, especially with the prevalence of lucrative money prizes was 'faggoting', which involved wrestlers agreeing '...to fix the match and share the prize money.'³ The practice seems to have proliferated in the second half of the nineteenth century, to such an extent that the wrestling public simply lost interest in the sport, convinced that most wrestlers had come to some form of 'accommodation' with their opponents. Lastly, there was less free time available compared with the early nineteenth century, due to the gradual curtailment of the traditional holiday calendar and leisure activities being compressed into Saturday afternoons and Bank Holidays.

In the 1920s and 1930s Cornish wrestling experienced a reversal in fortunes when it was promoted as an integral part of the wider ‘Celtic Revival’, epitomised by the creation in 1923 of a governing body, the Cornwall County Wrestling Association (CCWA), which was not only the most significant feature of this period, but was also largely responsible for an increase in popularity. The new organisation attempted to ‘modernise’ the sport by introducing a set of rules thought to be more appealing to spectators, arranging a full programme of regular fixtures throughout each season and organising the registration of both wrestlers and sticklers. In 1928 it was also responsible for introducing a series of occasional tournaments against teams of wrestlers from Brittany, with venues alternating between the two regions, which continued until 1980. Another major feature of this period which threatened to tear the sport apart was the schism that developed between those who supported modernisation and those who wanted ‘...the old Cornish style of wrestling, and under the old Cornish rules...’⁴ The traditionalists, mostly based in the east of the county eventually broke away from the CCWA to form the East Cornwall Wrestling Federation in 1934.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the decline of Cornish wrestling from 1850 through to the outbreak of the First World War, which is followed by a chapter devoted to exploring the relationship between Cornish wrestling and the ‘Great Migration’, whilst chapter six examines the part played by the sport in the ‘Celtic Revival’.

The state of Cornish wrestling, 1850-1919

It is acknowledged that the 1850s can be regarded as a problematic decade, as it would appear from some of the evidence, especially the number of tournaments and challenge matches organised in the period and the number of wrestlers entering them, that there was not a decline in Cornish wrestling, quite the reverse and therefore might be better placed in the ‘golden age’. However, the decade can be regarded as a watershed between the ‘golden age’ and decline, with aspects of the former evident in the early 1850s and elements of the latter towards the end of the period. It must also be noted that the decline, similar to the ‘golden age’ was not characterised by a single element, but was multi-faceted and included a whole range of factors, which when analysed together indicate a gradual but discernible decrease in wrestling from the mid 1850s, although most marked from the 1860s. The most important of these factors include: the number of tournaments organised; the number of wrestlers entering tournaments; the changing occupations of wrestlers; the amount and type of prizes; the size and behaviour of

crowds that witnessed the sport; the number of days in the week when tournaments were held and their duration; the places where wrestling was held; the prevalence of challenge matches; and the occurrence of wrestling in London.

Number of tournaments

A close examination of the number of Cornish wrestling tournaments held in each decade from 1850 through to the First World War and reported in *The West Briton* clearly shows that in general terms there was a slow decline from a high of 60 during the 1850s, which was an increase compared to the previous decade, to a low of 18 during the 1890s, followed by a significant increase during the first two decades of the twentieth century, that was interrupted by war, when all wrestling was abandoned as it was felt by organisers to be improper to continue to be involved in a leisure pursuit when so many men were losing their lives (see fig 4.1). It is acknowledged, however, that these figures are based entirely upon advertisements and reports of Cornish wrestling tournaments in *The West Briton* and may not be a complete record. It is likely that not all tournaments or challenge matches were reported in the paper, particularly those that were largely local encounters offering small prizes and involving wrestlers who were not well known, as these would not have been of interest to a county-wide readership. For example, in his book about the parish of St Gennys in north Cornwall, Parnall informs the reader that the local Revel, which was held during Whit week, was the great event of the year with church services, feasting and sporting events, including a wrestling match. He also refers to the recollections of an elderly inhabitant of the village speaking in 1927, who,

...used to go to the wrestling as a young man [probably during the 1870s]. They used to wrestle at Roscare on the green and at Week St Mary Revel. The wrestling was in a ring three or four land-goads across.⁵ [...] The pairs were picked by throwing hats in the ring, and then the winners of each pair would wrestle off again until one man had won. There was one man who could never be thrown. He was Jan Jose of Marshgate who was an uncle to John Jose who later farmed St Gennys Churchtown.⁶

Although the wrestling matches referred to above evidently took place, they are not reported in *The West Briton*, neither is the name of the local 'champion'. However, given the fact that this newspaper followed Cornish wrestling from the time it was first published in 1810 and continued to do so throughout the period under study, it can be taken as a reasonably reliable indicator of the general state of the sport. It is therefore likely that those tournaments or challenge matches reported in the press were the larger

events which offered lucrative prizes that attracted not only wrestlers, but also spectators and gamblers. For example, a report of a tournament held at Truro in July 1850 advertised as ‘Cornwall grand wrestling’,⁷ which offered £61 in prizes including £25 for the best man, stated that wrestling ‘...has of late been confined to the various local districts where it is followed as a recreation; but this year it was determined to originate a grand county wrestling match, at which the different players from the local districts might meet together.’⁸ The tournament proved to be so successful, with 64 standards and on the second day eight thousand ‘...people from all parts of the county, from the Tamar to the Land’s End, came into the town in carts, omnibuses, and all kinds of vehicles...’⁹ that it was proposed a similar event be arranged for the following year; however, it is not clear whether this actually took place as it went unreported, although there were similar tournaments at the same location in most years during the 1850s.

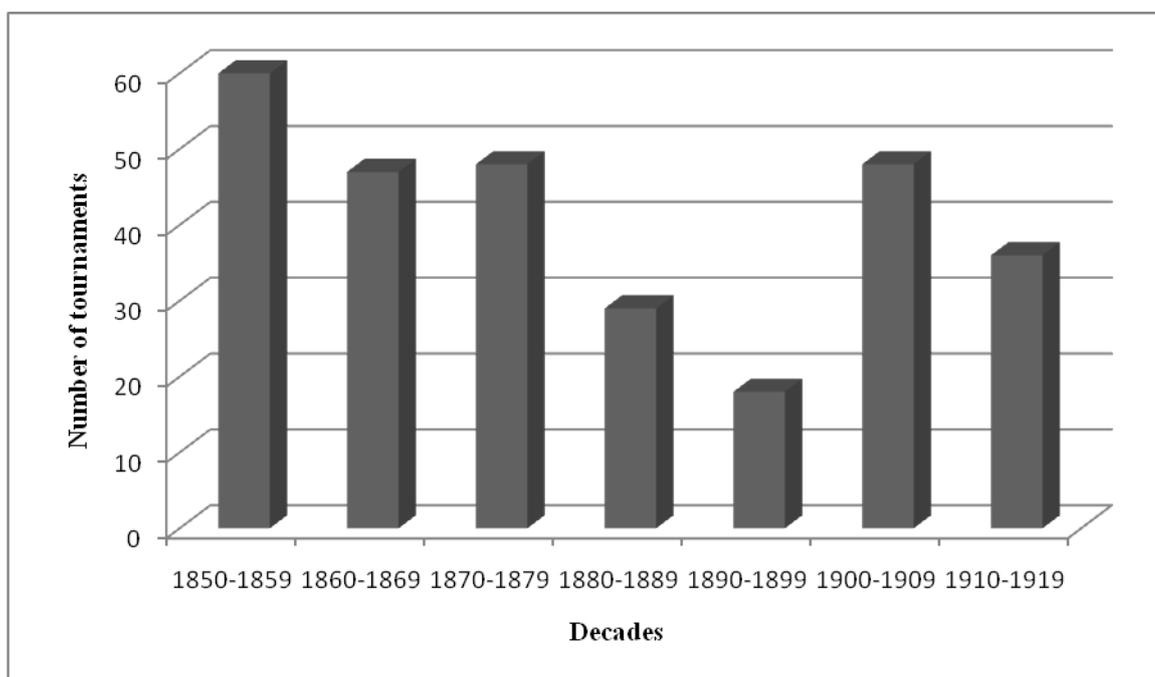


Fig 4.1: Number of Cornish wrestling tournaments held between 1850 and 1919¹⁰

The 1860s witnessed the beginning of a noticeable decline in Cornish wrestling. For example, in 1862 and 1863 there were no tournaments reported in *The West Briton*, and in 1864 there were only two, whilst in June 1863 the paper reported that the wrestling match at St Austell, ‘...which has hitherto been held annually, will not take place this year,’¹¹ thereby ending an ‘annual’ event which had apparently taken place since 1747;¹² despite the lack of details provided it is likely the organisers could not attract enough wrestlers or find enough subscribers for prizes. Similarly in May 1868 in a report of a tournament at Marazion, the paper noted that ‘[s]ome of the wrestlers had not

had a bout for nine or ten years,¹³ and in June 1868 in a report of a tournament at St Day it commented that '[a]lthough this game seems to have died out in the county, the wrestling was much better than was expected...'¹⁴ However, there were also a number of successful tournaments in the 1860s, such as the one held at Helston in July 1860, which was reported as being '...one of the best arranged and well contested prize wrestlings that has ever been seen in this or any other county,'¹⁵ and in July 1868 at Penzance '[a]bout £33 was either subscribed or taken as entrance-fees, to the ring, showing that a taste for this kind of amusement is far from extinct.'¹⁶

The evidence clearly shows that over the following three decades the number of Cornish wrestling tournaments declined markedly. For example, there were no reports of tournaments in 1882, 1883 and 1896 and at Helston in August 1873 only a few wrestlers entered so that the promoter '...informed the company that unless thirty standards were made he should refuse to award the prizes.'¹⁷ In the following year at Truro there were so few wrestlers competing that '...there was some difficulty in making up the third round,' which was assumed to be because William Pollard, who at the time was regarded as the 'champion' of the county had entered.¹⁸ In June 1880 *The West Briton* noted that a '...wrestling match in the neighbourhood of Helston is a very infrequent occurrence,'¹⁹ and in May 1884 at Truro it reported that '...though there was a scarcity of entries, the committee did the best they could with the material at their disposal.'²⁰ According to Jolly, the decline was characterised by '...a few obscure meetings without proper organisation...'²¹ however, in the mid-1880s a '...successful attempt was made to revive the old Cornish sport...'²² mainly organised by Mr J F Mark, who was landlord of the *Star Hotel* at Truro, assisted by what was later described as the 'County Committee'.²³ It appears that Mark, as secretary arranged a series of well organised and well attended tournaments with attractive prizes held mainly at Truro, but also at venues such as Penzance and Redruth, which were designed to persuade the best wrestlers from the county to take part; unfortunately his efforts were relatively short-lived.²⁴

Between 1900 and 1914 Cornish wrestling experienced a marked revival with the number of tournaments reported in *The West Briton* back to similar levels as the 1870s, and the average number of tournaments held in each year in the same period was five; if war had not intervened the trend suggests this figure would have been surpassed. Several reports referred to the revival of wrestling in a number of locations. For

example, the first tournament for eight years was held at Truro in Aug 1905; in September 1906 ‘[a]fter a lapse of six years the Cornish game of wrestling was revived at Newquay;’ a tournament at Duloe in September 1906 was the first for 50 years; and the first match for 20 years was held at St Columb in September 1912.

Number of wrestlers

The number of active wrestlers entering Cornish wrestling tournaments is also a good indication of the state of the sport, although it is difficult to comment with any degree of certainty as *The West Briton* did not record them in a consistent manner. For example, during the 1850s the paper followed the pattern of previous decades by reporting the number of standards created in the first round, rather than the total number of wrestlers in each tournament. The average number of standards for the 1850s in those tournaments reported by *The West Briton* is 62, although it must be noted that this figure is taken from a sample of only eight tournaments from a total of 60; the numbers of standards in other tournaments in the decade are not reported and it is therefore likely that the large figures are exceptional. The tournament with the largest number of standards during the 1850s was at Redruth in September 1853, when there were 68 and with so many bouts to complete the wrestling had to be extended from two to three days.²⁵ From the 1860s through to 1914 *The West Briton* reported the number of entries, rather than standards and occasionally only noted the numbers of wrestlers entering the second or third rounds. However, it is possible to provide estimates for each decade indicating broad trends (see fig 4.2), although the average figures for the 1860s through to the 1890s are based on very few tournaments and may again be exceptional, whereas the figures for 1900 onwards are estimated from a much larger sample of reported tournaments.

What can be concluded from this is that in general terms at the beginning of the twentieth century there appears to have been fewer wrestlers entering a smaller number of tournaments, and between 1900 and 1914 there were more tournaments, but no significant increase in the number of wrestlers entering each tournament. This conclusion is also supported by the decreasing numbers of wrestlers named in *The West Briton*, who can be positively identified in the Census Returns between 1851 and 1901 (see appendix 12 – 17).

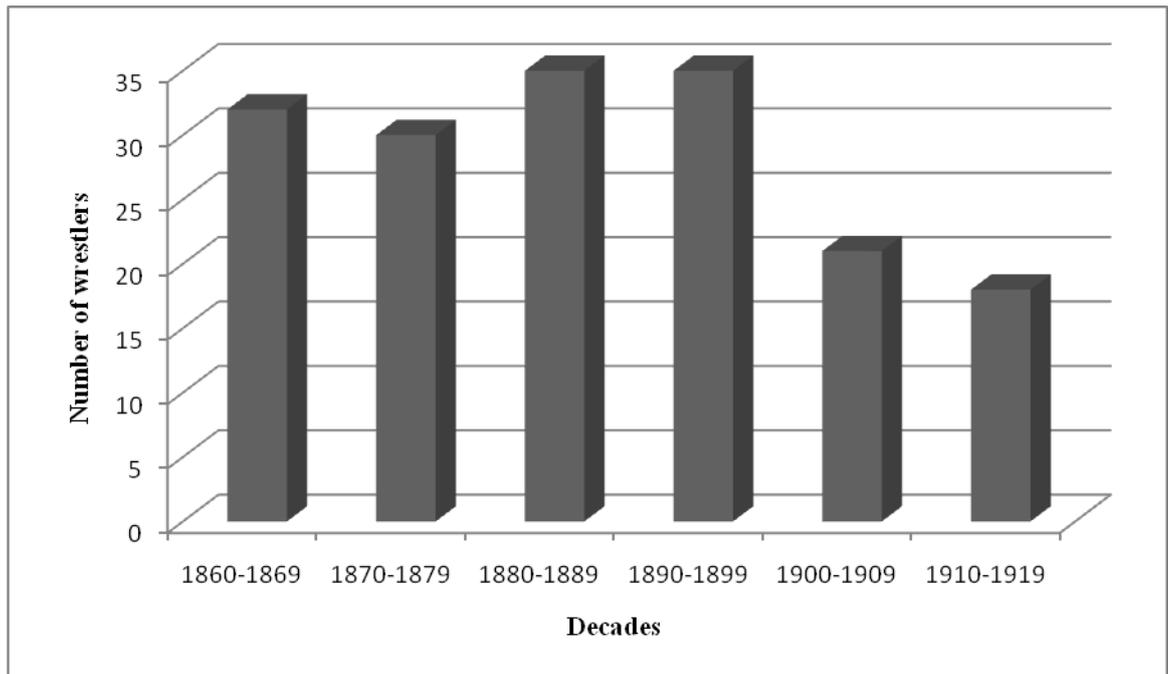


Fig 4.2 Number of wrestlers that entered Cornish wrestling tournaments between 1860 and 1919²⁶

It is acknowledged, however, that not all those individuals wrestling during this period were reported in the press, or if they were some details such as forename and parish were omitted, and in some instances it was not possible to positively identify some individuals, especially those who shared forenames, surnames and parish. Of those who can be positively identified in the Census Returns a significant proportion continued to be employed in mining, as in the earlier decades, making it the dominant occupation amongst Cornish wrestlers, especially during the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s, however, during the 1880s, 1890s, and 1900s it gradually ceased to overshadow other occupations (see table 4.1), whilst at the same time those working in the china clay industry become more prominent. The other notable occupation group amongst wrestlers throughout the period from 1851 to 1901 is unskilled labourers, the majority of whom worked in agriculture.

Table 4.1: Occupations of Cornish wrestlers taken from the census returns between 1851 and 1901²⁷

Occupations	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
Blacksmith/apprentice blacksmith	3	4	2			
Butcher	1	2			1	
Boiler maker		1				
Brakeman on railway		1				
Carpenter/sawyer	5	4	2			1
China clay worker	3	1	8	2	6	4
Coastguard			1			
Cooper/apprentice cooper		1		1		
Cordwainer/shoemaker	2	1	1			
Engineer	2	1				
Farmer	2	2	1		3	3
Fisherman					1	
Fishmonger	1					
Gardener (and butcher)		1				
Grocer		1				
Groom					1	
Gypsy			1			
Horse dealer	1	1				
Independent means					1	
Mason/slate cutter	1	3	4	1		1
Mine agent		1				
Miner	51	53	22	6	10	1
Plate layer for Great Western Railway						1
Plumber	1					
Quarryman	1				1	
Refreshment room owner			1			
Rope maker		1	1			
Sailor			1	3	2	
Soldier	1			1		
Tailor	1	1	2			
Unemployed				1		
Unknown	12	19	10	4	3	
Unskilled labourer	5	7	12	3	9	8
Wool comber	1					

Prizes

Another important indicator of the popularity and state of Cornish wrestling in the period between 1850 and 1914 was the amount and type of prizes awarded, similar to earlier decades (see appendix 3). The awarding of money continued to be the dominant

prize form (see fig 4.3), although the evidence shows that in general terms prizes were of less value compared to the first half of the nineteenth century; for example, throughout the entire period the largest first prize never exceeded £10, which was significantly less than the previous period when £20 was occasionally awarded. It is likely that it was more difficult to raise subscriptions from interested parties, as was the usual practice; for example, an advertisement for a tournament at Helston in June 1859 announced that '[o]wing to the absence of a number of the old subscribers...' the organisers were forced to reduce the prizes, including that for first place, from £10 to £8, but would be increased if alternative sources of money could be found.²⁸

The largest prizes were awarded at those tournaments held at the larger urban centres such as, Helston, Redruth and Truro; for example £10 was the first prize at Truro in July 1885,²⁹ at Redruth in August 1885,³⁰ and again at Truro in September 1893.³¹ The average first prize awarded at tournaments during this same period never exceeded £7 (see fig 4.4) and the figures show some interesting trends. From the 1850s to the end of the 1870s the general trend is in a downward direction with the lowest point during the 1860s when the average first prize was £3.10s. However, during the 1880s and 1890s the average first prize increased to over £6.16s, which can be explained by the fact that there were far less tournaments during this period, but were much better organised and promoted largely by the 'enterprising promoter'³² Mr J F Mark and his committee, whose strategy was to attract the best wrestlers of the day, which in turn led to larger crowds enabling large prizes to be offered. During the 1900s and 1910s, when the number of tournaments increased the trend is in a downward direction again, but never as low as in the 1860s. It is acknowledged that what is not revealed in these figures is the value of the prizes in real terms; £10 in 1910 was not the same as in 1850.

Occasionally material goods were also given as prizes, but never exclusively and were usually of secondary importance (see fig 4.5); for example in June 1858 a gold-laced hat was awarded as fourth prize at a tournament at St Day;³³ in September 1868 a hat and ribbons were awarded as fifth prize at St Columb;³⁴ and in June 1870 the same article was awarded as fourth prize at Chacewater.³⁵ These traditional prizes had by the 1870s become obsolete and were gradually replaced by other types of material goods (see table 4.2); for example, at Truro in June 1874 the first prize was £5 and a champion belt worth £5;³⁶ at the same place in July 1885 the first prize was £10 and a silver medal worth three guineas;³⁷ and at a Redruth tournament in September 1888 the first prize

was £8 and a ‘...silver watch for the championship of the county.’³⁸ As the first two examples above testify it became common practice for organisers of tournaments to provide details of the value of the material goods, presumably as an extra incentive to wrestlers; for example in July 1876 at a Truro tournament the first prize is noted as a gold watch and chain worth eight guineas;³⁹ in August 1893 at Truro the first prize was a solid silver cup worth five guineas;⁴⁰ and in July 1914 at St Columb the first prize was a championship cup worth £6.⁴¹

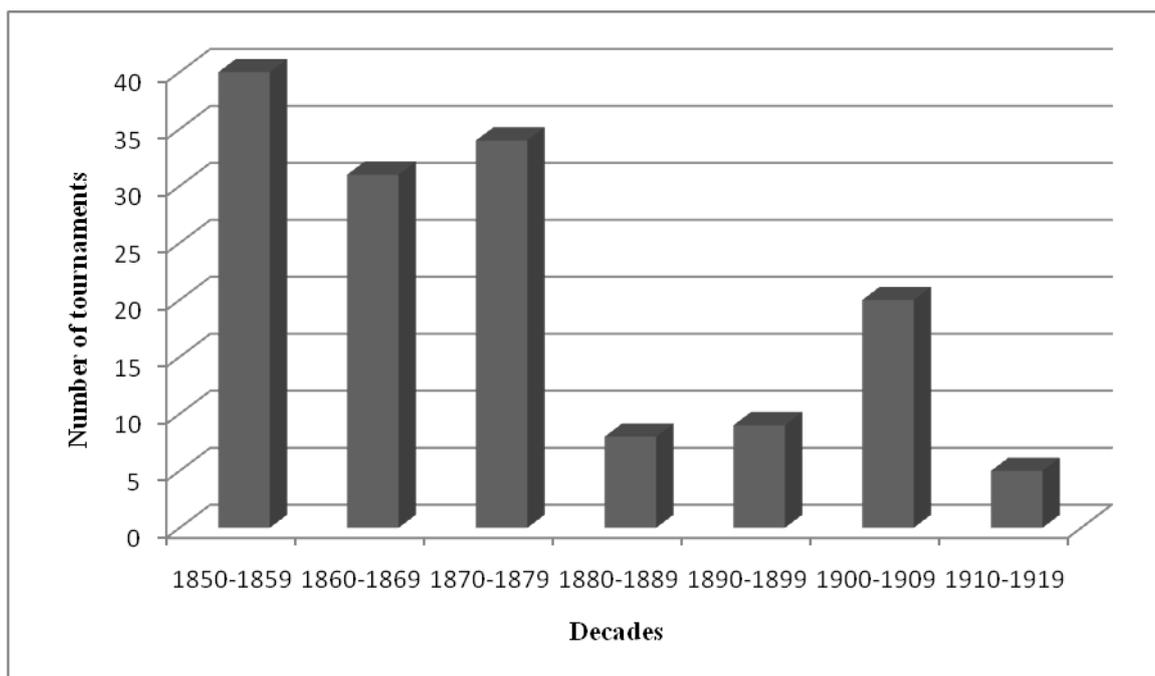


Fig 4.3 Cornish wrestling tournaments that awarded only money prizes between 1850 and 1919⁴²

From the 1850s to the 1890s organisers of tournaments continued with the practice of awarding money to thrown men, or of paying expenses. For example, at Helston in July 1858 ‘...sums of 7s.6d to 2s.6d were awarded by the committee to such of the unsuccessful competitors as had shown good play during the day;’⁴³ at Marazion in May 1868 the ‘...committee have offered Joe Meneer, the champion wrestler, to pay his expenses if he comes down and is unsuccessful;’⁴⁴ and in July of the same year the ‘...committee [at Mawgan] awarded 10s. to E Matthews for his good play and manly spirit. Several other deserving men were also rewarded by the committee.’⁴⁵ However, from the beginning of the twentieth century to 1914 this practice appears to have ceased completely (see fig 4.6), which suggests that organisers of Cornish wrestling tournaments could not raise sufficient sums to distribute to the thrown men, and thus decided to concentrate the money on those placed in the top positions.

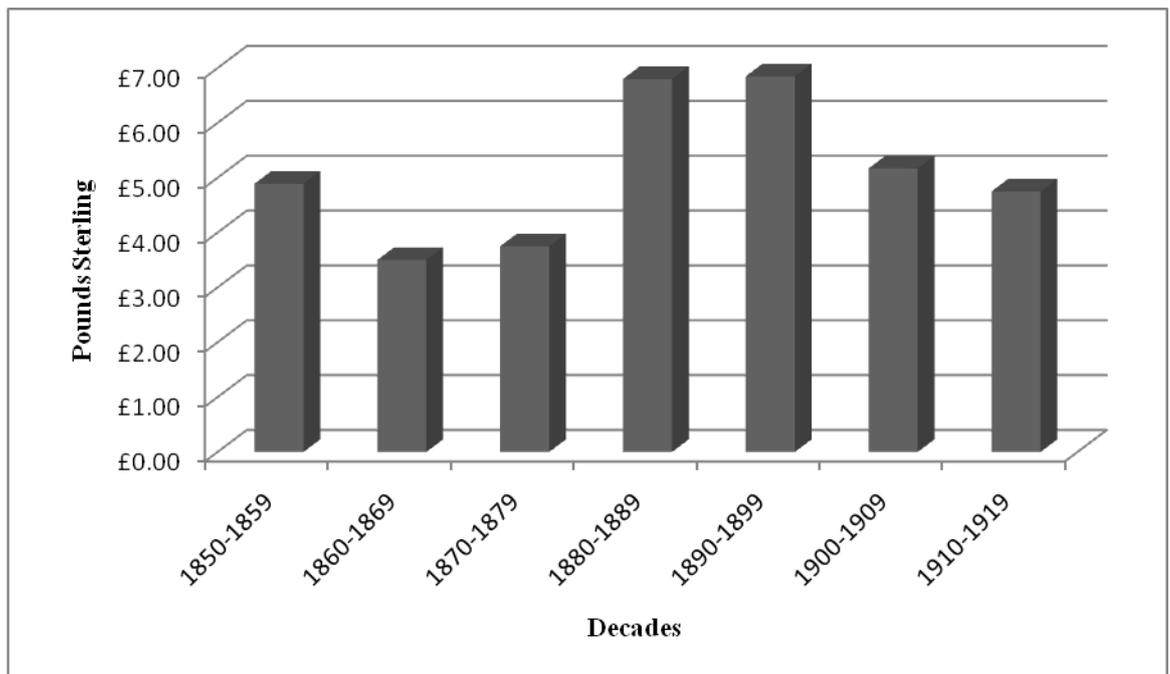


Fig 4.4: Average money prize awarded to the winning wrestler in Cornish wrestling tournaments between 1850 and 1919⁴⁶

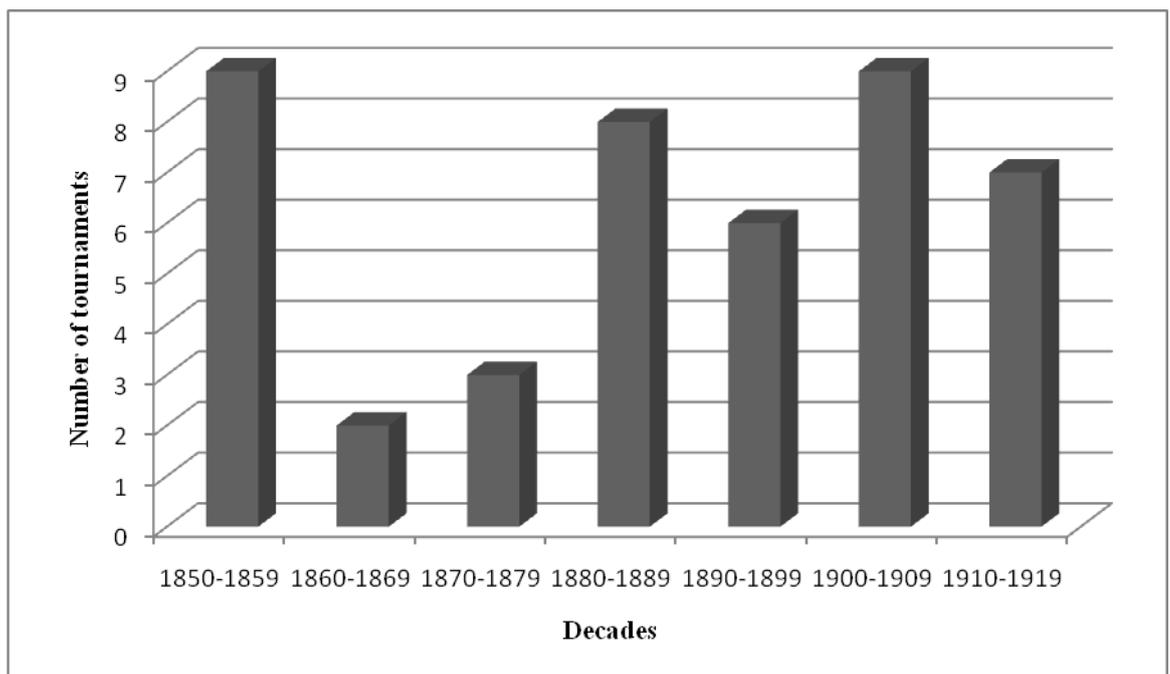


Fig 4.5 Cornish wrestling tournaments that awarded a mixture of money and material goods as prizes between 1850 and 1919⁴⁷

Promoters of Cornish wrestling usually raised the money needed for prizes by persuading interested men to ‘subscribe’ funds, supplemented by charging spectators an entrance fee, the latter becoming much more prominent in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially at the larger well organised tournaments. For example, at a tournament in August 1855 at Truro 6d., was charged for seats around the wrestling

ring and a booth was erected for the committee members; at Falmouth in April 1891 admission to the ground was 6d., to the pavilion 1s. and to the grandstand 3d. extra; at Threemilestone in September 1907 the admission to the ground was 4d., although ladies were allowed free entrance. At most of the more prominent tournaments refreshment booths were erected around the ground, often run by local innkeepers; for example in June 1871 at St Austell '[r]efreshments were supplied by Mr Job, of the General Wolfe Inn, and Mr Job of the Ring of Bells Inn.' Spectators were also often entertained by a band playing music in the intervals between bouts; for example in July 1884 at Truro the '...Truro City and St Agnes Bands were in attendance.'

Table 4.2: Types of material goods awarded as prizes in Cornish wrestling tournaments between 1850 and 1939⁴⁸

Material goods	Frequency
Hats	
Gold/silver laced hats	4
Hat	1
Hat with ribbons	2
Clothing	
Belt	33
Gold/silver objects	
Silver goblets	1
Cup	63
Gold watch and chain	1
Silver medal	9
Gold medal	11
Silver watch	1
Others	
Shield	6
Trophy	3
Souvenirs	1
Inscribed clock	1

An examination of the places where prize winners came from is illuminating (see appendix 18 and fig 4.7). In all decades apart from the 1880s, the majority of the more successful wrestlers resided in parishes in the east of the county and this is especially significant in the first two decades of the twentieth century, when wrestlers from the west are in a very small minority. The anomaly in the 1880s can be explained by the fact that the few tournaments that were organised by Mr J.F. Mark in that decade were in the west of county, and it is therefore surmised that many wrestlers from eastern

parishes did not travel the distance to compete. Overall there is a discernible eastwards drift, so much so that it is possible to conclude that the wrestling heartland was St Austell and the surrounding villages; that is, those communities in the clay country.

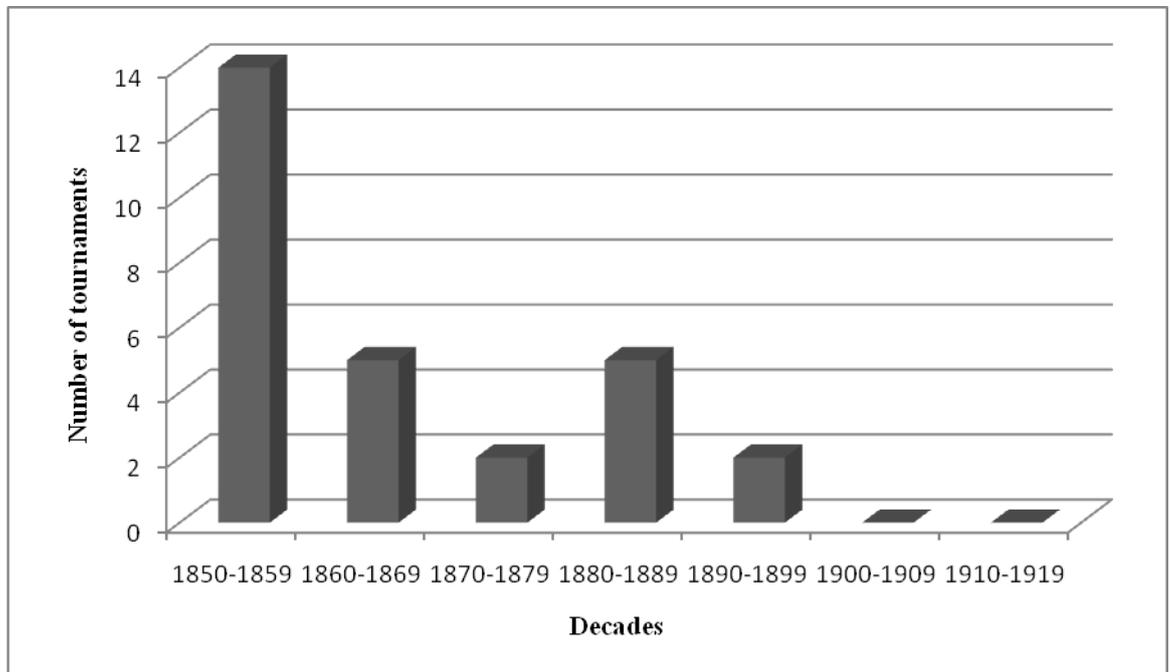


Fig 4.6: Cornish wrestling tournaments that awarded money and/or expenses to thrown men between 1850 and 1919⁴⁹

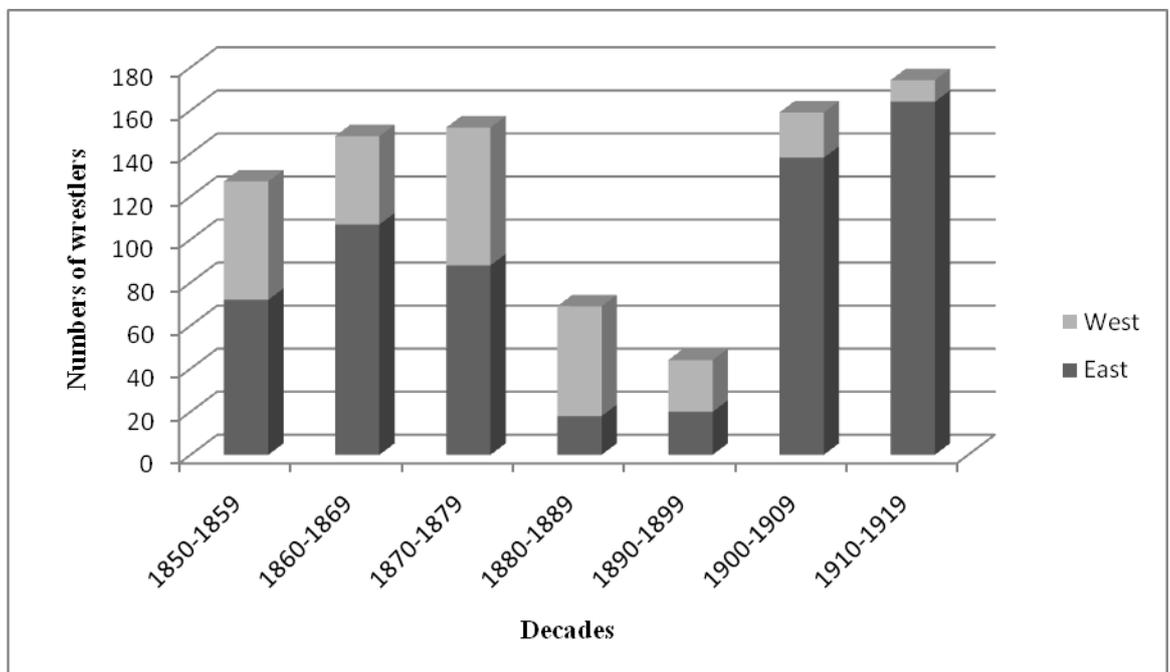


Fig 4.7: Residence of prize winners in Cornish wrestling tournaments between 1850 and 1919⁵⁰

Crowds

The general decline of Cornish wrestling between 1850 and 1914, characterised by a decrease in the number of tournaments, fewer wrestlers and smaller prizes, was also reflected in the size of crowds that attended. Tournaments continued to attract spectators, especially during the 1850s, with some crowds of substantial numbers; for example, on the day of a tournament held in May 1853 at St Austell 8,000 people attended;⁵¹ in September 1853 at Redruth it was estimated that six to seven thousand were present;⁵² and in August 1856 at Truro three to four thousand spectators watched the wrestling.⁵³ These examples are likely to be exceptional, however, as there were only ten out of a total of 60 tournaments when *The West Briton* reported such large numbers, and only at the larger urban centres. The tournaments held at Redruth and Truro in the examples above are interesting as many of the spectators were transported by the West Cornwall Railway Company, that ran special excursions; a feature that was to become a common characteristic of large sporting encounters across Britain in the years that followed.

The 1850s proved to be the zenith for large sporting crowds attending Cornish wrestling tournaments and apart from a few that were well attended in the 1880s, largely due to the organisational skills of J F Mark, the general trend until 1914 is of a gradual decline in numbers. However, there are a few examples of large numbers in most decades from the 1860s, although these are exceptional as most newspaper reports tended not to record crowd sizes or described them in vague terms such as a ‘...large concourse of people...’⁵⁴ In May 1868 at Marazion 4,000 people attended on the first day of the tournament with 3,000 on the second;⁵⁵ in August 1872 at Truro 3,000 were present;⁵⁶ in July 1884 at Truro 5,000 attended on the second day of wrestling;⁵⁷ in August 1893 about 1,600 attended at Redruth.⁵⁸ Interestingly a crowd of 600 at a tournament at St Stephens in August 1907 was described as a ‘great number,’⁵⁹ presumably as spectators in their thousands had by then become a thing of the past. In the almost complete absence of reports of fighting or drunkenness together with the occasional inclusion of comments such as that describing a tournament at Truro in Aug 1861, which stated ‘...there was not an angry word, but all passed off in a quiet and orderly manner, considering the number of spectators present,’⁶⁰ the evidence in the press suggests that wrestling crowds were largely well behaved.

However, there were occasions when crowds did behave badly, although this was not that often; for example in June 1876 at Redruth there was some fighting that occurred during the wrestling, ‘...which threatened to become the pastime of the day. After several rounds and some heavy hitting the police arrived, and with some force and a great deal of persuasion put a stop to it.’⁶¹ In July 1876 at Truro, just after the spectators had arrived, the town crier announced that the wrestling would be continued on the following day, although the tournament had been advertised for one day only. The crowd burst into the ring, demolished the committee stand and damaged other property in protest and ‘...broadly insinuated that the reason for making a second day out of it was to put money into somebody’s pocket.’⁶² On another occasion, at Tywardreath in May 1890, ‘...the noise which marked [the] return [of wrestling to Tywardreath] did not say much for their temperance principles.’⁶³

Days of the week

The days of the week when tournaments were held also provide an indication of the state of Cornish wrestling between 1850 and 1914 (see table 4.3 and appendix 19). It is clear that Tuesday was by far the most popular day to hold tournaments throughout the entire period, followed by Monday and Wednesday, as it was in earlier decades, and although tournaments were held on Thursday and Friday, they are statistically insignificant by comparison. Many of the tournaments held in mid-week were associated with feast celebrations, as they had done for generations, until the 1890s when the total number of tournaments held each year started to decline; for example, wrestling was held at St Austell in June 1867 and ‘...took place, as usual, on Feast Tuesday and Wednesday;’⁶⁴ in June 1875 wrestling was held on feast Thursday at St Blazey;⁶⁵ and at Probus in July 1901 wrestling was held on Tuesday and Wednesday in feast week.⁶⁶

Cornish wrestling tournaments were also held on other ‘traditional’ occasions, although these were not widespread; for example, in July 1856 wrestling was one of the features associated with Bodmin Riding;⁶⁷ in May 1874 wrestling took place on Whit Monday and Tuesday at St Teath;⁶⁸ in May 1890 there was a wrestling tournament at Tywardreath on Whit Tuesday;⁶⁹ and in 1914 Whit Monday was the occasion for wrestling at Fowey.⁷⁰

Table 4.3: Days of the week when Cornish wrestling tournaments were held between 1850 and 1919⁷¹

Decades	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1850-59	21	40	23	3	5	2
1860-69	7	28	12	3	1	1
1870-79	17	23	6	4	0	3
1880-89	11	6	7	2	0	3
1890-99	3	5	12	1	0	3
1900-09	4	4	5	2	0	31
1910-19	6	0	3	2	0	22
Totals:	69	106	68	17	6	65

During the early part of the period a significant proportion of Cornish wrestling tournaments took more than one day to complete, similar to the period between the 1820s to the 1840s, which is clearly linked to the number of wrestlers who entered and the time it took for each bout to be completed (see fig 4.8). In the 1850s 27 out of a total of 60 tournaments (ie 45%) lasted more than one day, however, as the number of wrestlers declined the duration of tournaments also declined so that by the beginning of the twentieth century those lasting two days had disappeared; the last tournament lasting two days was at Probus in July 1901.⁷² There were also five occasions between 1850 and 1914 when tournaments took three days to complete; the final time was in August 1868 at St Stephens,⁷³ whilst the remainder all took place in the 1850s. The gradual move towards one day tournaments is also reflected in the frequency of start times (see table 4.4). Where these were advertised or reported, morning starts were replaced by afternoons by the 1880s, indicating that organisers must have been confident of completing the wrestling in the reduced period of time.

The most significant change that took place towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, which is clearly indicated in table 4.3, is that mid-week days diminished in importance and Saturday became the most important day for leisure activities; a feature that was to become more evident in the 1920s and 1930s.

This transformation was accompanied by the emergence of Bank Holidays as a popular occasion to hold wrestling tournaments; for example, at Falmouth in 1891 on Easter Monday;⁷⁴ at Newquay in 1894 on August Bank Holiday Monday, which was to become a regular feature of the wrestling calendar for several years to come;⁷⁵ and again at Falmouth in 1905, also on August Bank Holiday Monday.⁷⁶

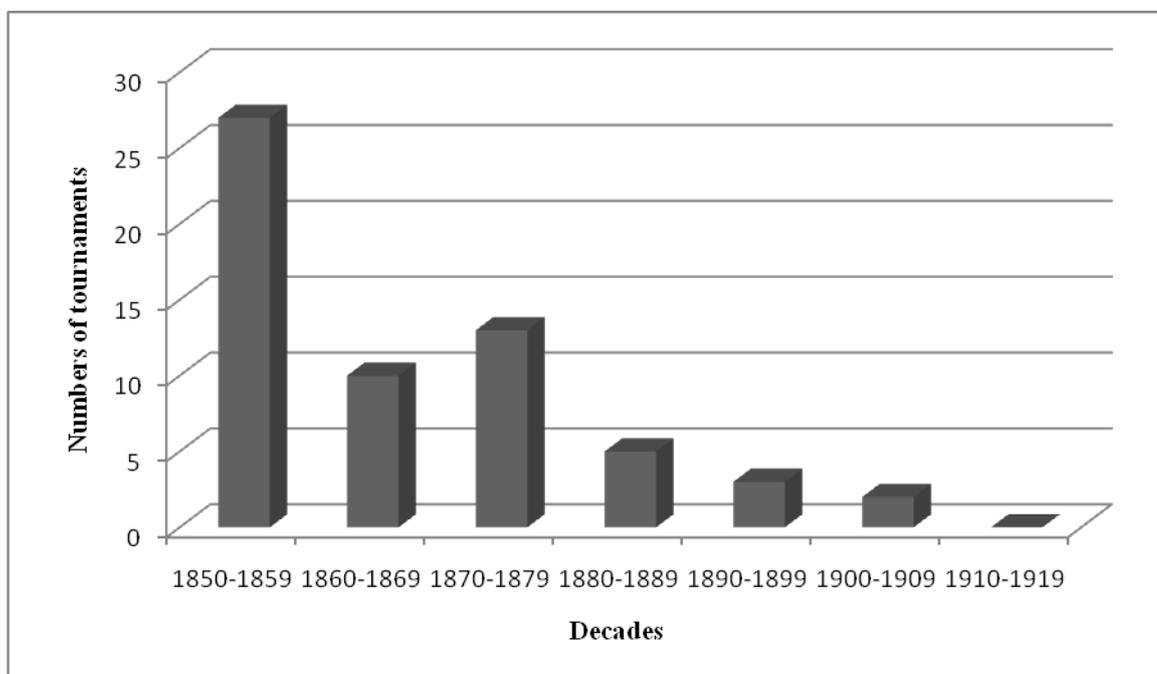


Fig 4.8: Cornish wrestling tournaments that lasted more than one day between 1850 and 1919⁷⁷

Table 4.4: Frequency of start times of Cornish wrestling tournaments between 1850 and 1919 (where known)⁷⁸

	1850-1859	1860-1869	1870-1879	1880-1889	1890-1899	1900-1909	1910-1919
08.30	1						
09.00	3						
09.30							
10.00	9	2	3				
10.30	1						
11.00	3	1	1				
11.30							
12.00	3	1	1		1		
12.30		1		1			
13.00	1			1	1	2	4
13.30						1	
14.00		2		1	1	4	
14.30						1	1

15.00						1	
15.30							

Places

Despite the evidence which suggests a decline in Cornish wrestling in the period between 1850 and 1914, it continued to be popular in towns and villages throughout Cornwall, with a significant increase in the number of places that held tournaments, compared with earlier decades (see appendix 6 and 20). There were also 32 places that held tournaments sometime between 1850 and 1914, but did not do so between 1801 and 1849 and of these 22 were in the east of the county; places such as Blisland, Carthew, Nanpean and St Teath. The most popular places for holding tournaments were in the larger urban locations, such as Falmouth, Truro, Redruth and St Austell, which not only had relatively good transport links making them easy to get to, but also populations big enough to make the sport an economically viable proposition. These were also important wrestling centres in earlier decades; for example, apart from Truro, there is evidence of wrestling at the other places from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. However, the most significant feature of the period was the increase in the number of tournaments held in places in the east of the county, such as, Mawgan-in-Pydar, Newquay, St Blazey, St Columb and St Stephen-in-Brannel. Newquay in particular epitomises this development, which grew as a wrestling venue during the Edwardian period at the same time that the town emerged as a thriving resort, holding tournaments on August Bank Holiday Monday, thereby capitalising on a holiday crowd intent on recreation.

Within these locations a variety of sites were used for Cornish tournaments. They continued to be held on ‘traditional’ sites, such as ‘...a field adjoining the Bowling Green ...’ at Falmouth⁷⁹ and also on land with close links to a pub; for example, at Truro in Aug 1856 the wrestling took place on ‘...Ship Inn Moor, where the agricultural exhibitions are held...’⁸⁰ and at Probus in July 1897 it was held ‘...in a field behind the Cornish Mount provided by Mr Thomas Bailey, landlord.’⁸¹ Some, perhaps many, tournaments were held at venues due to their vicinity to the railway network, allowing both wrestlers and spectators easy access; for example, at St Austell in July 1864 a tournament was held ‘...in a field near the Railway Station, belonging to Mr Henry Stephens, of the New Inn...’⁸² and in May 1890 the wrestling was held ‘...in a field

adjoining the New Inn, Tywardreath, five minutes walk from Par station...’⁸³ However, increasingly towards the end of the nineteenth century the associations with pubs diminished in importance and alternative sites emerged as wrestling venues (see fig 4.9), particularly the use of football and rugby club grounds, such as Bodmin Football Club,⁸⁴ Newquay Football Club⁸⁵ and Penryn Rugby Football Club,⁸⁶ or on land described as ‘recreation grounds’, such as those at Redruth⁸⁷ and Falmouth,⁸⁸ although it is unclear whether this referred in the modern sense to multi-purpose spaces owned and managed by local authorities for the benefit of the local residents. Other wrestling sites included Fowey Grammar School grounds ‘...lent for the occasion by Mr Hawkings, headmaster’⁸⁹ and the drill field of St Ives Artillery.⁹⁰

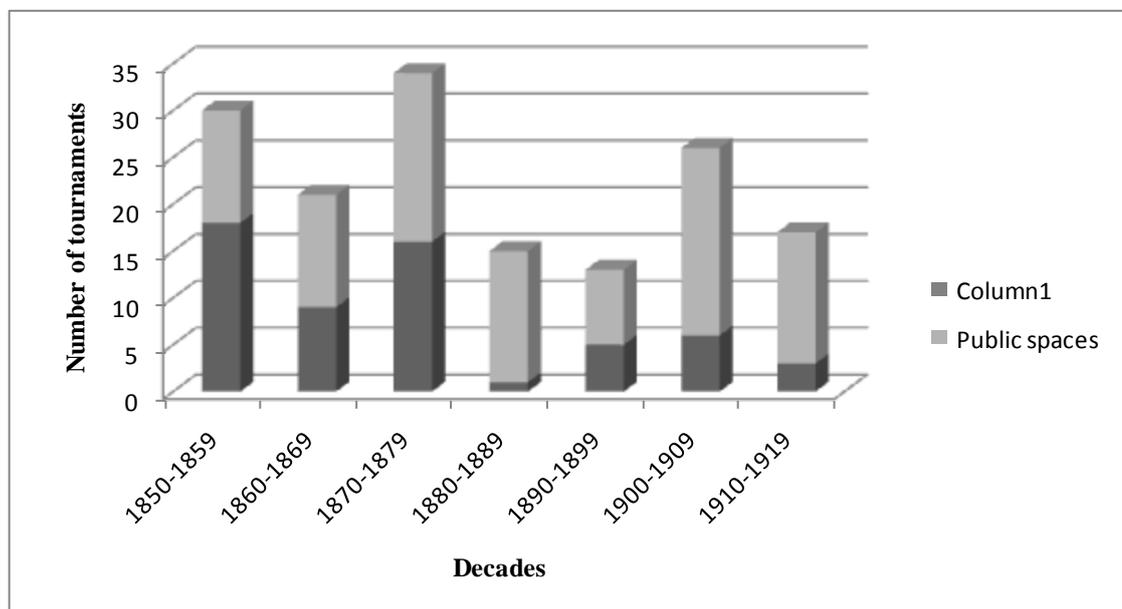


Fig 4.9: Type of Cornish wrestling site where tournaments were held between 1850 and 1919⁹¹

Wrestling in London and challenge matches

There were two other features of the second half of the nineteenth century, which are worthy of note as they also provide an indication of the state of Cornish wrestling; tournaments in London and challenge matches. Cornish wrestling continued to be organised in London for those Cornishmen living and working in the capital as late as the 1860s and 1870s; for example, in April 1868 at the *White Lion* grounds, Hackney Wick, the ‘...annual wrestling in connection with the Devon and Cornwall Society...’ took place witnessed by 3,000 people, including some of high rank;⁹² and in May 1872 several of the best wrestlers from Cornwall were brought to the capital by train to attend

a match at St James's Hall,⁹³ which is the last reference to Cornish wrestling in London. However, owing to a lack of evidence it is not clear how long 'annual' wrestling took place in the capital, although one writer suggested that if west-country wrestling revised the rules it would gain greater popularity and avoid being eradicated from London. This suggests Cornish wrestling was still in existence in London in the 1880s;⁹⁴ it appears to have died with the nineteenth century as there are no references to the sport in London in the twentieth century.

Leading wrestlers of the day also continued to challenge one another, partly for the kudos of being regarded as the 'champion' and partly for the large sums of money that could be made. A typical challenge was that made by William Treglown of Ludgvan to James Bullock of St Austell for £20 a side, which was '...deposited in the hands of the stakeholder, Mr Sparks of the Queen's Head...'⁹⁵ The match took place at Truro in October 1860 and lasted only twenty minutes before Bullock threw Treglown the required two fair back falls.⁹⁶ The most celebrated and certainly the most contentious of the challenge matches, since the epic Cann versus Polkinghorne encounter in 1826, took place on separate occasions in 1887, between Jack Carkeek and John Pearce, Philip Hancock and Thomas Bragg. Carkeek was born in Rockland, Michigan in the USA of Cornish parents, who entered his first wrestling tournament in his home state when he was only 16 and quickly established a reputation as a good wrestler.⁹⁷ By the time of his visit to Cornwall he wrestled only in challenge matches for side money and later appeared in music-halls giving wrestling exhibitions and challenging all comers, thus helping to popularise the new spectacle of professional wrestling.⁹⁸ The match with John Pearce of Wendron, held at Redruth in July 1887, was for £100 a side and a belt and was billed as the world championship of Cornish wrestling. Carkeek won this and the other two matches, although there was a suspicion amongst many that '...the promoters and combatants each had a share of the spoil, and that the results were pre-arranged.'⁹⁹ This had the deleterious effect of making the wrestling public turn its back on challenge matches, to such an extent that by the end of the nineteenth century they had disappeared completely from the scene.

Thus by the end of the nineteenth century the evidence strongly suggests that Cornish wrestling was in decline, which led one writer to ask '[i]s the fine manly game of wrestling to be one of the victims of the nineteenth century, civilised off the face of the earth...?' and appealed to Cornishmen to '...re-establish wrestling as a famous and

manly West Country play.’¹⁰⁰ His words must have struck a chord with the wrestling fraternity as there was a brief revival during the first two decades of the twentieth century, with an increase in the number of well organised tournaments and a consequent rise in popularity, reflected in the production of a set of cigarette cards, produced by the Player’s company in 1913, which included one card depicting Cornish wrestling.¹⁰¹ It appears that one reason for this revival was the emergence of the four Chapman brothers from St Wenn, who not only enlivened the sport with their skill and honesty, but also were a draw for spectators. Reuben, who was the oldest ‘...wrestled with changes of style and regard for the finer points of the game that made him a wrestler’s wrestler...’ Sid and Charlie were ‘...fast and dazzling,’ whereas Jim was not quite as successful as the other three.¹⁰² When they eventually retired from wrestling they became respected sticklers, similar to many other former wrestlers. Holmes also noted that cadets from the Naval Gunnery School, near Plymouth often competed.¹⁰³

The brief revival of Cornish wrestling at the beginning of the twentieth century can partly be explained by Perry, who whilst not wholly rejecting the notion of the ‘Great Paralysis’, suggests there was a relatively short-lived ‘remission’ during the Edwardian period, when there were attempts to diversify into such areas as farming, market gardening, china clay, food processing, explosives and tourism, which helped to fill the economic gap left by mining.¹⁰⁴ Perry therefore argues that Payton’s proposition that during this period Cornwall was unable to diversify in the face of mining collapse and de-industrialisation, which was viewed by the Cornish with a mixture of fatalism and resignation, resulting in a ‘getting by’ and ‘making do’ culture, with a reliance upon remittances from abroad is too pessimistic and simplistic.¹⁰⁵ For example, he argues that financial remittances helped in Cornwall’s economic growth and development through income and employment multipliers; the money was spent on basic necessities and local shopkeepers and producers benefitted, who were encouraged to employ more people; it helped communities to finance civic amenities, such as schools and chapels; and it may have encouraged some to be entrepreneurial.¹⁰⁶ Perry also argues that many of the migrants who returned to Cornwall had become successful and used their wealth to finance such things as smallholdings, mines, quarries, houses, schools, chapels and shops.¹⁰⁷ The migrants also returned with human and social capital, bringing ideas, behaviours, skills and education, which not only helped to promote dynamism in their home communities, but also encouraged many to play important roles in the economic, political, cultural and religious life of Cornwall. Schwartz has also suggested that the

experience for women who stayed behind in Cornwall, whilst their husbands were abroad was not entirely impoverishing as some have suggested, but may have been liberating; they were freed from the cycles of childbirth and breastfeeding, assumed the role of heads of households and managed the money sent home.¹⁰⁸

It is therefore argued here that the ‘remission’ in the Cornish economy, which coincided with a short-lived recovery for tin mining, prompted a brief period of socio-economic and cultural optimism resulting in the minor revival of Cornish wrestling. It is more than likely that some of the money from remittances or from returned migrants found its way into providing subscriptions for prizes and the promotion of the sport, which must have attracted wrestlers to enter tournaments and spectators to watch. Many of the returned migrants also brought human and social capital and helped to organise the sport; for example, James Triggs made his fortune in the USA and South Africa, made several trips back home, competing successfully in tournaments and eventually settled in Cornwall, becoming a founder member of the Cornwall County Wrestling Association in 1923 (see chapter 5).

Reasons for decline

It is argued here that there are five main reasons why Cornish wrestling declined at the end of the nineteenth century; the decrease in the population as a consequence of emigration; the sustained attack by moral reformers, in particular the Methodists; the widespread practice of faggoting; the increase in the number of counter-attractions; and the reduction and compression of leisure time. In addition there are those who suggested the sport had inherent faults that made it unpopular with the wrestling public.

Emigration

Chapter five provides details of Cornish wrestling in the context of the diaspora and therefore the current chapter is restricted to outlining the impact of emigration on Cornwall and its effect upon the sport. Cornwall experienced emigration during most of the nineteenth century, and it has been estimated that approximately 230,000 people left Cornwall for various destinations either to England and Wales or overseas, which represented at least a third of the population.¹⁰⁹ This led one authority to suggest that Cornwall was ‘...probably an emigration region comparable with any in Europe.’¹¹⁰ Deacon has suggested that mass emigration did not set in until the end of the 1830s, gathered pace during the 1840s and between 1861 and 1900 Cornish males and females

were three times more likely to emigrate than the norm for counties in England and Wales. For example, between 1861 and 1900 10.5% of Cornwall's male population left to go overseas and 7% left to go to other counties, which was more than any other county, and 5.3% of the female population went overseas and 7.1% to other counties. During the same period 44.8% of males aged between 15 and 24 went overseas and 29.7% to other counties, 26.2% of females in the same age group went overseas and 35.5% to other counties.¹¹¹ In total 118,500 people emigrated between 1875 and 1900.¹¹² This level of emigration had the deleterious effect of depopulating Cornwall. Payton has shown that emigration had a serious impact upon the population of many Cornish villages; for example, between 1841 and 1851 the population of Breage and Germoe fell by 27%; between 1861 and 1871 the population of Tywardreath fell by 29%; and between 1871 and 1881 the population of St Just-in-Penwith and Perranzabuloe fell by 27% and 22% respectively; and St Cleer fell by 25% between 1871 and 1881 and a further 22% between 1891 and 1901.¹¹³

The impact of this decrease in population upon Cornish wrestling was obvious; there were less wrestlers of wrestling age left in Cornwall to enter tournaments or challenge matches, either in Cornwall or in London and less spectators to watch, which is supported by the evidence presented above. However, not all wrestlers left Cornwall as there were enough who remained in the county to make it possible for promoters to organise wrestling on a regular basis, evidenced by the tournaments organised by J.F. Mark in the 1880s and the minor revival in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Methodist opposition

From the first visits of Charles and John Wesley to Cornwall in the 1740s they condemned Cornish wrestling, for its perceived brutality and its association with drunkenness, fighting and gambling. With its Celtic roots Cornish wrestling was also linked to paganism and therefore for Methodists was inherently sinful and consequently '...sporting events became battlegrounds between advocates of the new and defenders of the old, where contests between modernity and traditional belief were acted out.'¹¹⁴ In his diary, Charles Wesley records that on Saturday 4th August 1744, during his second visit to Cornwall he,

...preached at Gwennap, where the awakening is general. Very many who have not courage to enter into the society have yet broke off their sins by repentance, and are waiting for forgiveness. The whole county is sensible of the change [...] At their last revel they had not men enough to make a wrestling-match, all the

Gwennap men being struck off the devil's list, and found wrestling against him, not for him.¹¹⁵

This was optimistic on Wesley's part as the evidence shows that between 1801 and 1849 Gwennap had become a breeding ground for wrestlers, with a significant number of prize winners coming from that parish (see appendix 9). Methodists also took issue with its association with alcohol. According to Douch, wrestling '...became the favourite of the public-house landlords...' ¹¹⁶ as it needed little formal arrangement; there were always enough wrestlers; there was no expensive buildings or equipment to provide; and the prize winners were expected to spend some of their winnings in the pub. Through this association with pubs, wrestling '...reached the depths of ill-repute...' and the more wrestling there was '...the worse its reputation became.'¹¹⁷ For example, William White, a traveller to Cornwall in the 1850s, described a wrestling tournament at Probus and concluded:

I had seen a specimen of Cornish wrestling. As a people we are not so fond of outdoor athletic sports as we ought to be, and are too fond of work – that is money making. But I have little faith in sports and exercises which cannot be carried on for their own sake, without the aid of beer or betting, and the excitement of the Stock Exchange. Pastime should be pastime, not business. The wrestling at Probus seemed to me more a speculation of the two tavern keepers [who were selling alcohol on the ground] than the emulous recreation of a parish.¹¹⁸

In order to persuade people away from wrestling, Methodists used a range of counter-attractions designed to offer a deliberate spectacle, such as revival meetings, annual tea treats, watch nights, class meetings, open-air prayer meetings, chapel services, hymn singing, excursions to the seaside, processions and parades, bands and choirs and other ceremonial occasions with lots of rowdy music.¹¹⁹ For example, in June 1841 a diarist from Redruth noted with pleasure that a group of Rechabites and teetotallers marched from Redruth to Camborne in a procession about a mile in length and that a wrestling match near Redruth Brewery had very few spectators.¹²⁰ Methodists also tried direct intervention; for example, the Primitive Methodists of St Austell held a camp meeting on the site of the annual wrestling tournament on the Sunday before the event and prayed that God would abolish it. One of the sticklers became converted and although the wrestling was held it was '...in a more retired place on the opposite side of the town, where they could carry on their sports without molestation.'¹²¹ At St Just-in-Penwith in 1842, two Methodist ministers, Rev. Jewell and Rev. Christophers, accompanied by a small group of supporters, entered the wrestling ring and attempted to stop the sport on that day and in the future by offering to pay the value of the prizes to

be divided between the 33 standards that had been made on the previous day. The wrestlers refused their offer and wandered off, probably to wrestle at an alternative venue, whilst leaving the Methodists singing and praying ‘...in possession of the ring.’¹²²

Methodists also regularly denounced Cornish wrestling from the pulpit, wrote and distributed religious tracts at tournaments and submitted articles or letters for inclusion in newspapers. Although *The West Briton* covered Cornish wrestling throughout the nineteenth century, it had non-conformist sympathies, partly as it came into existence in opposition to the Tory *Royal Cornwall Gazette* in order to fight for Parliamentary Reform, and partly as its first editor, Edward Budd, was a Wesleyan local preacher,¹²³ therefore those that condemned the sport had a voice. An example is an advertisement printed in *The West Briton* in November 1821 entitled, ‘A FRIENDLY EXPOSTULATION, addressed to WRESTLERS, and to the Persons who promote Meetings for Wrestling, either by their presence, or by subscribing money for the distribution of Prizes.’¹²⁴ The anonymous author suggests that there were only two arguments in favour of organisers promoting Cornish wrestling; utility, whereby it ‘...makes men expert, active, vigorous, and of course more able in times of war to defend our country,’¹²⁵ and amusement. He rejects both arguments; utility as armies have not yet won ‘...by tripping up the heels of their antagonists and laying them upon the ground;’ and amusement as it ‘...cannot improve either the intellectual or moral powers of men...’¹²⁶ He argues that the evils of wrestling included idleness and a neglect of business, men forget God, a tendency towards profligacy that leads to the suffering of families and the risk to working men of ‘...fracture of bones, the dislocation of joints, the breaking of blood vessels, the loss of health, and untimely graves...’¹²⁷ In July 1829 a letter entitled, ‘A Relic of Paganism’ signed by ‘Philanthropos’ appeared, in which the author asserts that the continued existence of Cornish wrestling ‘...forms a very humiliating contrast to the general progress of the community in religious and intellectual improvement.’ He asks the rhetorical question ‘[w]hy do you not go to wrestling!’ and then provides the following eight reasons:

Because I should get no good there. Because I can employ my time better. Because it is throwing my money away. Because I wish not to be seen in bad company. Because I would not encourage idleness, folly and vice. Because I should set a bad example. Because God has forbidden it...because I must soon die.’¹²⁸

Another example is a letter from August 1870 and signed by ‘A Promoter of Civilization,’ who asks ‘[i]s it not strange in the nineteenth century, when there are so many means at work for raising men in the great moral scale, to find Cornwall retrograding in its morals.’ The author urges those ‘...interested in the progress of civilization, and the welfare of the human race, will do their very utmost to put down such brutish and demoralising sports...’¹²⁹

The impact of Methodist proselytising upon Cornish wrestling is difficult to assess as it is unclear the extent to which it was effective at persuading men to stop wrestling, although there were some successes. For example, Douch notes that Hugh Kent, a tin miner from Gwennap, left a house and three gardens in his will to a relative, with the stipulation that he never wrestle again.¹³⁰ William Carvasso, a Methodist class leader, wrote of when he was younger that, ‘I was borne down by the prevailing sins of the age; such as cock-fighting; wrestling; card playing; and Sabbath breaking.’¹³¹ James Eddy who was hanged at Bodmin gaol in 1827 confessed that in his youth he had developed bad habits such as, ‘...smuggling, Sabbath breaking, adultery, drinking, pilfering, gaming, wrestling etc., and thus got a bad name.’¹³² Abraham Bastard, whose ‘...moral malady showed themselves in his love of *boxing, hunting, wrestling, poaching, swearing,*’¹³³ once threw the celebrated James Polkinghorne in a tournament at St Kew, was converted after hearing a sermon by Bible Christians and later became a local preacher, class leader and teetotaller. The theme of conversion is also used by the author and Methodist preacher Silas Kitto Hocking in his little known novel, *The Strange Adventures of Israel Pendray*, in which the main character renounces his old life, including wrestling and after meeting one of the Wesleys becomes a Methodist preacher.¹³⁴ Despite missing an important wrestling tournament at Redruth, of which Pendray states to a friend, ‘...I was not there, neither did I regret my absence,’¹³⁵ the sport still hovers in the background of the novel, with Hocking using one scene as a metaphor for good overcoming evil. Pendray reluctantly wrestles with a farmer who was bigger and stronger than him, and, ‘...waiting my opportunity, I caught him in a way he least expected – and which had been a surprise to many a man before him – lifted him clean off his feet, and before he was aware what had happened he was lying on his back...’¹³⁶ The farmer shakes his hand and announces, ‘[a] Methody who can wrestle like that must be worth hearing preach.’¹³⁷

However, it is intriguing to note that given the prevalence of Methodism in Cornwall and despite the condemnation of Cornish wrestling by Methodists for over a century and a half, the sport survived, which was according to Deacon, a ‘...sign of its vitality and not its demise.’¹³⁸ He suggests that Methodists, ‘...played a part in the reformation of popular culture, but it was not the agent of change that was later claimed.’¹³⁹ There are a number of possible factors that help to explain the failure of Methodism to eradicate Cornish wrestling. Firstly, Cornish wrestling had been for generations so deeply embedded in the culture and so much part of what it meant to be Cornish that Methodism stood little chance of dislodging it, despite the fact that the religion was so widespread, especially in the very same communities where the sport was popular. This led one local writer to suggest that, ‘...wrestling has been so much in our blood since olden times that it is apt to be, with some of us, an irresistible attraction.’¹⁴⁰ Collectors of folklore showed that many traditional beliefs and superstitions endured in the late nineteenth century, which suggests that if Methodism could not eradicate paganism it would not be successful with a popular pastime such as wrestling.¹⁴¹ A significant factor is that almost as soon as the Cornish emigrants settled in other parts of the world they not only built chapels but they also organised wrestling tournaments, which were important symbols of Cornishness to retain; to be a wrestler was not incompatible with being a good Christian, they were not mutually exclusive.

Secondly, despite the occasional tournament when the crowds were drunk and badly behaved, the evidence suggests that Cornish wrestling was never quite as bad as Methodists claimed. For example, in September 1870 in response to a letter denouncing a tournament at Ponsanooth held in the previous month, *The West Briton* printed a letter signed, ‘Young Cornishman’, in which the writer suggested that, contrary to what was written previously, the crowds conducted themselves in an orderly manner and there were, ‘...no acts of violence committed to draw the attention of the police...’¹⁴² With its strict control by three sticklers, the cordial handshake before each bout, its lack of grappling on the ground and the relatively few serious injuries (see table 4.5) Cornish wrestling did not arouse ‘violent passions’ as Methodists alleged, which led Mudd to observe that, ‘...recent history has proved that its very gentlemanliness and strict rules have discriminated against audience appeal.’¹⁴³ It is therefore possible that Methodists turned their attention away from Cornish wrestling and reserved their ire for Cornwall’s other indigenous sport, hurling, which was far more violent, involved large unruly crowds and greater levels of conspicuous drunkenness.

Thirdly, the prizes awarded at Cornish wrestling tournaments, even for thrown men in early rounds, was an attractive potential source of funds, especially at times of economic hardship and there was also a greater incentive to gamble on the result of matches; feeding the family was far more important than conforming to Methodist edicts. Thus if emigration was seen, ‘...as one solution to the problem of destitution...’ it can be argued that entering wrestling tournaments was also similarly viewed.

Table 4.5: Frequency of injuries sustained in Cornish wrestling tournaments between 1850 and 1939¹⁴⁴

Type and site of injury	Frequency
Head	
Chafed neck	1
Cut eye	1
Concussion	11
Fractured skull (leading to death)	1
Torso	
Broken collarbone	7
Dislocated shoulder	2
Broken ‘shoulder bone’	1
Injured shoulder	15
Injured collarbone	1
Injured ribs/side	10
Broken ribs	4
Arm	
Broken arm	1
Injured arm	7
Injured/sprained wrist	6
Injured thumb	1
Injured hand	1
Leg	
Broken leg	2
Injured knee	7
Injured leg	1
Dislocated knee	1
Injured hip	1
Broken ankle	1
Injured ankle	1
Injured toe	1
Others	
Heat exhaustion	1
Unspecified minor injuries	69

Fourthly, it is also likely that Methodists witnessed the smaller number of active wrestlers, competing at fewer tournaments and challenge matches, watched by dwindling crowds especially towards the end of the nineteenth century and must have concluded this was evidence of ‘progress’ and ‘improvement’; they therefore thought they had won the battle and turned to other concerns.

Lastly, there is evidence to suggest that Cornish wrestling continued to enjoy the support from a cross-section of the community; for example, at Marazion in June 1850, *The West Briton* reported, ‘[s]everal gentlemen from London, Liverpool, Hull, etc., adventurers in Cornish mines, and who contributed liberally towards the prizes, were present,’¹⁴⁵ in Aug 1866 at Pencarrow, wrestling was ‘...witnessed last week by the distinguished party of visitors at present staying at Lady Molesworth’s seat,’¹⁴⁶ and in April 1868 a correspondent noted that at the wrestling in London, ‘...we noticed some gentlemen of title from the west country.’¹⁴⁷ Despite the increased difficulty in raising funds from subscribers, especially towards the end of the nineteenth century when times were hard, Cornish wrestling promoters still managed to offer valuable prizes in the form of money or material goods. Moreover, throughout the period between 1850 and 1914 *The West Briton*, a paper with Methodist sympathies and read by a social elite, continued to advertise and report on wrestling, for good commercial reasons; it could not afford to ignore a significant proportion of its readership who were interested in the sport.

Furthermore, Luker has questioned the impact of Methodism in ‘...confronting and dissolving traditional recreation and popular culture,’¹⁴⁸ as he argued there was a gap between what the Methodists desired and what actually happened in reality. In particular there was a difference between Methodist adherents who were fully committed to the faith and those who attended chapel in order to simply fulfil their primary religious needs, ‘...without inspiring the notion that a new life had to be adopted.’¹⁴⁹ For some ‘...the chapel was one of several competing attractions,’¹⁵⁰ and any changes in lifestyle tended to be, ‘...selective, voluntary and with defined and practical aims.’¹⁵¹ It was therefore possible for an individual to choose to attend chapel, to abstain from drinking alcohol, to forego gambling, but to continue to enter Cornish wrestling tournaments. It must also be noted that during the first half of the nineteenth century Methodist unity was undermined by a number of divisions and offshoots, which

also served to lessen the denomination's impact. Rule has estimated that between 1802 and 1857 there were thirteen divisions, the six most significant being: Wesleyan Methodist, Bible Christians, Wesleyan Methodist Association, Primitive Methodist, Methodist New Connexion and the Wesleyan Reform.¹⁵² Although these differed from each other in many respects they were all characterised by being independent, revivalistic and democratic and they also resented the centralised power of 'established' Methodism, with one Methodist minister insisting that '...in the villages the chapel belongs to the people...'¹⁵³ Also relevant here was that Methodism was '...able to integrate itself with popular indigenous religious beliefs and habits,' partly because Methodist theology was interpreted by local preachers and class teachers.¹⁵⁴ Luker suggests that Methodism adapted to 'folk' religion rather than the reverse and therefore popular culture, which included Cornish wrestling continued to flourish.

'Faggoting'

Collier cites the Oxford English Dictionary to define a faggot as a '...person temporarily hired to supply a deficiency at the muster – a dummy. 1700.'¹⁵⁵ Faggoting involved wrestlers agreeing to share the prize money with opponents who were friends or were thought good enough to cause a threat in one of the rounds; they either withdrew from the tournament or offered little or no resistance whilst wrestling. It appears the practice was virtually unheard of in the eighteenth century when prizes largely consisted of gold and silver laced hats, but with the emergence of money prizes in the early years of the nineteenth century there was a greater incentive to cheat and it became a regular feature of the sport. It was not confined to Cornish wrestling, as it existed in Devonshire wrestling, and also in Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling, where it was known as 'barneying'.¹⁵⁶ The practice was rife in tournaments and challenge matches throughout the nineteenth century, even the celebrated Thomas Gundry resorted to 'buying wrestlers' backs' on a number of occasions; for example, in August 1839 it was reported he bought the back of Penhall for two pounds and went on to win the first prize of ten guineas.¹⁵⁷ In order to rid the sport of faggoting organisers of tournaments issued regular warnings to wrestlers such as this one in September 1868 at St Columb: '[a]ny one found agreeing or faggoting; or in any way misconducting himself, will forfeit all claims to a prize.'¹⁵⁸ If found guilty wrestlers were disqualified and often excluded from further tournaments; for example, at St Mawgan in July 1860 the committee announced it, '...will not allow any man who has ever disgraced this ring, or that has been called out of any other ring in the county this season to wrestle.'¹⁵⁹

Faggoting was so prevalent that reports were at great pains to comment when it was absent, presumably to give the impression that it was under control; for example, in August 1873 at Truro ‘[t]here was a marked absence of many well-known wrestlers, but as most of them were also well-known “faggoters”, their loss was not severely felt...’¹⁶⁰

Despite its prevalence throughout the nineteenth century the most controversial period in the practice of faggoting was in the 1880s, when the Cornish-American, Jack Carkeek wrestled in a series of challenge matches. Prior to his match against Pearce in July 1887 at Redruth a letter appeared signed by ‘Fairplay’ claiming the result had been previously arranged by agreeing to two falls each and to share the gate money, which the writer felt should ‘...be strongly deprecated, but in such a match as this it would be a lasting disgrace to both men, and would assuredly give rise to much unpleasantness.’¹⁶¹ In the event the match ended ‘...in a most disgraceful and degrading manner...’ when following a dispute, Pearce left the ring and refused to re-enter, leaving the referee no option but to declare it undecided, with *The West Briton* declaring that ‘[w]restling in Cornwall will for ever from this time be regarded with more than usual suspicion.’¹⁶² There was also an unsatisfactory ending to Carkeek’s match against Hancock a month later, when after an equal number of falls, the latter left the ring claiming he had injured his shoulder, but he refused to allow a doctor to examine him, thus arousing the suspicion of the spectators who thought it ‘...was a “sell”, got up with no other object than that of making money and duping the public.’¹⁶³ It was also widely believed that Hancock and Pearce, the two best wrestlers in Cornwall at that time, who managed to avoid one another in tournaments, had an agreement not to oppose each other.¹⁶⁴ By the end of the nineteenth century reports of faggoting became rare, which coincided with smaller wrestling crowds and fewer tournaments and challenge matches and it therefore appears that the practice was a contributory factor in the overall decline of the sport. According to Pascoe, Cornish wrestling had, ‘...not only fallen into decline – it had fallen into disrepute.’¹⁶⁵ This is supported by Porter, who suggested that apart from a general shift of attitudes towards the violence of kicking during the second half of the nineteenth century, the other main reason for the decline in Devonshire wrestling was that the sporting public had lost interest due to the widespread corruption within the sport, especially ‘...the practice of some leading players reaching an “accommodation”.’¹⁶⁶

Counter-attractions

Whilst both sporting crowds and participants were deserting Cornish wrestling, it appears they were finding other attractions. Clarke has noted that during the second half of the nineteenth century, Cornwall, like the rest of Britain experienced a sporting revolution, with the emergence of archery, athletics, cricket, croquet, cycling, lawn tennis, polo, rugby football, soccer and swimming.¹⁶⁷ Cricket in particular had become an important leisure activity in Cornwall by the 1830s, especially for the middle classes, and between 1857 and 1870 it spread socially, experiencing an increase in the numbers of working class players and spectators, although it ‘...did not form a major leisure activity for the miner at the time, it was part of the changing process of recreation for this group.’¹⁶⁸ However, by 1881 despite population decline, which did not seem to adversely affect it, there were so many opportunities to play in a growing number of church, village and works’ cricket teams that all classes were involved, including agricultural and mine labourers.¹⁶⁹ The growth of the game was greatly assisted by the tacit approval given it by Methodists, who saw in it the potential to develop desirable personal qualities. Following one cricket match held at Clowance, the ancestral home of the St Aubyn family, between Cornwall and the United XI of all England, a demonstration was given ‘...in order that the “United Eleven” might see something of Cornish wrestling.’ It was reported that John Lillywhite, the manager and captain of the touring party was invited to try a hitch or two and he duly threw two men, Timmins from Hayle and another named ‘Lizzyboy-Dick’.¹⁷⁰

According to Pelmeur, the Cornish ‘...readily developed a liking for Rugby when it first appeared in the County in about 1870,’ especially amongst ‘...strong miners and hardy seafarers...’ in west Cornwall, partly as its physicality resembled that of wrestling.¹⁷¹ Many of the foremost clubs in Cornwall were founded by men educated at public schools in the 1870s and 1880s, who provided the necessary organisational skills and playing ability; for example, the Redruth club was formed in 1875 largely through the efforts of two public schoolboys who wished to continue playing the game when they returned to the town. The Camborne club was formed in 1878 by tin miners, with the assistance of former public school boys on the staff of Camborne School of Mines, in order to rival the Redruth club.¹⁷² Seward noted that before the end of the nineteenth century ‘...rugby football had soon superseded wrestling as the most popular Cornish sport,’ both for participants and spectators.¹⁷³ For, ‘...the people of Redruth [who] were disillusioned by Cornish wrestling, with its “faggotting”, or fixed bouts, they soon

found a substitute in rugby football.¹⁷⁴ One of the attractions of rugby was that it was relatively fast, exciting and did not last all day, whereas Cornish wrestling during the same period, according to one writer, ‘...had become heavy and slow and tedious.’¹⁷⁵

Clarke has also noted the growing popularity of swimming, which had emerged as a recreational activity in Cornwall in the 1850s. By the late 1870s there were regular championships held in the harbours of Newlyn, St Ives and Penzance, which were attended by large crowds; for example, in 1879 at St Ives thousands of people watched ten matches in the swimming championships ‘...from Little Warren, Malakoff and the Terrace...’¹⁷⁶ on August Bank Holiday Monday. The attraction of events like this for the competitors, who were from a range of backgrounds, but mainly working class occupations, was the opportunity to win money prizes; for example the prize for the winner of the one thousand yards’ championship at St Ives was £5.¹⁷⁷

Reduction of leisure time

The decline in Cornish wrestling in the second half of the nineteenth century also reflected the changing pattern of recreations generally, with the gradual disappearance of traditional holidays such as those associated with feasts and fairs and the tightening of labour discipline, which reduced the available opportunities for tournaments.¹⁷⁸ As traditional holidays disappeared opportunities for participation in Cornish wrestling were compressed into less time, especially Saturday afternoons and increasingly Bank Holidays, which union officials were campaigning to become national holidays with pay. Schwartz noted that many traditional forms of leisure disappeared, although not all at once, and events such as feasts and fairs and midsummer celebrations had died out by the mid-Victorian period in the Redruth area, especially the Goose Fair and Mazzard Fair, which were reported to be scantily attended in 1893. She suggested that this was ‘...probably due to the changing nature of employment in the mines, with working time being increasingly regulated by the mine management.’¹⁷⁹ Thomas also noted that holidays taken in the Camborne area, including St Martin’s feast and fair in November, St Peter’s fair at the end of June, Whitsun fair, ‘maze’ Mondays, weekly market days and over twenty others peculiar to mining were all gradually eroded in the late nineteenth century.¹⁸⁰ Some feasts in Cornwall survived well into the twentieth century, but most events declined and changed as industry was transformed.¹⁸¹

Weaknesses in the regulations

According to some writers the decline of Cornish wrestling was also due to weaknesses in the regulations which made it unappealing to the sporting public. Armstrong for example writing in the 1880s was critical of the rules which determined a fair back fall as one that required three pins down on the ground simultaneously as, '[n]o amount of argument can bolster up a set of regulations under which a man may be thrown no end of times by a better wrestler than himself, and yet, because he does not fall on the requisite number of "points", may resume the struggle...'¹⁸² To avoid falling on his back a wrestler often twisted and fell on his front or his side and resumed wrestling, or when thrown he lifted a hip or shoulder clear of the ground making judging difficult and thus, '...a weak judge is liable to be influenced.'¹⁸³ He gave an example of a match that he witnessed where a wrestler who was thrown sixteen times, later went on to win by a toss of a coin. Longhurst suggested the method to decide a fair back fall too often led to '...grievous wrangling...' and matches were often long drawn out, so that Cornish wrestling '[became] scarcely more than a memory.'¹⁸⁴ The requirement that all grips be taken on the jacket was also criticised. Mitchell, for example, regarded it as '...altogether artificial.'¹⁸⁵ Longhurst noted that before a 'hitch', getting a good grip on an opponent was so important, that it usually led to '...a good deal of preliminary fencing and feinting before the real business [began]';¹⁸⁶ and Armstrong complained that wrestlers '...feint and dodge about in a wearisome manner.'¹⁸⁷ In order to make the sport more popular all critics suggested making revisions to the rules, especially the definition of a fall and a complete change to the jacket. Both Armstrong and Longhurst suggested wrestling promoters devise one standard method, enabling wrestlers from all parts of England to compete on equal terms and they argued for the 'catch-as-catch-can' style, which was popular at the time of their writing. Longhurst warned that if those controlling Cornish wrestling did not make changes the sport would make '...little progress outside its native localities.'¹⁸⁸

Despite the decline in Cornish wrestling it did have its admirers, including the novelist and poet Thomas Hardy, who during the 1880s recorded items from issues of the *Dorset County Chronicle* and kept them in a notebook, which provided him with source material for his writing.¹⁸⁹ Amongst the items were reports of Cornish and Devonshire wrestling, from which he gained technical information, such as detailed descriptions of wrestling bouts.¹⁹⁰ It is clear that, despite his admiration for Abraham Cann, whose career he followed with interest, his preference was Cornish wrestling as he states in

one of his notes, '[k]icking at a wrestling match – a barbarous practice. The bare feet, or thin pump only sh[oul]d be used: padding the legs w[oul]d then be uncalled for.'¹⁹¹

Hardy used his notes in order to describe a wrestling match between Michael Henchard and Donald Forfrae, two of the main characters in one of his most famous novels, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. It is clear from Hardy's description that the match uses Cornish rules, as, '...the object of each being to give his antagonist a back fall...'¹⁹² and Henchard wins the final fall by delivering, '...the younger man an annihilating turn by the left fore-hip...'¹⁹³

Conclusion

This chapter provided evidence that demonstrated in overall terms Cornish wrestling declined as a spectacle between 1850 and the First World War, although it never disappeared completely, as there were signs of a revival in the first two decades of the twentieth century, albeit with the interruption of war. The decline manifested itself in, the decreasing number of tournaments and challenge matches that were organised; the smaller number of wrestlers who were active; the amount of prizes and their type, which shifted from money to a combination of money and material goods, especially silver cups and belts; the dwindling size of the wrestling crowds and their apparent behaviour; and the reduction in mid-week tournaments and those lasting more than one day, moving to Saturday afternoons and the occasional Bank Holiday. The decline was also echoed in the disappearance of challenge matches and wrestling in London. Another significant feature of wrestling in Cornwall during this period was the eastwards drift of the sport towards the clay country, which reflected the economic conditions in the county at that time, exemplified by the places where tournaments were held, the residences of wrestlers and especially the residences of prize-winners.

The minor revival between 1900 and 1914, characterised by an increase in the number of well-organised and well-attended tournaments, was largely engendered by the emergence of a group of wrestlers, especially the four Chapman brothers of St Wenn, who eliminated the bad habits that had brought the sport into disrepute in the previous century. Interestingly, Mudd suggested that '[p]erhaps by virtue of family skill and the opportunities for training, the sport's greatest champions came from certain families...'¹⁹⁴ which became a feature of the next period of Cornish wrestling.

Despite suggestions that the decline of Cornish wrestling was due to a lack of wrestlers of outstanding merit¹⁹⁵ or that tournaments were poorly organised¹⁹⁶ or the lack of genuine personalities amongst new wrestlers,¹⁹⁷ it was argued here that the main reasons were, the depopulating effects of emigration, which left the sport denuded of wrestlers, sticklers and spectators; the long-term and unending opposition by moral reformers, especially the Methodists; the practice of ‘faggoting’, which brought the sport into disrepute; the emergence of a number of counter-attractions that were more appealing to the sporting public; and the reduction of leisure time with the erosion of traditional occasions for recreational pastimes, such as feasts and fairs and the compression of available time into Saturday afternoons and Bank Holidays. Allied to this there were some who thought the main cause of the decline could be found in the sport itself, which had a set of regulations that did not allow for audience appeal; it was simply in need of modernisation to make it more popular.

It was also argued that despite the prevalence of Methodism and its opposition to wrestling it survived, as it was too embedded in Cornish culture; it was not as morally reprehensible as Methodists proclaimed; it was a useful source of ‘income’ during bad times; its decline was possibly seen as ‘progress’; and it continued to enjoy the support of many people. According to Deacon, the decline of Cornish wrestling, ‘...seems to reflect rises and falls in the mining economy, only itself finally declining as a major public spectacle after the traumatic years of the late 1860s,’¹⁹⁸ rather than the censure and recurrent attack by Methodists. The evidence presented here largely supports the view that the history of Cornish wrestling during the second half of the nineteenth century reflects the economic marginalisation of ‘Second Peripheralism’ in Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’.

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- ¹⁹⁵ *op. cit.* Pascoe, 1928

¹⁹⁶ op. cit. Jolly, 1928

¹⁹⁷ Kent, G., *A Pictorial History of Wrestling*, Spring Books, London, 1968

¹⁹⁸ op. cit. Deacon, 2001, p. 300

CHAPTER 5: Cornish wrestling and the Diaspora

Introduction

The previous chapter argued that one of the major reasons why Cornish wrestling declined during the second half of the nineteenth century was the decrease in the overall numbers of active wrestlers, who left Cornwall in order to find work. There is sufficient evidence to show that the promotion of Cornish wrestling tournaments and challenge matches were a significant part of the holiday calendar in those destinations where the Cornish settled and therefore worthy of further study. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to examine the evidence for Cornish wrestling outside Cornwall, however, before exploring this further it is necessary to provide some general introductory comments about the so-called ‘Great Migration’.

The conventional approach in Cornish migration studies is to portray the ‘Great Migration’ as a brief mass departure, dating from the mid 1860s to the early years of the twentieth century, consisting of young, single copper and tin miners who were escaping from unemployment, poverty and starvation caused by the crash in the price of copper ore in 1866 and who headed for overseas destinations, especially Australia, South Africa and the USA. Recent scholarship as part of the ‘new Cornish historiography’, however has refined this picture to show that it is misleading.¹ Firstly, although it is well documented that substantial numbers of people left Cornwall at the end of the nineteenth century, there is evidence that migration was a much earlier phenomenon. During the early eighteenth century, for example, tanners from mid and east Cornwall made the relatively short journey to the mines of Mary Tavy on Dartmoor; in the 1770s copper miners travelled to the shores of Lake Superior; in the 1790s groups of specialist and senior mineworkers were lured to work in mines in Devon; and also in the late eighteenth century Cornish miners moved to the metal mining regions of central and north Wales.² Cornish miners not only roamed between mines in different parts of Cornwall, as and when new deposits of copper and tin were discovered, but also some made the move to the copper mines of Anglesey and the lead mines of Shropshire during the early nineteenth century.³

There was noticeable emigration by the early nineteenth century; for example Cornish miners were recruited during the early 1820s on three year contracts to work in the silver mines of Mexico, which were largely backed by British investment and staffed by Cornish mine captains, engineers and foremen.⁴ According to Schwartz, who charted

the development of the 'Cousin Jack' myth, on arrival in Latin America the Cornish had to learn new mining techniques in order to compete for jobs with indigenous miners and other emigrant ethnic groups, such as the Germans.⁵ The mines of the New World '...acted as a training ground for the Cornish, where their skills as miners and engineers were rigorously questioned and tested,'⁶ but they soon developed the necessary skills, marketed themselves as the world's best miners and then '...played on their growing cult status to ensure that they secured the best jobs...'⁷ They were assisted in this process by the British-run mining companies who gave Cornish miners preferential treatment, which not surprisingly led to resentment and jealousy from other ethnic groups. According to Schwartz, early migration to Latin America '...represents the first significant overseas migration flow of skilled Cornish labour, setting the trend for what was to become a global phenomenon.'⁸

During the 1830s there was a steady stream of people leaving Cornwall and by the 1840s '...emigration had become an inescapable fact of Cornish life,'⁹ with a range of potential destinations that had already appeared. By the 1850s an 'emigration culture' had been established, in which the Cornish believed that to leave Cornwall was a rational strategy in order to escape hard times or to take advantage of new opportunities overseas. Emigrants were able to exploit not only the migration networks already established by Cornish emigrants who had settled overseas, but also the rising reputation of the Cornish as the best miners in the world with the increasing international demand for labour on the mining fields of the New World. Methodists also encouraged people to leave Cornwall in order to 'get on', as part of their self-help and improvement ethos. Emigration was also seen as beneficial to those left behind, as it relieved Cornwall of its surplus population.¹⁰

The 'emigration culture' was supported by an 'emigration trade', which was largely dependent upon migration chains established in the early nineteenth century and included a whole array of socio-economic activity that developed in response to the migration of the Cornish population. The 'official' trade involved many different groups, such as government officials, shipping agents, newspapers, printers, publicans, learned societies, clergymen, etc., which created in Cornwall '...not only an enthusiasm for emigration but also a sense of anticipation and expectation.'¹¹ Shipping agents in particular encouraged people to emigrate mainly to British north America and Australia by advertising ships' sailings in the press, holding public meetings, and publicising

letters sent to relatives from overseas, which ‘...were powerful propaganda tools in the cause of the “official” emigration trade.’¹² There also existed an ‘informal’ emigration trade whereby people were actively recruited by business interests; for example mine captains in Cornwall were often approached by mine companies overseas to supply men and/or to advertise emigration.¹³

Secondly, although miners represented a substantial proportion of those who left Cornwall, another significant group were agricultural workers and the evidence shows that early migration was from non-mining areas in the 1820s, especially the north and the far north-east parishes.¹⁴ Many of those families who decided to emigrate, especially to Australia and the USA, were from farming backgrounds.¹⁵ Another group identified by Rossler were stonemasons from Constantine and surrounding districts who went mainly to the USA, especially the favoured New England states of Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, but were also found in Devon and Wales.¹⁶ Mindenhall also conducted a study of Cornish non-miners to British Columbia, Canada and noted that there was no occupation in common, but a number of different trades were represented.¹⁷ Payton also noted that fishermen also emigrated.¹⁸

Thirdly, in a study of the Cornish mining industry Burke concluded that the ‘single roving miner’ represented the majority of migrants, who roamed the globe from one mining field to another, often returning to marry and either choosing to go back overseas with her or to leave her at home. She also recognised another group, those who emigrated, often with wives and families, never to return, which was especially common after the 1866 crash.¹⁹ Payton also reported that between 1861 and 1900 Cornwall lost 5.3% of its female population overseas, including 26.2% of 15-24 year olds, and 7.1% to other counties, including 35.5% of 15-24 year olds.²⁰

Fourthly, apart from economic depression caused by the collapse of the copper and tin mining industries in the 1860s and 1870s respectively, there were other ‘push’ factors which persuaded Cornish migrants to leave Cornwall, including agricultural distress, poor harvests, high taxes and rents during the 1830s and 1840s; the impatience by radicals for political reform in the 1830s; and the desire by nonconformists for religious freedom.²¹ However, there were also ‘pull’ factors which enticed Cornish migrants to leave Cornwall, even at times when the Cornish economy was booming. The decision to emigrate was made easier by the choice of a range of potential destinations across the

globe where the Cornish had formed ethnic communities, which paved the way for further emigration. Other factors included higher wages, fixed salaries and financial security;²² the potential for personal advancement; the opportunity to acquire cheap land and free or assisted passage to British colonies, such as Upper Canada (present day southern Ontario) and South Australia;²³ and the prospect of political and religious freedom in the USA and South Australia.²⁴ Payton has suggested that although the explanation of emigration as an interplay between ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors is useful, it is over-simplistic and that a general theory of emigration is unlikely to be satisfactory; as personal motives were involved a more suitable explanation will be found at individual and community level.²⁵

Lastly, a significant proportion of Cornish migrants did go overseas, especially to the USA, which was the favoured destination, Australia, Canada and South Africa, but they also went to Central and South America, India and a number of European countries such as France, Portugal and Spain.²⁶ Migration was a complex process characterised by such movements as emigration to one destination, regular return migration to Cornwall, renewed emigration to the initial destination or a move to another continent and constant roaming the globe, especially by miners.²⁷ According to Payton, mobility was ‘...inherent within the system, encouraging the Cornish miner to always look ahead for new or “better opportunities”’.²⁸ Deacon has demonstrated that, through his examination of the pattern of nineteenth century migration, based on census returns of 1861 and 1891, many people also went to destinations in England and Wales. He identified three different migration streams, a maritime stream to counties such as Hampshire, Kent and Sussex, which indicates a network of communication along the coast; an industrial stream to Lancashire, especially Barrow and Burnley, Cumberland and Durham; and a service stream of professionals, shop workers and labourers, particularly women, who worked mainly as servants in places such as Bristol, London and Plymouth.²⁹ He also suggested that ‘...often the industrial regions [of England and Wales] were merely staging posts for overseas moves,’ as the Cornish economy did not usually allow people to save enough money for emigration.³⁰

Therefore by the early years of the twentieth century Cornish migrants were conspicuous by their presence in a large number of destinations both in Britain and overseas, where in some places, such as Butte, Montana, Grass Valley, California or Moonta, South Australia they formed significant, distinct ethnic communities and it is

in such places as these that evidence can be found of Cornish wrestling tournaments and challenge matches.

Latin America

According to Schwartz, the significance of Latin America as a destination was that many of the characteristic features of Cornish migration have their origin in this area, including remittances, the development of transnational communities and the emergence of the Cornish reputation as the world's best hard rock miners. It was also among the first overseas destinations to attract significant numbers of Cornish labour and continued to do so until the 1930s, although less people migrated here than the USA, South Australia, England and Wales or South Africa.³¹ Many Cornish miners migrated to the silver mines of Pachuca and Real del Monte, in the Mexican state of Hidalgo in the mid-1820s when British owners acquired the mines, which led to a large Cornish community by the 1830s, many of whom came from the Central Mining District of Camborne-Redruth-Gwennap. The Cornish community remained in Pachuca and Real del Monte until many left Mexico in the early 1900s, when the mining company was acquired by Americans in 1906 and the Mexican Revolution broke out in 1910. Cornish miners also migrated to the Gongo Soco gold mine, 250 miles north of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in the 1820s and by 1843 there were 100 Europeans, mainly Cornish living in the area. By 1856 however, the community dispersed when the mine closed. In the 1830s the gold mine of Morro Velho, 200 miles north of Rio de Janeiro, recruited Cornish miners, who were resident in the area until the 1920s. Also in the 1830s Cornish miners went to work in the Cobre copper mine in Cuba, but had left by 1869, when the mine was abandoned.³² The Cornish were also found in Chile, Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador, although of these four most went to Chile.³³

Cornish migrants usually travelled to Latin America by ship chartered for the purpose. On one notable occasion the *Cambria*, bound for Tampico, a major port on the east coast of Mexico, went to the assistance of the *Kent*, an East Indiaman, which was engulfed with fire.³⁴ James Warren, a noted Cornish wrestler from Redruth, one of a group of miners recruited by the Anglo-Mexican Mining Company, played a prominent part in the rescue of survivors, by lifting them from the *Kent* lifeboats on to the deck of the *Cambria*.³⁵ According to *The West Briton*, Warren forced the sailors of the *Kent* to return to their ship to help '...those whom they had left behind, and whom they were disposed to abandon; for which purpose he stationed himself in the gang way of the

brig, and threatened to knock those overboard who refused.’³⁶ As a result of his efforts he was so injured that he had to remain behind when the *Cambria* returned with the survivors of the *Kent* to Falmouth, ‘...it not being likely he would ever recover his former strength.’³⁷ However, within a few months he had clearly regained his powers as he came second to the celebrated Abraham Cann in a tournament held at the *Eagle Tavern*, City Road, London, obtaining a prize of six sovereigns.³⁸

According to Schwartz, Cornish wrestling was never as popular in Latin America as it was in the USA or in South Australia, which might have been because the Cornish communities never reached the critical mass necessary to sustain regular tournaments, supported by local publicans and watched by several hundred spectators. However, she did note that the miners at Morro Velho, in Brazil, held an annual tea treat and festival on St John the Baptists’ Day at Midsummer and that there were Cornish wrestling competitions throughout the 1850s and 1860s, although details are hard to find. By the turn of the twentieth century the British leisure pursuits of cricket, football and rugby had replaced wrestling in the Cornishmen’s affections.³⁹ At Pachuca the favourite sports of the Cornish appeared to be cricket and they also had the distinction of starting the first football club in Mexico; the Pachuca Athletic Club, which at first was comprised entirely of Cornish miners from the surrounding mines.⁴⁰

The most notable Cornish wrestling match held in Latin America took place at the Invicito Theatre, Mexico City on a hot, sultry evening of the 13th June 1892, between ‘Professor’ Willie, a teacher of wrestling from San Francisco and Richard ‘Schiller’ Williams of St Day, ‘...a well-known athlete, who has on several occasions figured prominently in the wrestling matches of his native county.’⁴¹ Several months earlier whilst in Pachuca a Frenchman, named Pardo, who was travelling with an American circus, issued a challenge to wrestle all comers, which ‘Schiller’ Williams accepted. Williams beat Pardo with so much ease that it persuaded those Americans who had witnessed the match to entice ‘Professor’ Willie to Mexico, with a prize of \$250 and half the takings, for the first to obtain three falls following two rounds in the Cornish style, two in Graeco-Roman and if all square after that there would be a toss of a coin to decide the fifth round. Willie accepted the chance of a large purse ‘...seeing it as a chance to redeem the honour of his fellow Americans and establish himself as the undoubted champion of America, and now Mexico.’⁴² Betting was firmly in favour of the American, partly due to his reputation, based on his recent defeats of a giant

Japanese wrestler and Tom Cannon, the former champion of America, but also as he had a more athletic appearance, being six feet tall and weighing 176 pounds, whilst Williams was under five feet six inches and only 144 pounds.⁴³ The match was witnessed by hundreds of Cornish immigrants, many of whom had travelled by train for a full day, from all over Mexico and from mining camps in the USA, by Americans and by curious local Mexicans, who were all intensely interested in what was ‘...the first exposition of the “manly art” in Mexico...’⁴⁴ Williams won the first round in the Cornish style, Willie won the second in the Graeco-Roman style and Williams won the third and fourth rounds in the Cornish and Graeco-Roman styles respectively; ‘...the Cornishman thus winning the match amidst intense excitement.’⁴⁵

‘Schiller’ Williams’ curious nickname was acquired some years earlier, when returning to Cornwall from Pennsylvania, the ship he was travelling in, the *S.S. Schiller*, out of New York and bound for Hamburg via Plymouth, was wrecked on the rocks surrounding the Scilly Isles, at 10.00pm on 7th May 1875. Williams was washed overboard in heavy seas and dense fog and following two and half hours in the water was eventually rescued, one of only 43 survivors from a total of 355 people. His survival was attributed to his strength and athleticism and from this point on he carried the nickname of ‘Schiller’. On his return to Chacewater, his home at the time, a local poet hawked the following poem around the village:

How many Cornish were on board:
Their names we cannot gather,
But Richard Williams has been saved,
And his home is at Chacewater.⁴⁶

It appears that ‘Schiller’ Williams led a life full of incident. In 1882 he travelled from Swansea to Chile in the barquentine, *Leon Christabel*, which after 53 days at sea its cargo of coal ignited and although the ship was eventually wrecked near the Falkland Islands, Williams was able to continue his voyage to Valparaiso on a German ship that was in the vicinity. His eventual return to Cornwall took more than five months and it was assumed the vessel he was travelling in had sunk. In 1890 he went to the goldfields of South Africa and in 1892 he was in Mexico.⁴⁷

North America

USA

The first movement of Cornish migrants in large numbers to North America was from 1832, when many emigrated to the lead mines of Wisconsin and by 1850 there was a significant Cornish community of 9,000 people living in Mineral Point.⁴⁸ The Cornish also helped to develop the 'Lakes' region of upper Michigan, especially the Keweenaw peninsula, following a 'copper rush' between 1843 and 1844,⁴⁹ In 1849 the Californian 'gold rush' drew Cornish miners not only from Cornwall but also from Wisconsin and Michigan and they soon formed significant communities at Grass Valley, where gold was discovered in 1850 and at Nevada City.⁵⁰ During the 1850s emigration continued to expand, especially amongst miners who spread across the USA following mineral discoveries from one state to the next; during the 1850s Cornish migrants moved to North Carolina; in the 1860s they were found in Utah, Colorado, Montana and Nevada; in the 1870s it was New Mexico; and in the 1880s Arizona became a popular destination. By 1900 the Cornish were found working in almost every American state where there was mining or quarrying activity⁵¹ and wherever they settled they stuck together '...behaving as a distinct ethnic group;'⁵² they were 55% of the population of Wolverine, Michigan, over 60% of the population of Grass Valley and 98% of the population of New Almaden, California. Between 1830 and 1900 the USA was the favoured destination for Cornish migrants, who were attracted by higher wages, many employment opportunities, and the fact it was an English-speaking country.⁵³ The USA was so popular and familiar with the Cornish that it became known as '...the parish next door.'⁵⁴

Some of the earliest and more detailed references to Cornish wrestling in the USA are from Grass Valley, California. The first recorded tournament, which was to become an annual feature, was as part of the Fourth of July (Independence Day) celebrations in 1859. It was held in the rear of Samuel Hodges' brewery, on the corner of Main and Church Streets and was restricted to Cornishmen, although in later years it was opened up to anyone interested in wrestling. The ring was sixty feet square and in the middle of the arena were wooden boards covered in straw in order to make a relatively soft landing for wrestlers when thrown; soft green turf would have been preferable but there seemed to be a lack of it in mining towns and most outdoor surfaces would have been made very hard by the dry and hot conditions. In later years the surface of the rings

were strewn with sawdust, which was softer than straw. Around the ring on all sides there were seats for over eight hundred spectators, who were protected from the hot, strong sunlight by a light canvas, similar to a tent, whilst they watched up to forty individual matches, which lasted all day and evening. The tournament was organised by a committee and the bouts were controlled by three sticklers, who decided on fair back falls. Although the names of the winners are not reported, there was a total of \$100 in gold given as prizes.⁵⁵

It appears that Cornish wrestling at Grass Valley became a regular feature of the sporting calendar for many years attracting competitors from Montana, Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to compete.⁵⁶ According to Rowe, '[a]t one time hardly a Fourth of July passed in Grass Valley or Butte without a wrestling contest with a score or more contenders, the majority of them with very recognisable Cornish names.'⁵⁷ In 1867, for example, after three days of wrestling, William Pellow won the first prize of \$130. Much later in 1902 Pellow was reported in *The West Briton* as being 64, blind and helpless.⁵⁸ Also in the 1867 tournament, William Reynolds took fourth prize of \$50 and challenged Pellow to wrestle the best of three fair back falls for \$300. Reynolds, who was born in Cornwall in 1843, travelled to California in 1860, became a miner in Grass Valley's Eureka mine and made a name for himself as a wrestler and then a stickler, returning to Cornwall at least once to compete. When he and other Cornish miners moved to the famous Comstock Lode at Virginia City, Nevada in the early 1870s, *The Daily Union* remarked that, the '... boys on the Comstock had better not tackle him in a Cornish wrestle.'⁵⁹ He later became famous as the Marshall of Grass Valley for ten consecutive terms.⁶⁰ In 1868 the tournament began on the 4th and continued on the 6th and 7th of July, with a total prize money of \$300.⁶¹ In 1874, it was reported that '...nearly as much prize money "in gold coin" was given...' in the tournament held on the 4th and 7th July; Richard Andrews won first prize of \$100, William Nankervis was second with \$70 and Joseph Coombs was third with \$50. Consolation prizes of \$40, \$25 and \$10 were awarded to Charles Temby, William Henry Mitchell and Samuel Nankervis for their commendable play.⁶² Mann suggests that the '...size and organization of these gatherings [Cornish picnic and games] signalled the importance of the Cornish group in the community.'⁶³

In the early years many wrestling tournaments were promoted by publicans, as was the case in Cornwall during this period. At Grass Valley the owners of the *Wisconsin Hotel*,

William and Elizabeth Mitchell, who bought the hotel in 1862 and ran it for over 60 years, supported wrestling throughout this period. The hotel was located on Stewart Street near Main and stood there for about 80 years, which was described by Rowe as probably the most Cornish spot in the USA. The wrestling ring, which was capable of accommodating 600 spectators was situated just outside the rear door of the hotel and therefore convenient to the bar, where the publican no doubt recouped his expenses for promoting the tournament and made a profit.⁶⁴ The Mitchell family eventually sold the property to Standard Oil and the building was demolished in 1931 to make way for a petrol station.⁶⁵

At the neighbouring mining town of Nevada City, a wrestling tournament was held in 1861, and the first prize of the champion's belt of the state of California and \$275 was won by Thomas Eudy of St Austell. The second prize of \$75 was won by Thomas Michell of Gwinear, and the third of \$50 by Richard Edwards of Redruth. *The West Briton*, observed that, '[t]hus Cornishmen uphold the fame of their native county for wrestling, when they emigrate to distant lands.'⁶⁶

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Labor Day, held on the first Monday in September, which became a federal holiday in the mid-1890s and celebrated by most Americans as the symbolic end of summer, replaced the Fourth of July as the occasion for Cornish wrestling tournaments in Grass Valley. For example, in September 1911, with all business premises and mines closed, the third annual Labor Day picnic was held at Glenbrook Park, under the auspices of the Surface Workers' Union of Grass Valley and the Nevada City Miners' Union, and the Cornish wrestling tournament '...provided one of the most exciting of the day's diversions.'⁶⁷ In September 1921 the Labor Day wrestling, held in Olympia Park '...held under the auspices of the Mine Workers' Protective League, drew a monster attendance and it is estimated that fully 2,000 people, men, women, and children, visited the grounds during the day and evening.'⁶⁸ In September 1925 the Labor Day picnic was again held in Olympia Park and '[a]s in previous years, the biggest event of the day was the Cornish and catch-as-catch-can wrestling...'⁶⁹

Grass Valley was not the only place in the USA where there are reports of Cornish wrestling tournaments. Rowe notes that the Montana newspapers gave a lot of coverage to wrestling matches, especially in Butte City, as part of the Fourth of July celebrations,

which, ‘...shows the strength of the immigrant Cornish element in the Montana mining towns and the way in which the Cousin Jacks took their sports and pastimes to the mining camps of the far West.’⁷⁰ For example, in 1882, the ‘Annual Wrestling Match in Cornish Style’ took place over three days between the 24th and 26th May, at Butte, with \$200 in prizes. The wrestling arena was covered in sawdust, the Miners’ Union Band was in attendance and there was an admission charge of \$1 for the spectators.⁷¹ A journalist who was present reported that, ‘[n]o one who has attended the three days’ sport on the grounds south of East Park Street can fail to be particularly impressed with at least one unusual feature, and that is the general good humour and fairness of the contestants.’⁷² Another major holiday in Butte when Cornish wrestling was organised was the 13th June or the Miners’ Union Day, which was held continuously from 1878 to 1914 and then resumed in 1934. The ballad ‘One Miners’ Union Day’ by Joe Duffy describes the holiday held at Columbia Gardens, which includes the following fourth stanza:

The Sullivans and Harringtons, the Murphys and Malones,
Richards, Williams, Thomases, Trevithick and Treglowns –
Take-a-hitch and Six-year-itch, Olson, Johnson and Thor
Were the names of some contestants when they had the tug-o’-war.⁷³

Because of their skill, Cornish miners at Butte often avoided doing simple, menial tasks and consequently they were seen as lazy, encapsulated in the following poem by Walt Holliday, entitled ‘That’s Different’:

He can take an eighty penny spike
And bend it in his hand –
The strongest little Cousin Jack
That ever struck the land.

Though when it comes to loading rock,
He will not do it – nay;
He wouldn’t load a car of ore
Not in a twelve-hour day.

In wrestling down upon the mat,
This Cousin’s the best bet;
But the fellow who can make him work
Has not seen daylight yet.⁷⁴

In 1916 *The West Briton*, starved of wrestling news in Cornwall due to the cancellation of the sport during the First World War, reported a tournament held at the Lake Avoca Grounds, Butte City, for the championship of Montana. The wrestling was organised by the Butte Cornish Association before 3,000 people and a ‘...remarkable feature of the

tournament was that all the prizes went to Cornish china clay workers, natives of the same locality – Old Pound, Whitemoor and Foxhole.⁷⁵

Cornish wrestling tournaments were also reported in other places, including Michigan; for example, in 1870, there was Cornish style wrestling advertised for the 2nd and 4th July at Portage Lake on the Keweenaw Peninsula, by Bastian and Company of the *Red Jacket*;⁷⁶ on the Fourth of July 1875 there was wrestling at Negaunee, northern Michigan, which attracted over 60 contestants, although limited to men from Marquette County, and witnessed by 500 spectators;⁷⁷ and there were also over 60 wrestlers reported at the same place in June 1882.⁷⁸ *The Mining Journal* of Marquette carried the obituary of John Rowe, who was brought to the USA by his parents when he was five, later becoming the Sheriff of Gogebic County, City Marshall of Bessemer and in 1910 became the undefeated world champion of Cornish-style wrestling.⁷⁹ Todd also noted that at Brownsville, Colorado there was a ring for Cornish wrestling and ‘...here took place on a memorable evening in August 1877 one of the longest wrestling bouts ever recorded, when George Wedge and John Hall fought each other over a distance of four hours and eleven minutes.’⁸⁰ In his study of Salt Lake City, McCormick noted that although the primary sport in the area was baseball, there were also cricket, lacrosse, track and field athletics and special events including a ‘Grand English and Cornish Wrestling Tournament’ on the Fourth of July 1884, held in Emigration Square, which from the 1870s was the city’s main sports grounds.⁸¹

The acknowledged skill of the Cornish hard rock miners, their clannishness and ‘...the ease with which they found mining work...’⁸² ‘...occasionally sparked resentment among [their] American and Irish fellow workers.’⁸³ The antagonism between the Cornish and the Irish in particular, which was often expressed in violence, fighting and murder, was heightened by the continuing conflict in Ireland and because the former were often hired to break industrial strikes.⁸⁴ The Cornish and Irish often competed in wrestling tournaments against each other, which not only ‘[gave] the event[s] a sense of international conflict,’ but also an increased tension.⁸⁵ James notes that the sources have numerous examples of the Cornish cheering their own and the Irish also.⁸⁶ On one occasion James Cross, an Irishman, unexpectedly won the first prize of \$100 at the annual Fourth of July Grass Valley Cornish wrestling tournament. It was the first time that Cross had tried Cornish wrestling and he later explained his success as a matter of Irish luck and strength against Cornish science.⁸⁷

There were other ethnic groups that competed in Cornish wrestling tournaments; for example, Jaouen notes that a Breton wrestler named Guyader was champion in the Grass Valley tournament each year between 1893 and 1895. French-Canadian lumbermen living in upper Michigan learnt to wrestle from the Cornish who they worked with, one of whom remarked that, 'I was always fascinated in seeing those wrestling matches with the participants barefooted and using duck jackets; and if the wrestlers were paired off at equal size the Cornish always won.'⁸⁸

Challenge matches were also a feature of Cornish wrestling in the USA with one man in particular renowned for this type of contest. Jack Carkeek, who travelled to Cornwall in the late 1880s competing in a series of matches characterised by controversial results (see chapter four), was the son of Tom Carkeek, who was himself a proficient wrestler being at one time the champion of Lake Superior, Michigan. Between 1877, when Jack Carkeek first made an appearance in a wrestling ring at the age of 16, and May 1887 he appeared in 32 matches and tournaments and was only defeated on two occasions; on 25th April 1885 against Tom Cannon at San Francisco, in a match of six styles; and on 2nd January 1887 against G.P. Donner, at Hurly, Wisconsin.⁸⁹ It appears that prior to 1882 Carkeek only wrestled in ordinary tournaments in Michigan, where he worked as a miner, and the neighbouring states of Wisconsin, Iowa and Montana, but after this date he seemed to concentrate on challenge matches for lucrative money prizes, in a variety of styles, although his reputation was based on his skill as a Cornish wrestler. For example, in December 1884 he defeated James Pascoe, the champion Cornish wrestler of the Pacific Coast, for \$500 in Butte City; in February of the following year he defeated H.C. Bell of Darlington, Wisconsin for \$500 a side in the Cornish style; in July 1886 he defeated the Japanese wrestler Sorakichi Matsuda in less than one hour at Dodgeville, Wisconsin, in both Greco-Roman and catch-as-catch-can styles.⁹⁰ At the beginning of the twentieth century, Carkeek toured the provincial and London music-halls, giving wrestling exhibitions and challenging all-comers and was one of a handful of talented wrestlers who were responsible for starting the boom in music-hall wrestling before the First World War.⁹¹ In 1904 he was hired by Harry Rickards, a theatrical entrepreneur in Australia, to repeat his shows in his theatres. Carkeek travelled to Australia with two 'stooges' and when he challenged all-comers he had men planted in the audiences, which led to charges of deception.⁹² Carkeek died in March 1924 in Havana, Cuba.

Canada

In a study of immigration to Canada in the first half of the nineteenth century, James-Korany estimated that between 1831 and 1860, at least 42,000 emigrants left Cornwall and moved to upper Canada, although it is not possible to be more precise as the Cornish were not listed in the 'Blue Books' as a separate ethnic group.⁹³ Emigration to upper Canada in significant numbers started in the 1820s, but petered out in the late 1850s, however, by then the gold fields of British Columbia became a popular destination for hard rock miners, until the start of the twentieth century. In the 1840s Cornish miners migrated to the iron mines on the shores of Lake Huron.⁹⁴

British Columbia became attractive to non-miners, who according to Mindenhall became 'invisible immigrants' as they did not define themselves as a distinct ethnic group, were dispersed across the colony and chose to assimilate into the dominant British community. There are no records of Cornish wrestling matches amongst non-miners and when it came to Victoria it, '...may well have been regarded as a negative influence on ethnic identity for the middle-class Cornishmen aspiring to business and social success.'⁹⁵ However, there is evidence of Cornish wrestling tournaments in British Columbia amongst miners; for example in December 1864, as part of the Christmas festivities a tournament was held, '...between Cornish, Devonshire and Lancashire men at the Royal Hotel tap on Johnson last evening ... each fought according to own custom.'⁹⁶ The *Daily British Colonist* also reported that Cornishmen won the first three prizes; Jessie Pierce, John Bryant and Manwell; Eli Quick from Lancashire was fourth.⁹⁷ In 1903, as part of the Christmas Sports at Roseland, a match was held between John Tippett, and Billy Dunstan, both miners from Cornwall, for £200 a side, with John Roberts, also from Cornwall acting as stakeholder.⁹⁸

Australia

The first mass movement of people to Australia took place after 1836 with the foundation of South Australia, not as a penal colony but as a 'new Britannia in the Antipodes', promising to transport England to a new destination, which attracted a number of Cornish settlers.⁹⁹ Following the discovery of copper at Kapunda and Burra Burra in the mid 1840s, further emigration to the colony took place,¹⁰⁰ and between 1846 and 1850 over 6,200 emigrants left Cornwall taking advantage of free or assisted passages to Australia, with more than 70% of this number moving to South Australia.¹⁰¹

In the early 1850s gold was discovered in Victoria initiating a ‘rush’ of miners, including the Cornish to such places as Ballarat and Bendigo. In the early 1860s Cornish emigrants settled at the so-called ‘Copper Triangle’ of Moonta, Kadina and Wallaroo, in the Yorke Peninsula of South Australia, which became known as ‘Australia’s Little Cornwall.’ Following further ‘rushes’ the Cornish migrated to the silver-lead-zinc mining area of Broken Hill, New South Wales in the early 1880s and the goldfields of Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie, Western Australia., in the early 1890s.¹⁰²

According to Vamplew, ‘[s]port was part of the cultural baggage brought out to Australia...’¹⁰³ by migrants and ‘[i]n importing their traditional sports, the British were no different from other immigrant groups...’¹⁰⁴ for the Cornish that meant wrestling, which became their favoured holiday recreation in Australia.¹⁰⁵ Although it is recognised that there were many challenge matches that probably went unreported,¹⁰⁶ there is evidence that even from the earliest days of settlement in South Australia the Cornish participated in or watched wrestling tournaments and challenge matches at holiday times. One of the early references was in 1848 when the *South Australian* newspaper reported that, ‘Monday the 6th March was a great day amongst the Cornish people at Burra...’¹⁰⁷ as it was marked by the staging of a wrestling tournament as part of the St Piran’s Day (5th March) celebrations, but as that day was a Sunday in 1848 the wrestling was held on the following day in order not to offend any religious sensibilities.¹⁰⁸ St Piran’s Day survived as a public holiday at Burra until at least 1851.¹⁰⁹ Cornish wrestling matches were also always held as part of traditional festivities, especially Christmas and Easter. For example, the earliest reference to wrestling in Bendigo and surrounding districts was on Christmas Day at Seventh White Hill in 1856;¹¹⁰ in 1860 a ‘Grand Wrestling Match’ was advertised to take place on Boxing Day at Eaglehawk, which was repeated at the same place and on the same day for at least the next two years;¹¹¹ in 1859 a tournament at Burra took three days to complete over the Christmas period;¹¹² and the *South Australian Register* reported that in 1862, miners at Burra spent their Christmas, ‘...lounging round the taverns, playing skittles and wrestling...’¹¹³ A tournament held in south Adelaide in 1851, advertised as the ‘...first respectable attempt to introduce wrestling into the colony of South Australia,’ took place during Easter week.¹¹⁴ Other traditional holidays retained by the Cornish, when wrestling tournaments were held, included Whit Monday, which the miners chose to celebrate rather than the Queen’s birthday (ie 24th May), as they could not afford to take more than one unpaid holiday so close together,¹¹⁵ and ‘Midsummer’s

Day' (ie 24th June), although celebrated in Australia in the middle of the winter, when '...for a generation the mines gave the men a holiday...' ¹¹⁶ According to Payton, by 1886 Methodists had given up trying to suppress wrestling on Midsummer's Day as a pagan pastime, '...embracing it now as a manly sport – or at least recognizing the need for peaceful co-existence in a community where passions were not restricted to religion alone.' ¹¹⁷ At Kapunda the miners also took the Duke of Cornwall's birthday (ie 9th November) as a public holiday. ¹¹⁸

Cornish wrestling tournaments were largely staged on land attached to public houses, the publicans quick to realise the benefits of hosting an event which appealed to the local community and offered monetary prizes, especially at holiday periods. ¹¹⁹ Their motives are clear when, for example, at a tournament held on St Piran's Day in 1848 in the stable yards behind the *Miners' Arms Hotel*, Burra, the refreshment booth was '...constantly filled, all went off quietly although the brandy and ale casks must have got a sad shaking,' ¹²⁰ during the 1850s the lessee of the same hotel at Burra supplied free ginger beer to the spectators, although the selling of alcohol compensated for any losses; ¹²¹ in 1857 generous prizes, including £20 for first place, were awarded at a tournament held at the *Criterion Hotel*, Castlemaine, '...but the amount of liquor and ginger beer sold, obviously made up for this.' ¹²² In the 'Copper Triangle' wrestling took place on rings formed on land adjacent to the public houses in the three main towns; the *Miners' Arms* and *Wombat Hotel* at Kadina; the *Royal Hotel* and *Miners' Arms* at Moonta; and the *White Lion* at Wallaroo. ¹²³ In the Bendigo district of Victoria Cornish wrestling was advertised at the *Pavilion Hotel*, Sailors Gully in 1857; the *Catherine Reef Hotel*, Eaglehawk in 1860 and 1861; at Captain Burgoyne's *Butchers' Arms Hotel* in the White Hills area; the *Commercial Hotel* at Pottery Flat, Epsom; and at the *Sparrowhawk Hotel*, St Just Point, Long Gully, owned by Dick Davey. ¹²⁴ One of the most prominent venues for wrestling in the Bendigo area, however, was the *Rose of Australia*, at Eaglehawk, whose proprietor promoted the sport for many years until the building was destroyed by fire. On the Victorian goldfields Cornish wrestling was held in 1858 at the *Telegraph Hotel*, Castlemaine, owned by John Trewella; at the *Cumberland Hotel*, Fryerstown, in 1862; and during the early 1850s was part of the holiday entertainment at Clunes and Creswick. Prominent wrestlers at Creswick were four brothers, Phil, Tom, Steve and Zacy Williams from St Just. ¹²⁵

Cornish wrestling and challenge matches were also held in the *Brecknock Arms Hotel*, King William Street, south Adelaide, which became ‘...a centre for the sport in the ‘fifties.’ The facilities for wrestling were quite impressive with half an acre of enclosed ground, surrounded by six rows of seats arranged in an amphitheatre, which was capable of accommodating 2,000 people. The central space was roofed over and the wrestling ring was made level and strewn with tan and sawdust in order to create a soft landing, on what would otherwise have been a very hard surface.¹²⁶ Interestingly the hotel bears the same name as a public house in Camden Town, London, which was a focal point for the wrestling fraternity during the mid to late 1840s and it is therefore entirely likely that the owner deliberately chose it in order to entice those interested in the sport. The hotel was owned by William Hodge, born in Sithney, who was reputed to have won up to 80 prizes as a wrestler in Cornwall during the 1840s, although this may have been simply hyperbole. In the early years of the colony of South Australia, Hodge dominated the sport and later became its chief referee and promoter.¹²⁷

The evidence, although fragmentary, suggests that the type of prizes, the duration of matches, and the numbers of wrestlers were very similar to Cornish wrestling tournaments in Cornwall. The prizes were always monetary; for example, at the tournament held in 1851 at the *Brecknock Arms*, which was a large tournament, the first two prizes were £15 and £10 respectively;¹²⁸ in 1866 at the *Rose of Australia*, Long Gully, the prizes, which seem to be more typical were £6 for first place decreasing to £1 for fourth;¹²⁹ and in 1857 at the *Criterion Hotel*, Castlemaine, the prizes, which were unusually generous, ranged from £20 for first place to £5 for fourth and one wrestler ‘...showed such good play that he received a supplementary prize of £3.’¹³⁰

Many of the tournaments lasted more than one day, especially over a holiday period; for example, a tournament held in April 1851, at the *Brecknock Arms*, south Adelaide lasted for four days over Easter week;¹³¹ on Christmas Eve in 1859, the tournament held at the *Miners’ Arms*, Burra, was reported to have ‘...lasted till 7pm on the third day, the parties being so well-matched;’¹³² and Payton also noted that tournaments were well organised, which were sometimes spread over four or five days.¹³³

The numbers of wrestlers who were reported to have entered Cornish wrestling tournaments is an indication of the strength of interest in the sport. For example, in March 1848, at Burra 22 standards were made;¹³⁴ in the Easter week tournament at the

Brecknock Arms, in 1851 it was reported that ‘...50 of the best players in the colony have consented to take part in the proceedings;’¹³⁵ and in 1868 at the *Rose of Australia*, Long Gully, there were 32 wrestlers who entered the tournament, almost all of whom had recognisably Cornish names.¹³⁶ Payton also described a report from the *Yorke’s Peninsula Advertiser*, in which it announced that 30 pairs of wrestlers were expected to take part in the play-offs and he suggested there must have been at least 60 wrestlers in Moonta in 1883, not counting those in Kadina or elsewhere.¹³⁷

Early Australia did not just have Cornish immigrants, it also had a mixed population and other styles of wrestling certainly existed, including the Cumberland and Westmorland back-hold style, introduced to the country by William Hodge and William Marrs, the Devonshire kicking style and the Irish collar-and-elbow style, and according to Hopkins, ‘...eventually it is likely that some competitors adapted their skills to suit the different rules.’¹³⁸ However, she also contends that ‘...organisers of national and other sports might omit other styles from their programs, but rarely, if indeed ever, the Cornish form...’¹³⁹ Wrestling promoters attempted to be fair and organise tournaments in other styles, especially Devonshire wrestling; for example, Mr Creber owner of the *Muckleford Hotel*, Bendigo, held Cornish and Devonshire wrestling in 1862 and allowed the wrestlers to wear shoes.¹⁴⁰ However, it appears that Cornish wrestling predominated; for example, Mr Ellis, the proprietor of the *Catherine Reef Hotel* at Eaglehawk, was careful to stipulate ‘without shoes’ for the wrestling on Boxing Day 1860, to ensure Devonshire wrestlers were clear that kicking was not allowed;¹⁴¹ Mr H Rowe, the owner of the *Rose of Australia* at Long Gully advertised that wrestling in 1862 would be in the ‘Grand Cornish Style;’¹⁴² and when Cornish wrestling was the attraction at the *Cumberland Hotel*, Fryerstown in 1862 Cornish rules were to be strictly adhered to.¹⁴³ Hopkins also notes that Cornish wrestling featured at the Caledonian sports on New Year’s Day in 1863, in the Bendigo district and continued to be included in their programme until the late 1880s.¹⁴⁴ Apparently, even the Irish entrepreneurs, Heffernan and Meagher, included Cornish wrestling in their national sports.¹⁴⁵

Cornish wrestling was an important way of expressing rivalries, especially between the different settlements which had their own local champions; for example, John H ‘Dancing’ or ‘Dancer’ Bray, presumably so named for his clever footwork, was at one time the Moonta champion, who became famous for beating the Ballarat champion in

1868. The match held at Moonta was recalled by Thomas Cowling in his autobiography:

...like a flash of lightning, he (Bray) brought off the “Flying Mare” trick.¹⁴⁶ It was said that 20 captains who were there declared they had not seen anything equal to it in Cornwall [...] Then followed a shout such as might have been heard when Sebastopol was captured.¹⁴⁷

Apart from the rivalry between Cornish and Devonshire wrestlers, which was regularly played out in the colony, the Irish were another ethnic group who often clashed with the Cornish, both in employment and in wrestling tournaments. For example, in Easter week 1851, several Irishmen entered the tournament organised by William Hodge at the *Brecknock Arms*, and the *Adelaide Observer* commended the play of two of them when it asked, ‘Where are finer men than Corcoran and Garrigan?’ Although neither wrestler featured in the prizes, the paper not only applauded their efforts, but also the fact they chose not to wear shoes, and suggested that in the future they would be stars of the ring in the colony; ‘[t]heir non-success arose entirely from their unacquaintance with the Cornish method.’¹⁴⁸ *The Wallaroo Times* advertised a Grand Wrestling Match to take place at Christmas 1867 at Mr Burchell’s *Wombat Hotel*, Kadina where it was planned to hold wrestling in both Irish and Cornish styles.¹⁴⁹

Challenge matches were also a feature of wrestling in Australia; for example, in February 1848 the following advertisement appeared in the *South Australian Register*:

I, William Hodge, weighing 12 stone 12 lbs, challenge any man in South Australia, to wrestle, Cornish or Devon style, two [back] falls out of three to decide the challenge, for the sum of £20 or £50, the challenge to stand good for one month from this date.¹⁵⁰

In another advertisement, in the same paper, it announced a grand ‘Cornwall v. Devonshire’ match to be held at the *Brecknock Arms*, between William Hodge representing Cornwall and John Hockin for Devon, who would compete over two bouts, one in each style and in the event of a tie the ‘...two wrestlers would toss a coin to decide in which style the deciding “fall” would be played.’¹⁵¹ William Hodge was later beaten by Charles Cawrse, formerly of St Neot, the Sydney champion, for the ‘unofficial’ title of the champion of South Australia, before a crowd of 1,500, who paid the heavy fee of 4s. or 2s.6d. admission charge to watch.¹⁵² *The Adelaide Observer* reported that, ‘Hodge, except the unconquered Tom Gundry has run a course as brilliant as any hero of modern times, but a period must arrive when he would be forced to

resign the palm to more youthful aspirants.’¹⁵³ The match provoked a letter from Joseph Hodge, William’s younger brother, and carried in *The West Briton*, in which he strenuously denied the report that Cawrse had thrown his brother three times; he claimed William was not thrown fairly once and the match was not honest.¹⁵⁴ In another disputed match one of the wrestlers was induced to issue the following challenge:

Having heard that the Backers of Mr W Richards are not satisfied with the conclusion that he and I arrived at on Saturday last, I hereby offer to wrestle with him for £20 aside, W. Crowle, California Gully, 29th February 1872.’¹⁵⁵

Another notable challenge match occurred in 1883, when an advertisement announced that J. Thomas, the Cornish wrestling champion would meet a Mons. Victor, the Graeco-Roman champion wrestler of Australia, for the best of three fair back falls for a sum of £50, at the Princess Theatre, Bendigo.¹⁵⁶ Thomas was a popular wrestler who, whilst living in Australia, won over one hundred first prizes in a wrestling career that lasted 28 years, starting with his first win in 1871 at the Caledonian sports and ending in May 1899, when he was forced to retire after injuring his knee in a match at the Bendigo Easter Fair sports and ‘...upon his retirement was presented with a testimonial to honour his achievements.’¹⁵⁷ Thomas acted as a stickler on his retirement, was always in demand and ‘...was greatly revered amongst the strong Cornish community.’¹⁵⁸

An interesting challenge match occurred in 1905, between H.H. ‘Delhi’ Neilson, from Bendigo, the acknowledged Cornish wrestling champion of Australia and George Hackenschmidt, ‘the Russian Lion’, who for six years was undefeated as the world professional wrestling champion in the Graeco-Roman style and was regarded by most wrestling aficionados as the best wrestler in the world at that time, although there was no world governing body to award ‘official’ titles. Hackenschmidt had, prior to touring Australia, created with the impresario C.B. Cochran a music-hall boom in wrestling based in England, which involved much showmanship in his performances.¹⁵⁹ Before accepting Neilson’s challenge Hackenschmidt had to be taught Cornish wrestling, as he was unfamiliar with the style, however, this did not seem to be a handicap, as he weighed 95 kilos and Neilson only 66 kilos, he simply lifted the latter up by his canvas jacket and threw him easily in just under nine minutes. Neilson fought Hackenschmidt in a rematch, but this time in the Lancashire style, although the result remained the same.¹⁶⁰

By the outbreak of the First World War Cornish wrestling had disappeared from Australia. It was most popular in South Australia during the 1860s, but by the mid 1880s there were very few reports of the sport in the 'Copper Triangle', although Moonta miners were taking part in wrestling matches at Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie in 1895,¹⁶¹ presumably due to a lack of tournaments to enter in their home region. In Victoria Cornish wrestling appears to have ceased in about 1904, and in the final years there was a gradual decrease in the number of wrestlers entering tournaments and those that did, few had recognisable Cornish names.¹⁶² The last recorded match in the Cornish style took place at Kadina in 1911, between Professor Hudson, the local champion, who was beaten by a visiting Japanese sailor who introduced jujitsu to Australia.¹⁶³ The main reason for the decline was that those nurtured on wrestling in Cornwall either grew too old to compete or had died and the next generation were not interested as they had become assimilated into Australian culture, preferring cricket or Australian Rules Football instead.¹⁶⁴ Dickson also suggested that boxing replaced wrestling as the most popular combat sport.¹⁶⁵ There were also many other Cornish who had returned to Cornwall or had migrated to other destinations, especially South Africa.

England and Wales

In the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries almost '...every mining area that had been, or was to be, developed in the British Isles attracted at least a few Cornish miners,'¹⁶⁶ and in some regions Cornish migrants settled and worked in substantial numbers. Copper and tin miners preferred to work in non-ferrous metal mines and found work in mainly copper mines of North Wales, Cumberland, the Isle of Man and Ireland, although they also moved to the coalfields of South Wales, Tyneside, Lancashire, Yorkshire and Lanarkshire. Cornish migrants did not just consist of miners, they also moved to the metal-smelting areas of South Wales; manufacturing and engineering regions of the Midlands; and the clay areas of the Staffordshire Potteries. Large numbers of Cornish people also settled in the London area to work in a variety of occupations, although many of them became 'navvies' in construction work. Those from agricultural backgrounds moved to Essex, Sussex, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire and Northamptonshire.¹⁶⁷

In his examination of the pattern of nineteenth century migration to England and Wales, based on census reports of 1861 and 1891, Deacon concluded that in 1861 approximately two thirds of men who migrated out of Cornwall moved to Devon or

London/Middlesex, whilst the remainder went to Glamorganshire, Surrey, Kent, Hampshire and Lancashire.¹⁶⁸ They were also more likely to move to South Wales, industrial North Wales, north Midlands and northern England. By 1891 more than 25% of Cornish people in Britain were living outside Cornwall. After Devon and London, the second most important destination was Lancashire and Glamorganshire, followed by Durham.¹⁶⁹

There is little evidence of Cornish wrestling tournaments and challenge matches in other parts of Britain, arguably for three possible reasons: the sport took place but the press took little interest in a minority activity and therefore it went unreported; the sport required a critical mass of young men who were wrestlers and it is unlikely that many regions achieved this; and the Cornish migrants only stayed long enough in many areas until they had saved enough money to pay for a passage to an overseas destination. However, one area where they did settle in large enough numbers to form a critical mass and where matches were reported in the press was London, which is covered in sufficient detail elsewhere in this study (see chapters three and four).

Metcalf noted in his case study of the coal mining villages of east Northumberland between 1800 and 1914, that many communities were not as homogenous as many might have believed and that sports were used to promote differences as well as similarities. In the Cramlington area, nine miles north of Newcastle, Cornish miners were brought into the district to break a strike by coal miners in 1865 and from 1868 until the late 1880s Cornish and Devonshire wrestling matches were promoted, which helped to maintain the culture of copper and tin miners. They were, according to Metcalfe, ‘...a culture separate from that of other miners.’¹⁷⁰

As noted in chapter two, a jacket style similar in many respects to Cornish wrestling, apart from the criteria for victory, was practiced in South Wales during the nineteenth century and still existed as late as the 1940s when it eventually died out.¹⁷¹ It is entirely possible that this style of wrestling was introduced into Wales through the constant trading links between the two regions and that the sport was kept alive by Cornish wrestlers who had moved and settled there.

South Africa

Towards the end of the nineteenth century South Africa emerged as an important destination for Cornish emigrants.¹⁷² Although Cornish emigration to South Africa started as early as 1847, significant numbers did not arrive until 1852 when copper was discovered in Namaqualand in the Northern Cape province, however, this was only a short-lived 'copper rush' and it was over by 1856.¹⁷³ By 1870 more Cornish migrated to the diamond fields of Kimberley, also in the Northern Cape and stayed until the mines were shut in 1908. From 1886, when gold was discovered on the Witwatersrand (or simply the 'Rand') in the South African Republic and throughout the 1890s large numbers of migrants arrived, the largest group being Cornish miners, whose expertise in mining at deep levels was required by mine owners. During the 1890s and the early years of the twentieth century, the Cornish were the largest group of skilled miners in South Africa and it was estimated that 25% of the white male workforce on the Rand was Cornish.¹⁷⁴ In 1895 alone, 2,000 migrants left Cornwall for South Africa,¹⁷⁵ attracted by the highest wages paid by any mining companies in the world at that time.¹⁷⁶ By 1910, when the Union of South Africa was established, many Cornish miners had left, 'pushed' by a depression on the Rand and the policy of de-skilling by mine owners.¹⁷⁷

Dawe noted that, although there is a paucity of newspaper reports, there are enough to confirm that miners from Cornwall introduced Cornish wrestling to Kimberley and elsewhere in South Africa; for example, in February 1886, more than one hundred miners watched the 'St Just Pug' wrestle 'Captain Tom' to draw over three rounds; in 1887 John Vingoe and James Quayle met each other; and a few years before the Boer War (1899-1902), Richard Eddy, from Pendeen, was the champion at Kimberley.¹⁷⁸ In 1905 the *Transvaal Leader* observed that '... a number of the best known exponents of the Cornish style [of wrestling] had returned from a holiday trip to the old country where they had been adding to their reputations,' thus helping to revive the sport following a brief cessation during the Boer War.¹⁷⁹ Also in 1905 a tournament with 15 wrestlers was held at the *Stars and Stripes Hotel*, Fordsburg, a suburb of Johannesburg, owned by two Cornishmen named Trezona and Gendle, at which James Triggs, a miner at the Boksburg mine and Robinson Deep was beaten by an American.¹⁸⁰ Triggs, who was from Redruth had previously won the County Championship held at Penzance in June 1904 and in 1906, again at the *Stars and Stripes Hotel*, he became the heavyweight champion of South Africa.¹⁸¹ Tangye notes that wrestling was also organised at the

Redruth Hotel in Fordsburg, where in 1904, hundreds witnessed a match between the South African champion, Bill Irwin and Phil Mitchell of Redruth, for a stake of £25 a side, which the latter won easily.¹⁸² Martie Dunstan, the owner of the *Port Elizabeth Hotel* and former owner of the *Stars and Stripes Hotel*, also organised Cornish wrestling; for example, in 1905 J Rudd won the first prize, but in the following year he could not defend his title as he had returned to Cornwall and ‘Tit’ Wills from Lanner won the championship belt and £40 and was reported to have ‘...shewd great pluck and skill.’¹⁸³ Also at the same venue in 1906 the organiser of the match, Tom Goldsworthy, one of the sticklers, William Oliver and both the wrestlers in first and second places, were all from Lanner.¹⁸⁴ A report in 1910 claimed that Cornish wrestling was as popular as ever on the Rand; Littlejohn from Gunnislake was the heavyweight champion of South Africa and Sam Ham from Condurrow was the middleweight champion, although he was eventually beaten by Alfred (‘Barney’) Williams, a miner from Beacon.¹⁸⁵

Although many Cornish migrants had left South Africa before the First World War, there were still Cornish wrestling tournaments being held as late as the 1920s; for example, in September 1925 it was reported by a local newspaper that Cecil Coombe had won the first prize at the *West Rand Hotel*, Randfontein. In January 1927, *The West Briton* reported that at the annual tournament of the Randfontein Cornish Wrestling Association, the holder of the heavyweight title, B. Gregor, of Fordsburg and originally from Redruth Highway, beat all competitors until the final, where he was beaten by Coombe, the fourth time that he had won the title, the first time being in April 1918. He was presented with a gold medal by the Mayor of Roodepoort, Mr W.G. Wearne, who was originally from Wendron.¹⁸⁶ Coombe was born in Redruth, became a miner, married Catherine Victoria Gribble, a local girl when they were both teenagers and moved to Detroit, Michigan accompanied by his brother Reggie. His four sisters, Inez, Zenie, Delphie, and Ena all remained in Cornwall. At some point he migrated to South Africa, where he won several Cornish wrestling tournaments whilst in the Johannesburg district, including several silver cups and other articles worth over £60, before becoming the underground manager on the Northern Rhodesian copper belt. He was described by his contemporaries as a rather outspoken man, who could not tolerate hypocrites, fools or Americans, unless they had Cornish ancestry. Like many other miners he contracted silicosis and died at Cape Town in 1953 in his sixties.¹⁸⁷

William Oliver, a stickler at the *Stars and Stripes Hotel* in 1906, exemplifies the 'roaming' miner during the 'Great Migration'. He worked originally in Butte City, Montana before moving to South Africa and eventually returned to Cornwall to run the *Six Bells Hotel*, in Helston. When he died in 1907, he left a widow in Cornwall, a son in South Africa and three daughters, at least one of whom lived in Montana.¹⁸⁸ However, a much better example is provided by James Triggs, who was born in Helston in 1873. He emigrated to the USA in 1890 to work in the iron mines of Michigan, entered Cornish wrestling tournaments whilst there and for a short period was an under-sheriff. He returned to Cornwall in about 1900, became heavyweight champion in 1904 and sometime between 1900 and 1907 travelled to South Africa. In 1905 Triggs met Neilson, the champion of Australia and Phil Mitchell the champion of South Africa, at the *Stars and Stripes Hotel*, Fordsburg, for a prize of £100 and beat them both, consequently becoming the champion of South Africa. As a result of these two victories, his victory in Cornwall and his previous success against the American champion, a local South African newspaper proclaimed him the, '...champion of the four countries in the style of Cornish wrestling.'¹⁸⁹ In about 1907, he returned to the USA, but following the First World War, Triggs was back in Cornwall, became a founder member of the Cornwall County Wrestling Association in 1923 and acted as a matcher on several occasions.¹⁹⁰ He was also reputed to have owned a mine in South Africa, a saloon in Marquette, Michigan and was a member of several mining syndicates.¹⁹¹

New Zealand

According to Payton, Cornish migrants first travelled to New Zealand in the 1840s, but it was not until gold was discovered in the 1860s that miners went in significant numbers, drawn mainly from South Australia. A further 'pull' occurred in the 1870s when another gold rush occurred to the Otago district, which drew miners from both Cornwall and neighbouring Australia and a thriving Cornish community developed in the mining town of Hamiltons, eastern Otago.¹⁹²

Crawford noted that various ethnic groups contributed to the early sport and recreation in Otago, including Cornish miners, who introduced their distinctive style of wrestling; Irish diggers, who brought boxing; Scottish settlers, who introduced curling and golf; and Swedish settlers with feats of strength.¹⁹³ Cornish wrestling was popular, especially on Boxing Day and at New Year. A contemporary source, cited by Payton, writing

about Hamiltons, remarks that, '[i]t was amazing at New Year time to see the suspicion on the faces of those in authority, or those that the programme pleased, at the sight of a stranger, dreading he might spoil the fun of Cornish wrestling.'¹⁹⁴

Other

In 1965 the *Padstow Echo* reported that the '...nearest approach to the Cornu-Breton style of wrestling known to exist is that practised in Central West Africa (Ghana) where the holds and falls are identical with those of the Cornish style.'¹⁹⁵ It is likely that this style of wrestling was taken to Ghana by Cornish miners in the late nineteenth century. It also appears to have been in existence in 1972, when the *Western Morning News* reported that the CWA was considering a visit to Ghana in the following year.¹⁹⁶

Conclusion

The evidence suggests that wherever the Cornish moved to, whether that was the USA, Australia, Latin America or South Africa, they stuck together in distinct ethnic communities, sustaining a strong sense of identity, based on industrial pride and prowess, which according to Deacon and Schwartz manifested a very Cornish way of life. This included Methodist chapels and choirs, brass bands, self-help societies, the distinctive foods of pasties and saffron cake, the Cornish dialect.¹⁹⁷ It can be argued that to this list can be added Cornish wrestling, which was ubiquitous, especially where the communities were large enough to form a critical mass of wrestlers and therefore it became an important aspect of Cornishness throughout the diaspora. The characteristics of Cornish wrestling tournaments and challenge matches in overseas destinations were indistinguishable from those 'back home' in Cornwall. They took place during a holiday period such as Christmas or Easter, often lasting more than one day; they were promoted by publicans and were held on land adjacent to a public house or hotel; the prizes consisted of sizable cash rewards; they were witnessed by large and knowledgeable spectators; they provided successful wrestlers with the opportunity to gain the prestige of becoming a 'champion' of the community or district; and they provided the opportunity to express rivalries, especially against Devonshire wrestlers, but increasingly the Irish, who also competed against the Cornish in the employment sphere.

Schwartz argues that it is necessary to analyse Cornish migration through a '...prism of transnationalism...' in order to '...capture the mechanisms by which complex migration

interactions shaped cultural, political, social and economic life in sending *and* receiving communities.¹⁹⁸ Cornish migrants did not lose touch with Cornwall, but divided their attachments between their host communities and their native towns and villages, thereby creating dense transnational migration networks. Cornish migrants stayed in contact with friends and relatives in Cornwall through newspapers, letters, financial remittances, social remittances, and the formation of Cornish societies in host communities.¹⁹⁹ Contact with Cornwall was also maintained by the constant flow of migrants to and from Cornwall, which included Cornish wrestlers; for example, in August 1875 *The West Briton* reported that Joseph Williams, of Redruth had accepted a challenge to wrestle Sam Rundle and had delayed his return to California in order to do so;²⁰⁰ in July 1887, it was reported that Andrew Searle, who had ‘...recently returned from abroad...’ aroused some interest at Falmouth, when he appeared at a tournament;²⁰¹ and in July 1897, *The West Briton* reporting on a tournament at St Day remarked that ‘[s]pecial interest attached to the event by reason of the appearance of an old St Day boy who has just returned from Africa and is well-known to the wrestling community, Mr Alfred Bawden (commonly known as Mat), who took a prominent part.’²⁰² Apart from reporting wrestling matches from overseas, newspapers also regularly carried articles containing news of ‘Cornish Folk Abroad’; for example, in June 1902 *The West Briton* informed its readers that Abe Angove, of Camborne and William H. Kitto, two well-known wrestlers of Butte City, Montana, had agreed to meet for \$50 a side and the entire gate receipts,²⁰³ and two weeks later it announced that Angove had won.²⁰⁴ In July 1902 the same paper reported that James Rodda, the champion Cornish wrestler of Grass Valley, California had been charged with the attempted murder of Robert Crase, following an argument over wrestling;²⁰⁵ he was later fined \$200.²⁰⁶

The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that Cornish wrestling played an important part in sustaining and maintaining Cornish identity in migrant communities around the world. However, Deacon and Schwartz have suggested that by the early twentieth century the Cornish identity was under threat and although they concentrated on the USA in particular it is likely that similar factors to those they identified affected other migrant communities. These factors include the gradual assimilation of children into the American way of life, manifested in the disappearance of the Cornish dialect; the decline of mining and the consequent fragmentation of Cornish migrant communities as people left to find work; the diminishing of Cornish immigration; the

waning in interest in Cornish societies; and the decline of contact with families in Cornwall. As far as Cornish wrestling is concerned, second generation Cornish were less interested in the sport and adopted the American sports of baseball and basketball.²⁰⁷ Payton has suggested another possible factor in the decline of Cornish wrestling, especially in the USA, was the emergence of drilling competitions, which was far more inclusive as it allowed all ethnic groups to compete on equal terms.²⁰⁸ By the 1970s there was a resurgence of the Cornish identity overseas, which had its genesis in the 'Celtic Revival' in Cornwall in the 1920s. The following chapter will examine Cornish wrestling and its relationship with the 'Celtic Revival'.

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CHAPTER 6: The revival of Cornish wrestling, 1919-1939

Introduction

As indicated in chapter four, Cornish wrestling underwent something of a minor revival at the beginning of the twentieth century in the years leading up to the First World War, largely inspired by a small group of wrestlers from the clay district, that acted as ‘...a reservoir of Cornish wrestling skills and knowledge.’¹ The progress made was halted by the war, as the sport was discontinued, although this was only temporary as wrestling recommenced in 1919 and for a few years, where local committees were able to promote them, a handful of tournaments were held. The most significant feature of this period, however, was the decision made at a meeting held at Bodmin, in September 1923, to form a governing body for Cornish wrestling under the name of the Cornwall County Wrestling Association (CCWA), with the aim to bring the sport, ‘...now carried on in a somewhat haphazard way, into greater prominence and popularity.’² This development led to a revival of Cornish wrestling throughout the 1920s and 1930s, which was characterised by a discernible increase in the number of regular tournaments and active, registered wrestlers. Another characteristic of this period was the constant problem caused by the lack of funding, which led the CCWA to discontinue its activities in 1930, although this proved to be only a temporary measure, as ‘official’ tournaments were resumed in 1933. Cornish wrestling continued to be organised on a regular basis until war again intervened in 1939, when the governing body, renamed Cornish Wrestling Association (CWA) in 1933, decided to suspend all ‘official’ tournaments until after the war, but allow local committees to arrange them if they so wished.³ The second half of the 1930s was also dominated by a schism that developed between the modernisers of Cornish wrestling, embodied by the CCWA/CWA and a break-away group, calling themselves the East Cornwall Wrestling Federation, who disliked many of the changes that had been introduced and wanted the sport to return to its ‘traditional’ form. Despite the split both organisations managed to arrange a full programme of tournaments up to 1939.

Thus the purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed examination of the revival of Cornish wrestling during the 1920s and 1930s, which was a relatively short-lived phenomenon, and to demonstrate the relationship with the Cornish Revival. However, before this it is necessary to provide some general background comments about the Cornish Revival.

Cornish Revival

It is generally agreed that the Cornish Revival began with the formation of the Cowethas Kelto-Kernuak (Celtic-Cornish Society or CKK) in 1901, although it is acknowledged that its antecedents can be traced back to the much wider ‘Celtic Revival’ of the nineteenth century, which influenced cultural changes in both Ireland and Scotland. It was founded by Louis C Duncombe-Jewell, who revealed in the pages of *Celtia*, the publication of the Celtic Association, in May 1902 that the major aims of the CKK were, to preserve and to study the Celtic remains of Cornwall; to revive the Cornish language as a spoken tongue; to revive the Cornish Miracle Plays; and to re-establish the Cornish Gorsedd. A further aim which is of particular relevance to the present study was:

To keep carefully every National Custom and above all the truly Cornish sports of Wrestling and Hurling, by presenting every year a Belt to be contended for by Cornish wrestlers, and inscribed silver Hurling balls to each Parish in the Duchy that will ordain an annual Hurling match on its feast day.⁴

One of the Vice-Presidents of the CKK was Thomas Robins Bolitho, landowner, partner in a bank, shareholder in various businesses, member of Cornish learned societies, former High Sheriff of Cornwall, Deputy Lieutenant, Justice of the Peace and County Councillor, who was given the special responsibility to foster Celtic sports, but ‘...as Hambly Rowe pointed out in his letter to the Cornish Telegraph, this remained a moribund area of the Society’s activities.’⁵ This neglect of Cornish wrestling should not be that surprising as the major concern of the CKK was to establish the Celticity of Cornwall and the revival of the Cornish language became the main preoccupation of the Revivalists.⁶ For example, Henry Jenner, who became the public face of the CKK when Duncombe-Jewell left the movement in 1903, produced a number of publications on the Cornish language, especially with the help of Robert Morton Nance, and was also responsible for securing Cornwall’s membership of the Celtic Congress in 1904, which marked the acceptance of Cornwall as a Celtic nation. All progress was halted during the First World War and the CKK folded.⁷

In 1920 Jenner and Nance were jointly responsible for founding the Old Cornwall Society (OCS) at St Ives, to replace and to further the Revivalist work of the CKK, but also to make the Cornish Revival more relevant to ordinary people. This was followed by the foundation of Old Cornwall Societies in other Cornish towns, that led the leading

Revivalists to form the Federation of Old Cornwall Societies in 1924 and in the following year the *Old Cornwall* journal was first published, which became an important mouthpiece of the Cornish Revival.⁸ In 1928 a long-term aim of the Revivalists was realised when the Cornish Gorsedd (Gorseth Kernow) was formed, based on those in Wales and Brittany, with Jenner as the first Grand Bard and Nance as his deputy. Jenner also attempted to influence the activities of other Cornish institutions, especially the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society and the Royal Institution of Cornwall (RIC), both of which he served a term as President. In 1936 the RIC created the 'Jenner Medal' to be awarded to those individuals who made an outstanding contribution to the study of some aspect of Cornwall.⁹ Revivalists were also interested in promoting the use of a variety of icons of Cornish identity, such as a 'Celtic' kilt; a tartan design; the St Piran's flag; the singing of *Trelawny* as a 'national' anthem; and establishing links with Brittany, which they saw as the model for revival.¹⁰ Cornish wrestling was also adopted by the Revivalists as an important icon, which was now portrayed not as a 'classical' sport, but as 'Celtic', and therefore closely related to Breton wrestling.¹¹ For example, in 1926 at a meeting of the Federation of Old Cornwall Societies to discuss the proposed Pan-Celtic Congress Annual General Meeting to be held at Penzance later in that year, a suggestion was made to include Cornish wrestling as part of the programme; however, the event was cancelled due to the General Strike.¹²

Many of the leading personalities of the Cornish Revival were also involved in some way with the activities of Cornish wrestling. For example, the Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould who was born in Devon in 1834, later became vicar of Lewtrenchard church, near Okehampton and the heir to the family estate, was a prolific writer; a collector of folk songs and folk-lore, including myths and superstitions; a composer of hymns, including the well-known *Onward, Christian Soldiers*; a biographer of the Rev. Robert Stephen Hawker, for fifty years the eccentric vicar of Morwenstow; and a hagiographer.¹³ He also wrote *Cornish Characters and Strange Events* and *Devonshire Characters and Strange Events*, in which he devoted a chapter in each book to wrestling.¹⁴ He also served as the President of the RIC for ten years from 1897.

Henry Jenner was born at St Columb Major in 1848 and worked at the Department of Ancient Manuscripts in the British Museum for over forty years, where he developed an interest in the Cornish language, culminating in the publication of the influential

Handbook of the Cornish Language in 1904. In 1909 he retired with his wife to Hayle, where he devoted the rest of his life to Cornish activities. In 1912 he was elected the librarian of the Morrab Library in Penzance, a role he performed for the next fifteen years. In 1928 he became the first Grand Bard of the Gorseth Kernow, bearing the bardic name of Gwas Myghal ('Servant of Michael'),¹⁵ which he acquired in 1903 from the Gorsedd of Brittany.¹⁶ He also served as the President of the Hayle Wrestling Association in which he took an active role, opening tournaments and presenting prizes. In 1925 he was the first to suggest that '...the CCWA should endeavour to get over some wrestlers from Brittany, and pit them against the Cornishmen.'¹⁷

Robert Morton Nance was born in Cardiff in 1873 of Cornish parents, but moved to Cornwall in 1906. He became a leading authority on the Cornish language, writing many books and pamphlets on the subject and editing magazines and pamphlets about Cornwall, including *Old Cornwall*.¹⁸ He was also noted as a nautical archaeologist, painter, craftsman, and designer of some of the regalia for the Gorseth Kernow. In 1928 he was joint founder of the Gorseth Kernow, taking the bardic name of Mordon (Sea Wave) and succeeding Jenner as Grand Bard in 1934, which he undertook until 1959.¹⁹ Whilst Grand Bard, Nance is reported to have suggested that prior to Cornish wrestling tournaments the organisers should arrange a demonstration to be staged for the benefit of spectators who were not acquainted with the sport.²⁰

Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch (aka 'Q') was born in Bodmin in 1863, educated at Trinity College, Oxford and in 1912 became professor of English at Cambridge. He made his home at Fowey in 1891 and became well-known as a novelist, especially of books on Cornish themes in which he portrayed a romantic and pre-industrial image of Cornwall. He was also noted as an anthologist and literary critic.²¹ He was a founder member of the CKK in 1901, was Chair of the Cornwall Education Committee and was one of the first bards to be initiated in the Gorseth Kernow in 1928, bearing the bardic name of Marghak Cough ('Red Knight').²² He also edited his own *Cornish Magazine*, which in its first edition carried an article about Cornish and Devonshire wrestling.²³

Dr Joseph Hambley Rowe, who was born in Hayle in 1870, spent much of his early life in Tsarist Russia, graduated as a doctor from Aberdeen University and eventually settled in Bradford as a GP, where he remained for 41 years. He was a founder member of the CKK, fellow of the Society of Antiquarians, Secretary of the Arthurian Congress,

President of the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society, patron of Tyr ha Tavas, Vice-President of the London Cornish Association and founder of the Bradford and District Cornish Society.²⁴ He was one of the first to be initiated as a bard in 1928, taking the bardic name Tolzethan (place name) and became Nance's Deputy Grand Bard for three years from 1934.²⁵ He had eclectic interests including dialect studies, Arthurian legends, genealogy, literature, the Gorseth Kernow and was '...one of the most important and influential participants'²⁶ of the Cornish Revival. He wrote on a variety of topics and contributed regularly to *The Cornish Telegraph*, in which he revealed some interest in Cornish wrestling; for example, he noted the absence of interest by the CKK as referred to above and sent a letter suggesting that prize money should be deliberately kept low in order to make the honour of winning the most important motive for taking part in tournaments.²⁷

Also worthy of note are a number of less renowned individuals, who played a part in both the Cornish Revival and Cornish wrestling. For example, the Rev. A A Clinnick, President of the Truro Old Cornwall Society and author of *The Cornish Year: Cornish folklore, festivals and characters throughout the year*,²⁸ was initiated as a bard of the Gorseth Kernow in 1929, with the bardic name of Keledden ('Holly Bush'),²⁹ and was also President of the Truro Wrestling Committee.³⁰ Mr A H Luke, who helped to create the CCWA and served on its Council of Management for a number of years, acted as its auditor³¹ and presented prizes at tournaments,³² was initiated as a bard in 1935 for his services to Cornish wrestling and his interest in other sport, with the bardic name of Den Newodhow (Man of the News).³³ Sir John Langdon Bonython, born in London of Cornish parents, emigrated to Australia and became a wealthy Adelaide businessman, was appointed President of the Royal Institution of Cornwall in 1931³⁴ and initiated as a bard of the Gorseth Kernow in 1935 for numerous benefactions to Cornwall, taking the bardic name of Kernow Tramor ('Cornishman Overseas').³⁵ He also became patron of the CCWA in the 1930s, donating sums of money to stave off debt.³⁶ The Rev L V Jolly, the vicar of St Eval, who took an active interest in Cornish wrestling, writing several articles on the subject³⁷ and presenting prizes at tournaments,³⁸ also became a bard in 1935, for religious reasons, taking the bardic name of Pronter Jolyf ('Ready Priest').³⁹

The state of Cornish wrestling, 1919-1945

Cornish wrestling resumed after the First World War, with a handful of tournaments held between 1919 and 1923, arranged in places where local committees were able to find a suitable site and raise the subscriptions in order to offer attractive prizes, which in the immediate post-war period was not an easy task. However, it appears that despite the interruption of war there remained an appetite for the sport (see appendix 6 and 20). From 1924 there was a discernible increase in the number of tournaments held each year, which is largely explained by the impetus provided by the Cornwall County Wrestling Association (CCWA), which had been formed at the end of the previous season (see fig. 6.1) One of the major objectives of the CCWA was to arrange tournament fixtures each season, including when County championships in various weights were to be held, each venue being carefully selected from the affiliated wrestling associations, thus avoiding any clashes. The peak year for the revival was in 1926, when 26 tournaments were held, including one that took place on Saturday 14th August at St Columb to celebrate the centenary of the challenge match between Abraham Cann of Devon and James Polkinghorne of Cornwall (see chapter three). The celebrations included a full programme of Cornish wrestling at the Recreation Ground in front of a crowd of nearly 3,000, which included the lightweight championship of Great Britain, won by Fred Lean from Foxhole and a demonstration of the catch-as-catch-can style by Peter Goty, the ex-lightweight champion of the world and Alf Hewitt, the trainer to the British wrestling team at the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris. The day began with a procession of local dignitaries through the town, headed by the St Columb Town Band and was followed by a public luncheon in the Red Lion Hotel, accompanied by speeches and toasts. The day was concluded with a dance, also held at the Red Lion Hotel.⁴⁰ The *Royal Cornwall Gazette* described the scene that day as follows:

From all parts of the Duchy supporters of the old county sport poured into the quaint little town of St Columb...From an early hour in the day they came in their hundreds, by motor coach, omnibus and train, and by mid-day the town presented a scene of bustle and liveliness that must be almost unprecedented in its history...The tortuous, narrow streets were ablaze with flags and buntings, and the main thoroughfare was a perfect riot of colour.⁴¹

The day also included the unveiling of a marble tablet, which was paid for largely by St Columb residents, but also included \$40 sent by Cornish expatriates living in the USA, depicting two wrestlers in a 'hitch' with the following inscription:

To the memory of James Polkinghorne, of St Columb in commemoration of his famous encounter with Abraham Cann, Champion of Devon, for the Championship of the West of England 1826.

The tablet was unveiled by Col E N Willyams, the chairman of the St Columb Wrestling Committee and erected on the granite façade of the *Red Lion Hotel*, which was entirely appropriate, as Polkinghorne was for several years the landlord and apparently on his retirement passed the business to his son, William.⁴²

The Polkinghorne centenary celebrations, which was an exceptional event led to an increased interest in the sport; for example, in the following year a total of 38 competitions took place at 22 tournaments, which included nineteen open, ten local or novice, seven boys', one lightweight, one middleweight, two championship finals and two exhibitions.⁴³ The number of tournaments also reflected the number of committees affiliated to the CCWA, with 30 being reported in December 1925, compared with only nine in 1923.⁴⁴

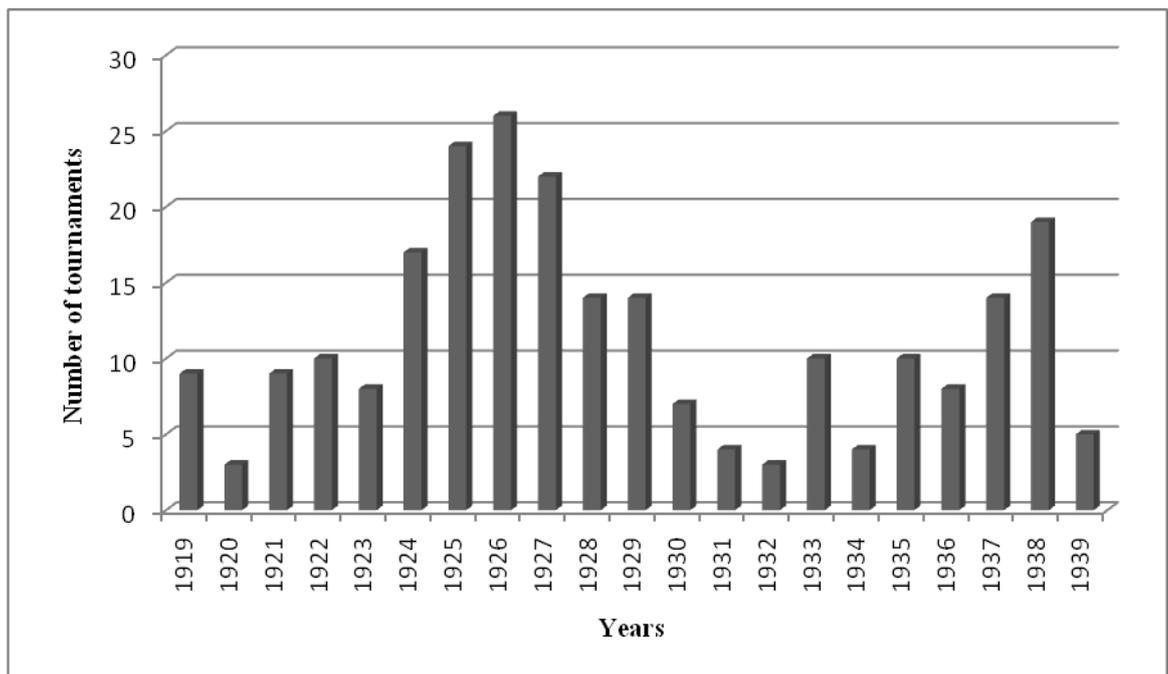


Fig 6.1: Number of Cornish wrestling tournaments held between 1919 and 1939

In 1930 the CCWA decided to suspend its activities due to mounting debts and did not reform for two years, which explains the small number of tournaments between 1930 and 1932.⁴⁵ A handful of tournaments did take place in 1930 and 1931, but these were only ‘local’ events and as the CCWA did not reform until July 1932, the season was too far advanced to arrange many ‘official’ matches in that year.⁴⁶ For most years between

1932 and 1939 the number of tournaments gradually increased, although the CCWA had deliberately chosen to arrange fewer events as it was hoped this would lead to greater attendances. Between 1933 and 1939 tournaments were organised by the Cornish Wrestling Association (CWA) and the break-away East Cornwall Wrestling Federation (ECWF), which tended to compete against one another for wrestlers.

The progress of Cornish wrestling in the inter-war period was also mirrored by the number of wrestlers entering tournaments, with a discernible increase up to a peak in 1926, a rapid decline in the early 1930s, followed by a recovery in the later 1930s. In order to compete in approved tournaments wrestlers had to be officially registered with the CCWA. In the peak year of 1926, there were 184 registered wrestlers, which compared with 51 in 1924 and 119 in 1925; of those registered in 1926, 84 won prizes.⁴⁷ There were also 109 wrestlers in 1926 that competed in tournaments for the first time, 86 of whom came from the east of the county and 23 from the west. In total there were only 36 registered wrestlers from the west of the county, with most of the remainder coming from the east, although there were 6 that came from Devon.⁴⁸ Some places in 1926 received record entries; at the Polkinghorne centenary celebration tournament at St Columb there were 52 entries; at Bodmin there were 51; at St Austell 38; at Truro 32; at Helston 31; at Reduth 30.⁴⁹ In 1928 109 wrestlers took part in tournaments and 59 won prizes,⁵⁰ however, by 1935 only 53 took part in the whole season.⁵¹ At the CWA Annual General Meeting in May 1938 the secretary noted that the average number of wrestlers entering tournaments was 16, with the largest of 36 at St Kew and the smallest of 12 at Helston.⁵²

One group of wrestlers who did much to popularise Cornish wrestling during this period and who assisted greatly in its survival, especially in the 1930s, was the Chapman family from St Wenn.⁵³ They were not the same men who wrestled before the war, as they had all retired from the sport and some had become sticklers, but their offspring. Reuben's sons were Bernard and Maurice; Sid's sons were William and Charlie; two cousins were John (aka 'Jack') and Sid.⁵⁴ On some occasions the Chapman family dominated tournaments; for example, in August 1936 at St Columb, five members of the family won five of the six prizes and Sid the elder, was one of the sticklers;⁵⁵ in August 1937 at Newquay, Bernard became the middleweight champion, John the lightweight and William the boys';⁵⁶ in August 1939, again at Newquay, the Chapmans won all the championships, Bernard became middleweight champion, John the

lightweight and William the heavyweight.⁵⁷ On another occasion three of the ‘elder’ Chapmans, Sid, Reuben and Jim acted as sticklers at a tournament at St Wenn.⁵⁸

The other major indicator of the popularity of Cornish wrestling during this period was the size of the crowds, which followed a similar pattern to the number of tournaments and wrestlers who entered them. For the most part reports of tournaments usually did not mention specific numbers of spectators, but referred in vague terms to the size of crowds; for example, in Aug 1919 at St Stephens there was a ‘...very large gate...’;⁵⁹ in August 1924 at Hayle there was a large crowd; and at Mount Hawke in August 1934 there was ‘...an exceptionally large “gate” and considerable enthusiasm prevailed, spectators being drawn from a wide area.’⁶⁰ It is clear that up to 1930, when numbers were reported, attendances averaged between 1,000 and 1,500; for example, in September 1919 there were 1300 who attended a tournament at Bodmin;⁶¹ in June 1925, there were 1,500 at Truro;⁶² and at Helston in September 1929 there were 1,000.⁶³ The largest crowd recorded before 1930 was at Newquay in 1925, when 3,000 people attended and £150 was taken at the gate, although it is acknowledged that this was exceptional as it was August Bank Holiday Monday, the weather was fine and the tournament consisted of bouts at various weights for the championship of Cornwall.⁶⁴ Reports of tournaments after 1930, that refer to actual numbers, indicate that the average gate was just over 500 spectators, with the largest attendance again at Newquay in August 1937, when 2-3,000 people ‘...thronged the grandstand and the seats surrounding the spacious area...’⁶⁵ Despite the general reduction in the size of crowds after 1930, *The West Briton* in its report of a tournament at Truro in June 1936 was able to remark that ‘[t]he appreciation of the visitors round the ring was an indication that the public is still loyal to the old sport, when carried out in real sporting spirit.’⁶⁶

There are no reports that indicate that wrestling crowds were badly behaved as was occasionally the case in the previous century, which led the secretary of the CCWA to remark that ‘[o]ne gratifying feature of the season had been the number of ladies who witnessed the various tournaments. That tended to show that the efforts of the association in keeping the sport clean had not been wasted.’⁶⁷ He repeated this refrain at a CCWA meeting in the following year, when he suggested that wrestling was so respectable that ‘...ladies could be invited to witness it.’⁶⁸ These are significant observations as women are largely ‘invisible’ from the history of Cornish wrestling.

As indicated in chapter four, during the 1920s and 1930s the most popular day to hold Cornish wrestling tournaments was Saturday, which had become embedded in the calendar as the day for sport (see appendix 19 and table 6.1). The majority of those tournaments that took place on Mondays were held on Bank Holidays, especially those at Newquay in August, or at Helston at the Harvest or Plum Fair held in early September (see appendix 2).

Table 6.1: Days of the week when Cornish wrestling tournaments were held between 1920 and 1939⁶⁹

Decades	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1920-1929	13	6	4	4	1	89
1930-1939	12	0	2	3	0	65
Totals:	25	6	6	7	1	154

Those tournaments held on all other mid-week days were associated with feast celebrations; for example, in July 1925, the tournament at the St Merryn Feast took place on a Tuesday;⁷⁰ in June 1926 the tournament at St Blazey Feast was held on a Thursday; and in August 1926, the tournament at St Stephens was ‘...in connection with the feast celebrations.’⁷¹

There were no tournaments during the period that lasted more than one day, the majority providing only an afternoon’s sport; for example, in June 1929 at Falmouth, ‘...the events were rather slow and lasted five hours;’⁷² in June 1930, the wrestling took over four hours to complete at Truro;⁷³ and at St Dennis in June 1938 there was ‘...four hours of excellent sport.’⁷⁴ On some occasions wrestling took place in the evening; for example, in July 1930 at Falmouth;⁷⁵ in Aug 1934 at Mount Hawke;⁷⁶ and in July 1937 at Perranporth.⁷⁷

The evidence shows that the majority of prizes awarded in Cornish wrestling tournaments between 1919 and 1939 were a combination of money and material goods, whereas the practice of awarding only money had become very rare, and most of these before 1930 (see fig. 6.2). As the period progressed the value of the money prizes, whether given solely or in combination with material goods gradually diminished,

which is likely to be a reflection of the background economic conditions (see appendix 3). The largest money prizes during the period did not exceed £10, which occurred before 1923,⁷⁸ but by 1939 the average money prize awarded to those that won competitions was £3; for example, the winner of the all weights championship (ECWF) at Bodmin in August 1939 won an inscribed oak clock and £3 in cash.⁷⁹ The usual practice throughout the period was for tournament organisers to give a variety of belts, cups and medals together with a relatively small money prize to the winner, and to give all other prize winners a smaller amount of money only. For example, in September 1929 at Penhallow, the prize for the winner of the open competition was a gold medal worth £5 and £6 in cash; the second prize was £3; the third prize was £2; and the fourth prize was £1.⁸⁰ It was also common practice for more valuable prizes to be awarded at competitions to decide the championship of Cornwall in the different weights. For example, at Newquay, on August Bank Holiday Monday in 1932, the prize for the winner of the heavyweight competition was the Graham Farmer perpetual cup worth twenty guineas; the prize for the winner of the middleweight competition received a championship belt worth thirty guineas; the prize for the winner of the lightweight competition a belt worth forty five guineas; the prize for the winner of the boys' competition was the Lyons Tea Cup worth forty guineas; and the value of all prizes and trophies amounted to £160.⁸¹

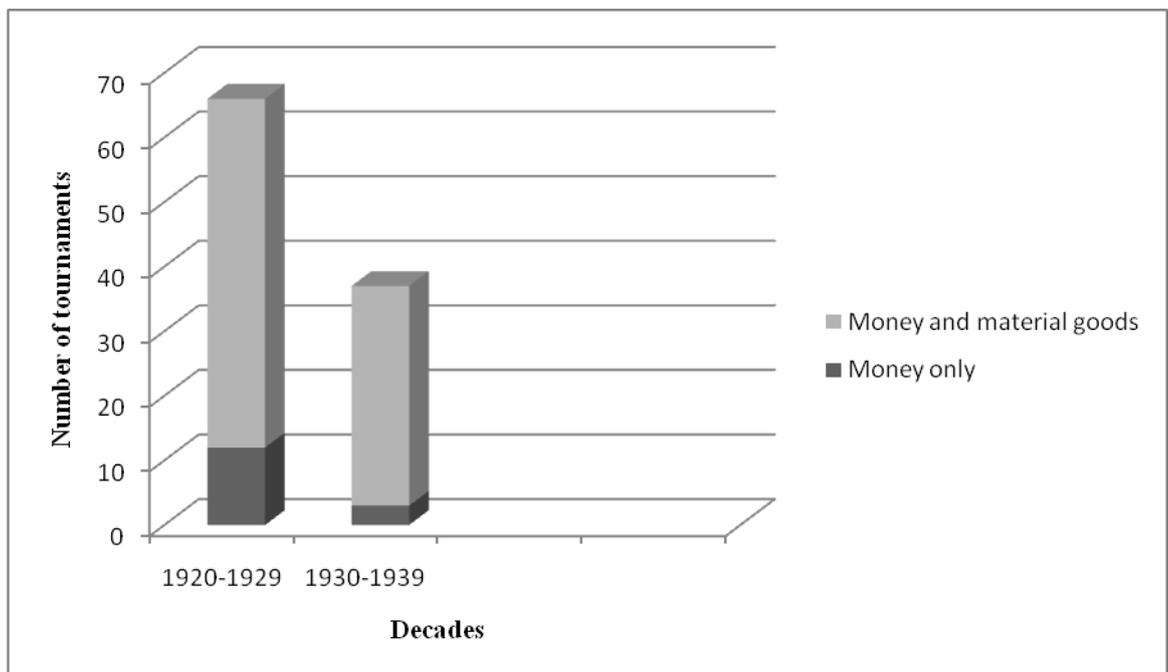


Fig. 6.2: Number of Cornish wrestling tournaments that offered money and material goods between 1920 and 1939

The practice of awarding standard money to thrown men or of paying expenses to non-prize winners, as was the case in previous decades, also became much rarer in the 1920s and 1930s, although there are examples when it did take place. For example, at Roche in June 1927, the organisers of the tournament awarded '[s]pecial prizes of £1 each for two men showing the finest play in the field...';⁸² in August 1933 at Trevarrison, '...deserving and injured men were paid in accordance with the committee's decision,'⁸³ and at St Kew in July 1937, '...each of the 27 non-prize winners received a consolation award.'⁸⁴ On another occasion in August 1938 at Trevarrian, Bernard Chapman was reported to have been so impressed by two wrestlers who just failed to get places that he offered to provide consolation prizes.⁸⁵

In order to arrange a tournament and pay all necessary expenses, including prizes, organisers could no longer simply rely upon gentlemen 'subscribers', but were increasingly dependent upon admission paid by spectators. The tournament at Ludgvan in July 1921 was typical. Spectators were charged 1s.3d. which included free parking on the ground and advertisements announced that 'Marazion Garage Cars will meet trains at Marazion Station and run special trips to Penzance.'⁸⁶ Similarly, at a tournament in August 1933 at Redruth, spectators were charged 1s.3d. admission to the ground, 1s.3d. extra for a seat in the grandstand, with a capacity of 750, 6d. for car parking and 7d. for the unemployed and boys. At Falmouth in July 1936, entrance to the ground was 1s and ringside seats 6d. extra.

Cornish wrestling continued to be popular in towns and villages across Cornwall, but in contrast to earlier decades there was a discernible decrease in the number of places that held tournaments (see appendix 6 and 20). During the 1920s forty places held tournaments, with slightly more (60%) in the east of the county, whilst there were only twenty six during the 1930s, with a more equal distribution between east and west (54%:46%), which can be explained by the schism between the CWA and the ECWF; both organised tournaments, often on the same days. The most popular places for hosting tournaments were Falmouth, Mawgan-in-Pydar, Newquay, St Columb, St Day and Truro. The major reason for the decrease in the number of places that held tournaments between 1919 and 1939 was that, by organising an annual fixture list, the CCWA (and the CWA from 1933) and the ECWF restricted the number of potential venues to places that were capable of attracting sufficient spectators to make tournaments economically viable. Many of the places used for tournaments, such as

Falmouth, Helston and Truro in the west of the county and Bodmin, St Austell and St Columb in the east, had been popular venues for several decades and were all larger urban centres, with relatively good transport links, especially the railway. In 1925, for example, in an advertisement for a tournament at Truro, *The West Briton* announced that, '[t]he Secretary reported that both the Great Western and Southern Railway Companies had promised, as soon as the associations had issued their fixtures, to grant facilities for issuing cheap tickets.'⁸⁷ Some found other means of transport, however, such as T Trevena, a 17 year old miner, who in August 1937 was '...at work underground from 6am till noon, and after cycling from Carharrack to Newquay won his three rounds and so secured the championship in the featherweight section.'⁸⁸

In those places where Cornish wrestling tournaments took place during the 1920s and 1930s, a variety of sites were used, although a significant feature of the period was that pubs were no longer a popular venue. Despite wrestling taking place in 1935 and 1936 '...in a field at the back of the Angel Hotel ...'⁸⁹ at Helston, it is likely this was used as it was a traditional Cornish wrestling field, rather than because it was a pub; the building was once the town house of the Godolphins and the sunken garden at the rear may have been used for wrestling for generations.⁹⁰ However, the publican most likely still benefitted financially from the custom of the spectators. Other traditional sites used were the Moor Field at Truro, and '...the ground presented some hundreds of years ago to the men of the parish [of St Merryn] for the purpose of wrestling.'⁹¹

Increasingly during the 1920s and 1930s, sports grounds, recreation grounds and public parks became preferred sites for Cornish wrestling tournaments. Rugby club grounds were used at Camborne,⁹² Penzance⁹³ and Redruth;⁹⁴ football club grounds were used at Bugle,⁹⁵ Newquay,⁹⁶ St Dennis,⁹⁷ Truro⁹⁸ and Wadebridge;⁹⁹ recreation grounds were used at Camborne,¹⁰⁰ Falmouth,¹⁰¹ Newquay,¹⁰² Redruth,¹⁰³ St Columb,¹⁰⁴ St Day¹⁰⁵ and St Ives;¹⁰⁶ and the 'Tower Field, adjoining [Newquay] Golf Club and by their kind permission.'¹⁰⁷ Occasionally, a field was lent, or hired by a local farmer; for example, in July 1921 wrestling took place at Ludgvan, '...in a field lent by Messrs William Lawrey and Son of Ludgvan Lease Farm;¹⁰⁸ and in September 1924 at Penhallow, wrestling took place '...in a field lent by Mr E George, 10 minutes walk from Mithian Halt.'¹⁰⁹ School grounds and private residences were also used; for example, in September 1925 *The West Briton* opined that, '[n]o better venue than the splendid grounds of Probus College could have been obtained;¹¹⁰ and in the same month at St Wenn, a tournament

was ‘...held in the beautiful grounds of Trewollock, lent by Capt E H Whitford Hawkey, MC.’¹¹¹

The Cornwall County Wrestling Association

The revival of Cornish wrestling was mostly inspired by the activities of the CCWA, which was formed in September 1923, at a meeting in Bodmin, at which the twenty local wrestling associations then existing in the county were invited to attend at the instigation of the Bodmin Wrestling Committee. The CCWA had the following objectives:

To promote and foster Cornish wrestling in towns, villages and public schools; the affiliation of wrestling committees with the county and the observance of certain rules and conditions; to prevent the clashing of dates and fixtures; the registering of all Cornish wrestlers with their correct names, addresses and weights; to promote and hold yearly meetings with distinct championships, light-weight for men under 150lb., heavy-weight for men over 150lb., and one for youths under 18 years of age; and lastly, to encourage the promotion of local competitions which shall be confined to a certain radius and small areas.¹¹²

The idea for a ‘governing body’ had the approval of Cornish Associations in London, Bristol and Cardiff, but had only received favourable replies from ten of the local wrestling committees, and Newquay and Port Isaac ‘...had decided to have nothing to do with the idea.’¹¹³ This reluctance to join was a sign of trouble in the future, however, it was suggested by one of the delegates that others might join once they saw an association had been formed, although there could be dissention over some of the rules, especially the one debarring men from wrestling at unaffiliated meetings. Rules were eventually adopted for the association and the following officers were elected:

Commander Sir Edward Nicholl, RNR, JP, DL (patron); Captain Thomas E Bisdee, DSO, MC (president); Colonel W A Bawden (honorary treasurer); and Mr W G Tickell (honorary general secretary).¹¹⁴ These were prominent men; for example, Sir Edward Nicholl who was born in Redruth in 1862, went on to become a successful businessman, a director of many companies, a ship-owner and between 1918 and 1922 was Member of Parliament for Penryn and Falmouth. He also served terms as President of the Cornish Bowls Association and the Cornish Band Association, was a Freeman of the City of London, a member of the Cardiff City Council and in 1935 was initiated as a bard in the Gorseth Kernow, for his services in the war and to Cornwall after, taking the bardic name of Gwythyas an Ganal (‘Guardian of the Channel’). Captain Thomas Bisdee was born in Tasmania in 1888, served with distinction in the Duke of Cornwall’s

Light Infantry (DCLI) during the First World War, winning the Military Cross in 1918¹¹⁵ and at the time of the meeting was stationed at the DCLI depot and was also president of the Bodmin Wrestling Committee. Local wrestling committees also possessed their fair share of prominent men, who all took an active interest in the sport; for example, at Camborne the president was Captain A H Moreing, MP;¹¹⁶ at Ludgvan the president was Sir Clifford Cory, Bart, MP;¹¹⁷ and at St Blazey the president was Sir Colman Rashleigh.¹¹⁸

In order to achieve its objectives the CCWA needed to encourage the development of Cornish wrestling in towns and villages throughout Cornwall, to induce more young men to take up the sport, to persuade more people to watch tournaments and to ensure all those who were affiliated to the association abided by its rules. The CCWA organised tournaments in a number of areas, which led to revivals; for example, at St Blazey, where wrestling was ‘...revived by a capable committee...’¹¹⁹ at Camborne, ‘[a]fter a lapse of 35 years wrestling was revived with great success...in July 1926;’¹²⁰ and at Tregony in October 1927 it was the first time a tournament had taken place for over twenty years.¹²¹ New local wrestling committees were also established at Falmouth in 1926,¹²² at Hayle in 1929¹²³ and the sport was also introduced to students at Camborne School of Mines¹²⁴ and at the DCLI depot at Bodmin.¹²⁵ The Falmouth local wrestling committee was formed largely due to the efforts of William Tregoning Hooper, who was deeply committed to reviving Cornish wrestling. He was born in 1880 at Trevallas, St Agnes, later serving in the army, and became a founder member of the Old Cornwall Society at Truro and at Falmouth and Penryn.¹²⁶ In 1928 he became one of the first to be initiated as a bard of the Gorseth Kernow, taking the bardic name of Bras Y Tolon (‘Great Hearted’)¹²⁷ and in 1955 he was awarded a prize by the Jenner Memorial Fund for all his work for Cornwall.¹²⁸ As a librarian at Falmouth, Hooper was able to access documents and records which enabled him to write a number of articles about the history of Cornish wrestling.¹²⁹

The CCWA recognised the need to promote wrestling in areas where it had been popular at one time, but had declined or died out. In these cases it gave permission for local wrestling associations to organise competitions restricted to a certain radius, although almost always with an ‘open’ event in the same programme. For example, in May 1926 at Colan one of the competitions was restricted to wrestlers living within three miles of the village;¹³⁰ in June 1926 at St Day, wrestlers from the west of Probus

were able to compete for the Insuta Cup, ‘...presented by a number of men from St Day and Redruth districts, now residing in South Africa;’¹³¹ and in July 1929 at Falmouth, the prizes included the Old Cornwall Society Cup for boys from Penryn and Falmouth district, the Devenish Cup for lightweights from Falmouth and district and the Lennard Cup for all weights from the same area.¹³² Not all local wrestling committees were successful in reviving the sport. At Truro, one of the most important centres of wrestling in the nineteenth century, the committee decided that, as attendances at most tournaments were poor, which led to a financial loss, it would terminate its activities and hand over its credit balance to the CCWA.¹³³

The CCWA also saw the necessity to develop the next generation of wrestlers by encouraging more young men to come forward, however, it was clear from the outset that although many were enthusiastic, they lacked the necessary skills. In June 1924 at Redruth, at the first tournament under the auspices of the CCWA, it was remarked that the ‘...wrestling, considering how little the art has been practised in the county of late years, was promising,’ and the younger men should make a ‘...good show when they have mastered the technicalities.’¹³⁴ In the following year, at the same venue, the secretary of the CCWA, Mr W G Tickell, claimed the young wrestlers had a lot to learn and it was not good for the sport when the public sees such poor displays for a whole afternoon and suggested there was a need for good tuition to become accomplished.¹³⁵ The CCWA therefore suggested the formation of evening schools to teach boys the rudiments of wrestling, run by some of the best men who ‘...would go down from east to west to instruct boys if their travelling expenses were paid.’¹³⁶ This initiative proved to be very successful with several places starting ‘training schools’, which led to an increase of wrestlers, exemplified by Falmouth, where fifty to sixty young men received regular tuition from James Triggs, from Hayle, the former champion of South Africa.¹³⁷ The CCWA also sent letters to seventeen secondary schools with the proposal they introduce wrestling into the curriculum, but only received one reply from the head teacher of Probus College, who stated there was no time available to devote to it.¹³⁸ However, the Falmouth wrestling committee appeared to be more successful with this idea. At its annual general meeting in June 1930, the secretary, Tregoning Hooper, who was mostly responsible for the initiative, reported that,

[a] pleasant feature of the game last summer was the interest taken by the headmaster of the Falmouth Grammar School, Mr P D Goodall, who encouraged his lads to practice in the playing fields. He had shown an example which might well be copied by others.¹³⁹

In order to attract the best wrestlers to enter tournaments and thereby maximise the entertainment value for spectators the CCWA's policy was to ensure the prizes were appealing and therefore during the 1920s the number of cups, belts and medals awarded at tournaments gradually increased, so did their value and were presented by prominent individuals. The annual championship tournaments at designated venues where wrestlers competed to become the champion of Cornwall in different weight categories increased from three to five and the prizes, which also included money, were as follows: all weights (men over 160lbs) championship belt, worth forty five guineas, presented by Sir Edward Nicholl; middleweight (not exceeding 160lbs) championship belt, worth thirty guineas, presented by Commander A M Williams; lightweight (not exceeding 145lbs) championship belt, worth forty five guineas, presented by Sir Edward Nicholl; featherweight (not exceeding 130lbs) championship belt, worth twenty five guineas, presented by Captain G F Thomas-Peter; bantamweight (youths under 18) championship belt, worth fifteen guineas, presented by the *Western Morning News*. The following trophies were also awarded: the Shipwright Perpetual Challenge Cup, worth fifteen guineas, presented by Captain Denis Shipwright, wrestled for annually in the Falmouth-Penryn Parliamentary Division; the Pochin Challenge Trophy, worth twenty one guineas, presented by Messrs H D Pochin and Co, for the championship of the clay area and only for employees in the china clay industry; the Walter Hicks West Cornwall Trophy, worth fifty guineas, presented by Messrs Walter Hicks and Co., wrestled for annually in west Cornwall in open competitions; the London Cornish Association Special Prize of two guineas awarded annually to the novice gaining most points¹⁴⁰ during the season; the St Levan Cup, worth twenty one guineas, presented by Lord St Levan, awarded annually to the wrestler gaining most points in open competitions; the Lyons Tea Cup, worth thirty guineas, presented by Messrs J Lyons and Co., for boys under 16 years of age.¹⁴¹ There were also other trophies awarded at 'local' tournaments.

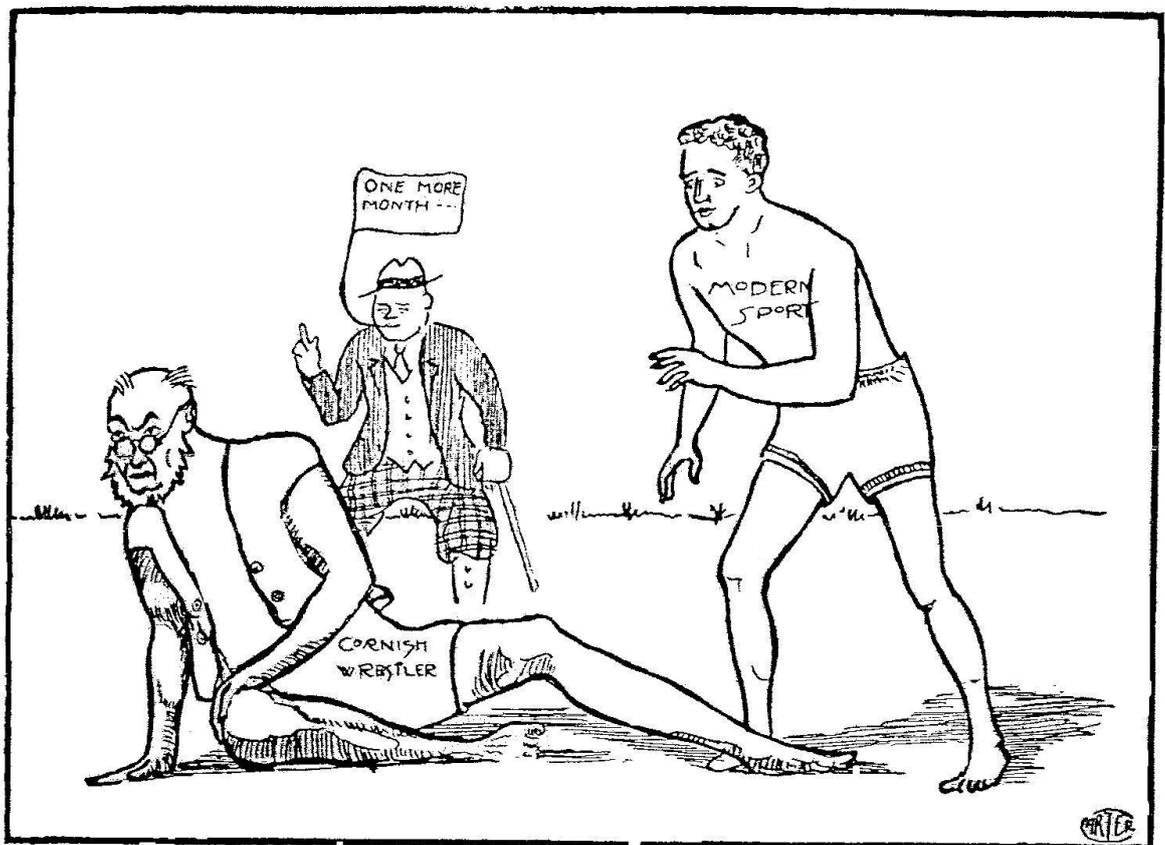
The CCWA also gave approval for a visit of eight prominent wrestlers, who were invited by the London Cornish Association, to give a fortnight's display of Cornish wrestling at the Palladium theatre in London, in the hope that it would popularise the sport in the capital. It was reported that a '...club had been started in London [...] and it was hoped next year to bring a number of men to Cornwall to take part in competitions,'¹⁴² although there is no evidence this took place. The CCWA party consisted of Fred Richards, from Roche, the heavyweight champion; Francis Gregory,

from St Wenn, the boys champion and runner-up in the heavyweight championship; Jack Glover, from Port Isaac, the middleweight champion; Walter Fish, from Bodmin, runner-up in the middleweight championship; Harry Gregory, from St Wenn the former middleweight champion; J C Brewer, from St Eval, the former lightweight champion; George Bazeley, from St Dennis; and Tom Richards, from Nanpean. They were in the charge of John Bray and Walter Bound, members of the CCWA, who also acted as sticklers.¹⁴³ The party was met at Paddington railway station by senior members of the London Cornish Association and then driven through the streets of London in a car with the label 'Champion Cornish Wrestlers who are appearing at the London Palladium'. The wrestling programme, which was opened by Sir Edward Nicholl, and Miss Diana Trevanion, who sang 'Trelawney', consisted of twenty to thirty minutes of wrestling three times a day, one period in the afternoon and two in the evening, when a challenge was issued to anybody in the audience to 'try a fall' with any wrestler, except Francis Gregory; anyone challenging him could not exceed sixteen years and nine months.¹⁴⁴ Whilst in London, the wrestlers were entertained by Sir Edward Nicholl, at his home in Shepperton, where he offered ten guineas of his own money to any man in London who could throw any of the wrestlers in fifteen minutes. He also offered twenty one pounds to any man of the same age and within five pounds in weight who could throw the young Gregory.¹⁴⁵ Although the wrestling was not a great draw, over the two weeks the wrestlers met fifty two challengers and only lost on one occasion, to the forty five year old Yukio Tani, a famous Japanese ju-jitsu expert, who threw Fish in just under five minutes.¹⁴⁶ Tani was originally lured to this country in 1899 to establish, with other Japanese experts, a judo school and although the idea failed he stayed and earned his living by touring music halls and theatres '...offering challengers £1 a minute for every minute they lasted beyond five and £50 if they defeated him.'¹⁴⁷ According to Johns, Cornish wrestlers appeared on two further occasions at the Palladium and at several other local theatres.¹⁴⁸

Despite the success of the CCWA in promoting Cornish wrestling during the 1920s, the sport suffered from a severe shortage of funds, which hampered progress. Money was usually raised through affiliation fees from each of the local wrestling committees and a percentage of the profits made at the championship tournaments, but this proved to be insufficient and the debts increased. Several ideas were put forward to increase funds, such as asking each affiliated committee for an annual additional guaranteed sum; to create one hundred vice-presidents at ten shillings and sixpence each; to appeal to Old

Cornwall Societies and to Cornish people abroad, to make donations to keep the sport alive. However, by 1930 the CCWA was unable to clear its debts sufficiently and therefore decided to suspend its activities; request the return of all the trophies, valued at three hundred pounds and place them in the care of the bank; ask each member to pay a share to clear the debt; and allow local committees to run tournaments under county rules on payment of five shillings (see fig. 6.3). The main reason for the debt was insufficient spectators attending tournaments, which led the secretary of one local wrestling committee to report that the ‘...accounts seemed to show that it was impossible to run a tournament without a loss.’¹⁴⁹

DOWN BUT NOT OUT



Cornish Wrestler : "The beginning of the end; I can't stick the pace."

[After hearing unfavourable reports, recommending the winding up of the association, the annual meeting of the Cornish Wrestling Association was adjourned for a month to give the secretary a chance to reduce the deficit.]

Fig. 6.3 Cartoon depicting the financial position of the CCWA in 1930¹⁵⁰

A number of reasons were suggested for the lack of interest in wrestling during this period, including an increase in counter-attractions, especially for the younger generation;¹⁵¹ several tournaments adversely affected by bad weather; the slow nature of some bouts, which delayed the afternoon's sport;¹⁵² and 'begging at the ring'.¹⁵³ A

major factor was the retirement of several prominent wrestlers who were popular draws, especially Fred Richards and Charlie Warne and the lack of any replacements in the public's affections;¹⁵⁴ it was suggested that up to twenty wrestlers had retired in 1926 as they were afraid of sustaining injuries (see table 4.5), which might have prevented them from earning a living and the effect this would have on their families¹⁵⁵ The CCWA did investigate the possibility of insuring the wrestlers, but the cost proved to be prohibitive and therefore resorted to a benevolent fund instead, which was itself a contributory factor in the accumulated debt¹⁵⁶ Another reason for dwindling crowds was the persistence of 'faggoting', or the suspicion that it might take place. Although it was rare in the 1920s, mainly as the CCWA was successful in stamping it out, it still took place; for example, in 1928, at an emergency meeting of the CCWA, two prominent wrestlers, Harry Gregory of Roche and Frank Gay of Falmouth were found guilty of faggoting. Consequently Gregory was suspended for twenty one days and ordered to return the Walter Hicks Cup and Gay was suspended for eight days.¹⁵⁷ Following an appeal for funds, several prominent individuals, including the Prince of Wales, Lord St Levan, Viscount Clifden, Sir John Langdon Bonython, and the Falmouth Old Cornwall Society donated varying sums of money, which cleared the debt and the CCWA was able to reform in July 1932.

Cornish Wrestling Association

In May 1933 the CCWA changed its name to the Cornish Wrestling Association (CWA) and the following officers were elected, who were to remain in office until 1939: Sir John Langdon Bonython as patron; Brig-Gen The Lord St Levan, CB, CVO, DL, as president; Viscount Clifden as vice-president; Mr W E Hawkey as treasurer; and Mr W Tregoning Hooper as secretary.¹⁵⁸ The choice of Hooper was not that surprising as he had probably done more to promote Cornish wrestling in the 1920s than any other individual; the Falmouth wrestling committee, of which he was secretary, had a credit balance each year, surviving on voluntary contributions from local organisations and individuals; a large group of young wrestlers practised most weeks and were successful in tournaments; and Falmouth was the '...only town in Cornwall where tournaments were run regularly, and where instruction was given to young men.'¹⁵⁹

At its first annual general meeting, in May 1933, the CWA agreed to introduce a rule limiting the duration of individual contests to fifteen minutes without a break and if no fall ensued it would be decided on points, which could, in finals and exceptional cases,

be extended by five minutes.¹⁶⁰ This change, which was a major transformation in the conduct of Cornish wrestling contests, was initiated in order to reduce the time it took to complete a tournament and thereby making the sport more entertaining for spectators. Significantly from 1933 until 1940, when it was decided to suspend 'official' tournaments, the CWA retained a credit balance.

The feature which came to dominate the nascent organisation in the period from 1933 until 1939 was the schism between those members of the CWA that wished to modernise Cornish wrestling and those from some of the local wrestling committees who wanted the sport to retain its 'traditional' form. From the outset of the formation of the CWA there were dissenting voices, who did not accept the rationale for a county-wide organisation, to which Hooper responded that it existed '...for one purpose only and that to promote the best interests of wrestlers and wrestling.'¹⁶¹ The incident which precipitated the schism occurred in July 1933, when members of the Mawgan wrestling committee decided to organise a tournament and Hooper wrote reminding them that they were not affiliated, the CWA had the sole responsibility for deciding fixtures and any wrestlers taking part would be debarred from any 'official' tournament.¹⁶² The secretary of the Mawgan wrestling committee responded to Hooper informing him that the 'unaffiliated' tournament would proceed without the CWA's permission and stating that tournaments had been held in the area for hundreds of years before the formation of a county organisation; that Cornish wrestling was Cornish wrestling '...only under, and in accordance with, the first made rules hundreds of years ago,' and did not need altering; St Austell were given permission to hold a tournament on the same day, but would receive only half the profits, whereas Mawgan will keep it all; and asked why they needed to ask permission.¹⁶³ By the following season, so many other wrestling committees, especially those in mid, east and north Cornwall, had agreed with the actions of Mawgan that they formed into the East Cornwall Wrestling Federation (ECWF) and severed their connections with the CWA.¹⁶⁴

Several attempts were made to bring the CWA and the ECWF together in order to seek a reconciliation not least because, as most tournament dates clashed, both organisations competed for spectators, and the CWA agreed to rescind the rule barring wrestlers participating in 'unauthorised' tournaments, but to no avail.¹⁶⁵ It appeared the main grievance of members of the ECWF was that they were opposed to altering age old rules, especially the introduction of the regulation limiting contests to fifteen minutes

and decisions on points, which they felt radically transformed the sport into something that was no longer Cornish wrestling. They were also opposed to the regulation which barred wrestlers from competing for championship trophies unless they had competed in at least three tournaments affiliated to the CWA. Other grievances included a belief that most wrestling and the best wrestlers were from the east of the county and yet championship meetings were held in the west and they were unwilling to disband at the behest of the CWA, especially as they had proven to be a successful organisation.¹⁶⁶

Inter-Celtic tournaments

A major feature of Cornish wrestling in the inter-war period, which was consistent with and formed part of, the much wider Cornish Revival, was the creation of regular tournaments, between teams of wrestlers from Cornwall and Brittany. There were very close parallels between the state of Cornish wrestling and that of Breton *gouren*: it had been an integral part of local feasts, but ceased to be in the twentieth century; after 1918 young Bretons lost interest in wrestling; and in the 1920s there were signs of a revival, especially at Hennebont, which became a centre for *gouren*, where gold belts were awarded to the winners of tournaments; but all progress was halted by the Second World War.¹⁶⁷ There was also a tension between those who viewed the sport as a traditional activity and those who saw the need to modernise.¹⁶⁸ Although the original suggestion for a meeting of the two regions was made by Henry Jenner in 1925,¹⁶⁹ the initiative was largely the work of Tregoning Hooper, who at first attempted, but failed to arrange for Breton wrestlers to give a demonstration of their style at the centenary celebration of the Cann versus Polkinghorne match at St Columb in August 1926.¹⁷⁰ However, the idea of a tournament really took shape in the summer of 1927 at the first Breton Gorsedd gathering since the First World War, held at Riec sur Belon.¹⁷¹ It was here that Hooper, leading the Cornish delegation, met Dr Charles Cotonnec, who was initiated as a bard. Cotonnec, who was born in 1876 near Quimperlé, studied medicine in Paris and returned to his home district to open a private clinic specialising in vascular diseases. He was very much involved in the Breton cultural movement, but became particularly interested in *gouren* and other physical exercises, which he saw as a way to combat contemporary social ills. He was influenced by the Olympic Games that were held in Paris in 1900 and towards the end of his life he planned to create a ‘Celtic Olympiad’, involving wrestling and other traditional sports between athletes from Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland and Wales – ‘Six countries! Only one soul!’¹⁷²

Hooper later described his first meeting with Dr Cotonnec thus:

It so happened that one of the features of the programme [at the Breton Gorsedd] was a Breton wrestling match. As soon as I saw the game I recognised it as being identical with Cornish wrestling. It seemed to be very popular, and the idea occurred to me that we could use this game as a means of promoting a closer friendship, confidence and understanding. I proposed to the Breton President the exchange of teams between Brittany and Cornwall; the President was a great Breton patriot and welcomed the idea.¹⁷³

Hooper and Cotonnec entered into a correspondence that culminated in the latter inviting Cornish wrestlers to compete against a team from Brittany at Quimperlé, which ‘...would be the first occasion for something like a thousand years that the Cornish and Bretons have met together for this historical game.’¹⁷⁴ At first the CCWA was reluctant to accept the invitation as there was a shortage of funds and the wrestlers were afraid they might lose their jobs during their absence, however, after re-considering the decision and an offer by Cotonnec of free passage and accommodation, a team of Cornish wrestlers competed against the Bretons in August 1928¹⁷⁵ (see appendix 21). This first Inter-Celtic tournament, which was watched by 6,000 spectators, was hailed as a ‘...resurrection of Breton wrestling...’¹⁷⁶ with one local newspaper declaring that within living memory, ‘...one never had seen such a considerable crowd of spectators around a wrestling ring, one never had seen gathered such a large number of the best wrestlers of Brittany...’¹⁷⁷

As the first Inter-Celtic tournament proved to be such a success, it was decided by the CCWA, influenced by Hooper, that despite continuing funding problems, attempts should be made to make it an annual event and a Breton team should be invited to Cornwall in 1929 to coincide with the Gorsedd Kernow, when members of the Breton Gorsedd would also be attending. The Gorsedd ceremony took place on 30th August 1929 on Carn Brea and the wrestling was held on the following day at nearby Trevenon Park, Pool, by kind permission of Captain J Paull, at the suggestion of Robert Morton Nance.¹⁷⁸ One contentious issue concerned the difference in the jackets; the Bretons found the Cornish jacket heavy and clumsy, whereas the Cornish wrestlers complained they could not get a proper grip on the comparatively lightweight Breton *chemise*.¹⁷⁹ However, this was resolved as each contest was the best of three falls, the wrestlers wore the jacket and chemise alternately and in the event that a third fall was required the choice of what to wear went to the wrestler who had obtained the fastest

back in the previous bout.¹⁸⁰ The CCWA also sent a rule book and a Cornish jacket to Dr Cotonnec, so that the Breton wrestlers could train with it and he in turn sent some Breton *chemises* to Hooper.¹⁸¹ The cash prizes and the trophies were valued at over £115, with each winner receiving £4 in cash and a serpentine trophy and each loser receiving £1 and a silver sugar bowl. One further prize, the Walter Hicks Challenge Cup, worth forty guineas, was a special contest, involving the winners of each bout wrestling against one another in the Cornish style, which was awarded to Francis Gregory.¹⁸² Gregory was a talented sportsman, who attempted professional boxing for a few months in 1928,¹⁸³ played rugby for Redruth RFC in the 1930s, signed professional terms for Wigan Rugby League Club in 1936 and later went on to be a successful professional wrestler,¹⁸⁴ retiring in 1963 in his early fifties. In an interview in 1965, Gregory informed the interviewer that, ‘Rugby was a tough sport in those days [1930s]. I suppose Rugby helped my wrestling and wrestling helped my Rugby – a bit of each.’¹⁸⁵ During the 1920s and 1930s many other leading rugby forwards also participated in Cornish wrestling including, Harold Curnow and Peano Knowles from Redruth, Frank Gay from Falmouth, Carter from Camborne; ‘...both sports complimented each other.’¹⁸⁶

The 1929 tournament, which was watched by 3,000 spectators, was considered to be such a success that it persuaded the CCWA to attempt to make it an annual event. In June 1930 Cotonnec invited a team of five wrestlers to Brittany, but as the CCWA was suspended, Tregoning Hooper was given permission to arrange it in a private capacity. In August, in the company of James Triggs and the five wrestlers, Hooper made what turned out to be a very rough Channel crossing, with most suffering from sea sickness and then a four hundred mile rail journey to Quimperlé. Although the tournament was successful, with approximately 8,000 spectators watching, Francis Gregory was the only Cornish wrestler to win in his weight category, but lost the all-weights championship event, which involved all the winners of the bouts wrestling each other; the prize was a gold belt and a live ram. One innovation introduced in this tournament was the wrestlers’ oath of loyalty or *serment du lutteur*, which was delivered by Cotonnec in Breton and French, followed by Hooper who spoke in Cornish and English. This oath which was accompanied by a handshake is now taken at all tournaments:

War ow enor ha war enor ow bro, my a de omdewlel, hep traytury na garowder,
hag avel ol ow lelder, my a ystyn ow luf dhe m contrary gans geryow ow
hendasow...Gwary Whek Yu Gwary Tek.

On my honour and the honour of my country, I swear to wrestle without treachery or brutality, and in testimony of my sincerity I offer my hand to my opponent and in the words of my forefathers... Good Play is Fair Play.¹⁸⁷

In response to this oath being taken, an article appeared in the *Old Cornwall* journal, which claimed that, based on the testimony of an old Cornish miner who witnessed wrestling in his youth, it was common practice for the wrestlers to take an oath before tournaments. What is not clear from this is whether it was taken in Cornish or English and if the one taken in 1930 was the same or similar.¹⁸⁸

Despite the Bretons agreeing to pay their own expenses, six residents of Camborne and Hayle subscribing £60¹⁸⁹ and the Prince of Wales sending a donation of two guineas towards the costs, the continuing financial difficulties experienced by the CCWA led to the cancellation of the Inter-Celtic tournament in 1931.¹⁹⁰ Hooper was therefore very keen to host the tournament in Cornwall in 1932, as it was not only the county's turn but it also coincided with the visit of the Celtic Congress, however, this also had to be abandoned for financial reasons. The CCWA therefore had to face the humiliation of accepting Cotonnec's offer to host it in Brittany, and to pay the expenses of five wrestlers and two managers for a week.¹⁹¹ Francis Gregory was again the only Cornish wrestler to beat a Breton, which led Hooper to conclude that, '[t]heir wrestlers are quicker, better trained, and cleverer than ours...' and they rely more on skill and science than do the Cornish who simply use brute force. He recommended the CCWA introduce measures to reverse the weaknesses, but given the lack of funds it was in no position to do so.¹⁹²

The next Inter-Celtic tournament was held in Cornwall at Redruth Recreation Ground in August 1933, in the same week as the Gorseth Kernow gathering, before an appreciative crowd of 3,000 people. Before the wrestling began all the wrestlers entered the ring, shook hands with their adversaries, kissed, and Hooper and the Breton manager, Leon took the wrestlers' oath in their respective languages. The Bretons were again more successful than their Cornish opponents, winning four of the six contests, although Francis Gregory was again a winner. After the wrestling had finished and the prizes distributed, Mr Edmund Hambly, from Port Isaac, the founder and secretary of the newly formed Tyr-ha-Tavas ('Land and Language'), an organisation aimed at inspiring young people, especially to use the Cornish language, made a speech urging boys to take up wrestling.¹⁹³

In 1934 the Inter-Celtic tournament, which was held in Quimperlé, Brittany, was also a successful event, witnessed by 8,000 spectators, when again Francis Gregory was the only Cornish winner. Hooper reported that prior to the tournament two young brothers gave a display of Breton wrestling, which convinced him that what was necessary was for Cornish wrestlers to practice intensively, more young men to take up the sport and the establishment of training clubs. His conclusion was that ‘[o]ur men were all unanimous as to the far superior standard of Breton players.’¹⁹⁴

The next and what proved to be the last Inter-Celtic tournament before war interrupted proceedings was held at Newquay in August 1936; the tournament in 1935 being cancelled out of respect for Dr Charles Cotonnec who died earlier that year and the ones planned for 1937 and 1938 were also cancelled.¹⁹⁵ In the 1936 tournament, which was witnessed by 5,000 spectators, the Cornish wrestlers, who wore black and gold sashes, again came second best to their Breton adversaries, who wore red. Francis Gregory was again the only successful Cornish wrestler, the seventh tournament in succession when he went undefeated in his weight category, which underlined his outstanding ability. A notable feature of this tournament was that of four wrestlers representing Cornwall, John and Bernard Chapman were brothers and so were Harry and Francis Gregory, which clearly demonstrates the importance of families in Cornish wrestling.¹⁹⁶

Conclusion

The revival of Cornish wrestling during the inter-war period was most marked from 1923, with the modernising developments initiated by the CCWA, which led directly to a discernible increase in the number of regular county-wide and ‘local’ fixtures; the introduction for the first time of championship contests in different weight categories; the proliferation of prizes in the form of cups, medals, trophies and especially belts; the introduction of rules controlling the conduct of wrestlers, including penalties for infringements; and the introduction of timed bouts with an associated points system to determine winners. However, the revival, which was a relatively short-lived phenomenon, was not a smooth development, as there were some years that were more successful than others, especially 1926, when a team of wrestlers performed on the stage of the Palladium theatre in London, whilst at the start of the 1930s the death of the sport looked the most likely scenario, but it staged a partial recovery from 1933 with the formation of the CWA. The revival was also not without its difficulties, with the

constant struggle by the CCWA to find the funds for its activities and especially the tension that existed from the outset between those who saw modernisation as the means to save Cornish wrestling and those who saw no need to make any changes to its traditional form. Although the consequent schism between the CCWA and the ECWF weakened Cornish wrestling, with two sets of ‘official’ championships, both organisations were successful in staging regular fixtures and attracting spectators.

The revival of Cornish wrestling, which has usually been given scant attention by scholars who have concentrated on other issues, especially antiquarianism, hagiography and linguistics, must be seen as a constituent part of the much broader Cornish Revival. From the outset, with the formation of the CKK, Cornish wrestling was seen by the Revivalists as integral to the Celticising of Cornish culture, although it was not until the CCWA was formed in 1923 that the sport was fully part of the project. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s a number of the more renowned Revivalists were involved either directly or indirectly in the sport, sometimes offering verbal support and at other times being actively involved. However, probably the most influential individual during the period was William Tregoning Hooper, who did more than anybody in transforming Cornish wrestling into a ‘modern’ sport. Although it is generally recognised that the Cornish Revival in general was unable to relate to the broad mass of the Cornish population, Cornish wrestling was much more effective in appealing to ordinary people. Most tournaments were regularly watched by hundreds of spectators throughout the period and some had crowds of thousands, although it is acknowledged that there was a decrease by the late 1930s. The wrestlers were ordinary working men competing for the chance to win small amounts of money at a time when it was a scarce commodity, together with gaining recognition in their communities. Many of these became household names, such as the Chapman brothers and Francis Gregory, who were working class heroes. The exploits of the wrestlers, especially against the Bretons, were carried in the local newspapers and read by many, whereas other aspects of the Cornish Revival were always only a minority interest.

The Inter-Celtic tournaments in particular were arguably a Revivalist project *nonpareil*, with Cornish and Bretons meeting and socialising together as a common Celtic people; the wrestling as the *lingua franca*; the wrestler’s oath given in the two Celtic languages; the determination of those involved in Cornish wrestling, especially Tregoning Hooper,

to proceed, even when funds were strained; and the thousands of people who watched that clearly demonstrated how popular these events were.

According to Payton the revival of Cornish wrestling was consistent with the 'making do' popular culture, which had overtaken Cornwall; it was '...the private practice of a private Cornish sport in an atmosphere of making do...' ¹⁹⁷ Rather than affiliate to a 'national' governing body, which was the practice with most other sports, the Cornish chose to create an association that only had governance at local level and continued to promote a sport limited to a single county, although Graeco-Roman and freestyle had become the accepted forms of wrestling for national and international competitions. The 'making do' nature of Cornish wrestling is best revealed in the way the CCWA and the CWA dealt with its debt problems. Throughout the whole of the inter-war period when the sport struggled to finance itself, it was reactive rather than proactive in seeking, or hoping for, the support of donations from individuals and organisations, including Cornish people living abroad. For example, in June 1938, Tregoning Hooper announced at a CWA meeting that he had received a \$5 donation from a Dr Trevarrow, from California, to help to keep wrestling alive. ¹⁹⁸

All the progress made during the revival of the 1920s and 1930s was abruptly halted with the Second World War and Cornish wrestling did not fully recover in the 1940s and 1950s.

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PART 4: 'THIRD PERIPHERALISM'

CHAPTER 7: The survival of Cornish wrestling

Introduction

The brief, though discernible revival of Cornish wrestling in the 1920s and 1930s, described in detail in the previous chapter, was abruptly halted by the Second World War, as all 'official' tournaments sanctioned by either the CWA or ECWF were abandoned, although there may have been a few 'local' competitions that went unreported. However, there was clearly an appetite for Cornish wrestling, as tournaments recommenced in the late 1940s, and from then until the present day it has experienced alternating periods of decline and relative revival. The period is characterised by funding shortages that seriously hampered progress, although the debt levels experienced by the CCWA in the 1930s did not recur; the determination by the CWA to continue to organise Inter-Celtic tournaments in the face of those funding shortages; a lack of active wrestlers entering a handful of tournaments; a poor level of wrestling skill as compared to the inter-war period, that was particularly exposed against better prepared and more able Breton wrestlers; the attempts by the CWA to encourage more young men to take up the sport and to develop their skills through coaching; and the growth in counter-attractions. Cornish wrestling also continued to be viewed as an integral part of the Cornish Revival, demonstrated by its involvement in various 'Celtic' festivals and other cultural events; the interest taken by Cornish nationalists, especially Mebyon Kernow, whose journal *Cornish Nation* carried regular articles about the sport and the establishment of the International Federation of Celtic Wrestling. A surprising development related to the Revival is the renaissance of interest in the sport in the diaspora, especially in Australia since the 1970s, where there are a group of young wrestlers who compete in tournaments at times when Cornish identity is celebrated.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed examination of Cornish wrestling in the post-war period in both Cornwall and the diaspora against a backdrop of a constant shortage of funds and an increased number of counter-attractions.

Cornish wrestling since the Second World War

Cornish wrestling tournaments recommenced in the late 1940s, and according to Mudd experienced a 'surging revival' in 1949,¹ but in the 1950s there was a noticeable

decline, although it is not easy to substantiate these claims as the sport was only occasionally reported in local newspapers. It is therefore not possible to chart the numbers of tournaments and wrestlers in as much detail as in previous chapters, however, there is enough evidence from a variety of sources to be able to state that since the Second World War the sport has suffered from small numbers of wrestlers, entering a handful of tournaments and witnessed by few people. One major reason for the revival of Cornish wrestling in the late 1940s was that the schism between the CWA and the ECWF was finally ended when the two organisations put their differences to one side and merged, ‘...although not always in complete accord.’² In order to ensure harmony between wrestling interests from the east and west of the county, the newly merged governing body appointed two honorary secretaries, Tregoning Hooper, the former secretary of the CWA and Mr B. Jane, from Bodmin, the former secretary of the ECWF, who worked together for a number of years.³

An important feature in the development of Cornish wrestling was the introduction of the sport into the Physical Education curriculum of Truro Cathedral School in 1949, largely due to the efforts of Lieut-Col. E.W. Cannings, MC, of the Cornwall Army Cadet Force (CACF), supported by the head teacher, Mr S.M. Mischler.⁴ Cannings was also responsible for introducing the sport to members of the CACF.⁵ The former lightweight champion of Cornwall, Thomas Cundy, was appointed to run coaching sessions at the school and by the late 1950s he was training over thirty boys on a regular basis, with more than half of the entries at tournaments during the period consisting of current or former pupils of the school;⁶ the schoolboy champion was also a pupil at the school.⁷ An interesting aspect of this training was that, in order to reduce injuries the boys wrestled on sawdust, which was the usual practice in Brittany.⁸ Cornish wrestling was also introduced at Falmouth Grammar School in the 1950s, which was successful for a brief period, but it was not sustained.⁹

The training experienced by the boys had a lasting influence on the sport, with many developing into skilled and successful performers as adults; for example, in 1962 at Chacewater a tournament that opened the Carnival Week included a large contingent of boys from Truro Cathedral School, who ‘...figured prominently in the list of winners’¹⁰ and at the prize-giving, the chair of the Carnival Committee, Mr Kenneth Buckingham, commented that the head teacher was a ‘...a champion of the sport...’ and his pupils were the ‘...coming generation of Cornish wrestlers.’¹¹ One of the most successful

former pupils during this period was Peter Sheldon, from Padstow, who won amongst many other first, second or third prizes, the Lyons Tea Cup for boys under 16, at St Kew in 1957; the Western Morning News Championship belt for youths under 18, at Truro in 1960; the Lewis Cup at Wadebridge in 1962 and 1965; the Col. Williams Cup, at St Columb, in 1964; and the Walter Hicks and Co. Cup for the light-heavyweight championship, at St Merryn, in 1965. He also won the Inter-Celtic light-heavyweight championship, at Wadebridge in 1965 and was chosen as part of the Cornish team against Brittany in 1963, at Belle-Ile en Terre, at Plouaret in 1964 and Le Faouet in 1966.¹²

During the 1960s Cornish wrestling underwent a minor revival, partly boosted by current and former pupils of Truro Cathedral School; for example in the 1963 season seventy wrestlers took part in seven tournaments and the secretary of the CWA, reported that, ‘Cornish wrestling is now at as high a standard as it has been for many years...’¹³ In this year the local artist S.L. Bennet presented a painting to the Royal Institution of Cornwall, depicting two wrestlers in a hitch with three sticklers watching attentively and surrounded by an interested crowd at a tournament held at Chacewater, ‘...so that future generations of Cornishmen may be able to see an artist’s impression of one of Cornwall’s ancient sports.’¹⁴

The secretary of the CWA in 1963 was Tregoning Hooper, who had taken over on the death of his father and who shared the same forename, and was similarly initiated as a bard of the Gorseth Kernow in 1964, taking the bardic name of Car Omdowl (‘Friend of Wrestling’).¹⁵ In 1964, Hooper led a group of CWA officials when they met a delegation from the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR), who visited Cornwall to discuss and advise on training methods and facilities, which followed on from the Wolfenden Report that recommended what action statutory and voluntary bodies should take to allow sport to play a ‘...full part in promoting the general welfare of the community.’¹⁶ Although little came of the meeting, it was hoped that the CCPR would offer support for the plan to open new training centres in order to arouse greater interest in wrestling, especially in the west of the county, where there was ‘...little opportunity for young men to take up the sport.’¹⁷ In that year there was indoor winter training on mats for youngsters at Wadebridge and Chacewater, but the CWA wanted to increase the number of centres, persuade former wrestlers from Camborne, Falmouth and Redruth to act as coaches and to introduce Cornish wrestling into schools, on the

same basis as Truro Cathedral School.¹⁸ According to Sheldon, who was interviewed by Tresillian in 1965, there were enough keen youngsters, it was more tournaments that was required; ‘...the more action we get, the better the standard of the wrestling.’¹⁹ He had a point, as in that year there were only a handful of tournaments arranged, most of which were to decide the champions at the various weights, although one was at the Cornwall County Youth Camp, Porthpean, during an international event attended by over three hundred students from across Europe.²⁰

The minor revival of the 1960s continued into the 1970s enabling Rawe to claim that ‘[w]e have some young and ardent wrestlers of whom we can be proud,’ and that tournaments attract ‘...considerable numbers of spectators.’²¹ This seemed to hold true for the whole of the decade as Aver, writing in 1978, suggested that despite the decline in popularity compared to the previous century, the sport was still very much alive, with an average of seven tournaments per season.²² There are three features of the 1970s that help to explain the continued popularity of Cornish wrestling. Firstly, every Wednesday evening during the winter, training sessions for novices were introduced in 1975, at Carn Brea Leisure Centre, near Camborne, taken by Tom Burley and Brian Kendall. Despite it being a relatively short-lived phenomenon the initiative did lead to an increase in the number of youngsters entering tournaments; for example, Harris noted that there were many novices coming forward, with more than twenty at one tournament.²³ Secondly, also in 1975, Brian Kendall produced *The Art of Cornish Wrestling*,²⁴ which with the help of line drawings and descriptions of all the holds and throws by three former champion wrestlers, Bernard Chapman, Harry Gregory and Thomas Cundy, provided the first ever coaching manual of Cornish wrestling. As it was relatively inexpensive it proved to be not only readily accessible to novices and seasoned wrestlers alike, but also very popular and was reprinted in 1990. Prior to this, the technical aspects of the sport were orally transmitted. Thirdly, in 1976 at St Columb, on the 150th anniversary of the famous challenge match held at Morice Town, Devonport, a tournament was held as part of the August Carnival Week festivities, to celebrate and honour James Polkinghorne²⁵ and was accompanied by the publication of a booklet by Ivan Rabey about the 1826 clash.²⁶ A further initiative introduced by the CWA to achieve its objective of promoting and fostering the sport, was the use of demonstration events, which became and still is a regular feature of the annual wrestling fixtures; for example, in 1974 Harris noted that wrestlers travelled long distances to raise money for charity, the furthest being Crediton, in east Devon.²⁷

The progress made in the 1960s and 1970s was consolidated in the 1980s. For example, it was reported in 1980 that Cornish wrestling was making a comeback, with the first championship tournament held at Penzance for thirty years and the introduction of a championship for under fourteen boys at St Erth, to encourage more youngsters to come forward to wrestle. Both these developments were due to the work of the Penwith Cornish Wrestling Association.²⁸ Also in 1980, Dunkley noted that although there were only approximately fifty active Cornish wrestlers entering tournaments on a regular basis, he was encouraged by the introduction of tuition in Cornish wrestling at Helston Comprehensive School.²⁹ This initiative produced a number of young wrestlers, but it was another relatively short-lived phenomenon. In order to encourage boys and young men to enter tournaments the CWA introduced competitions for those under ten, twelve, fourteen, sixteen and eighteen. Trevenna also reported that there were wrestling classes being held regularly at Lostwithiel, St Mawgan and Sithney, which in the mid 1980s provided the majority of young wrestlers, including his own son who won the championship for his age group in 1985.³⁰ Increasingly training sessions during the winter months took place indoors on mats.³¹ The various initiatives to encourage more wrestlers to enter tournaments had some effect as towards the end of the 1980s, Dale was able to state that there were approximately sixty active wrestlers, with between twenty and twenty five who participated in any one of seven or eight tournaments per season.³²

At the beginning of the 1990s Cornish wrestling appeared to be in a healthy position. For example, in 1993 nine tournaments were held; seventy nine wrestlers participated, which included twenty two seniors and fifty seven juniors; the CWA gave demonstrations of the sport at twenty one venues, including a visit to Scotland; the majority of young wrestlers were trained at wrestling clubs, a relatively recent phenomenon, at St Ives, Troon, Saltash and Truro, with plans to introduce others; the annual championship events were reinstated having been abandoned at one point; and for the first time women wrestlers had their own competition.³³ Much of this progress resulted from the efforts of the then secretary of the CWA, Trevor Lawrence, from Penzance, who was initiated as a bard of the Gorseth Kernow in 1984, taking the bardic name of Omdowlor Gans Geryow ('Wrestler with Words').³⁴ One area in which Lawrence and the CWA wanted to instigate, but as in previous decades were unsuccessful, was to introduce wrestling into Cornish schools, assisted by current and

former wrestlers sharing their knowledge; all previous initiatives in schools, which were only temporary, resulted from the support given by head teachers.³⁵ Lawrence also noted that during Easter week for a brief period during the 1990s a small group of Cornish wrestlers attended training sessions at the Breton school of wrestling, at Lorient, where all styles of Celtic wrestling were taught.³⁶ Another notable feature of the 1990s was the publication by Christopher Johns of an inexpensive booklet on Cornish wrestling, which apart from Kendall's book, was the only one available on the topic.³⁷ Despite containing some interesting details and a few photographs that had never been printed before, there was an absence of references to literature and therefore it lacked any academic rigour.

At the end of the 1990s, Hosken, the editor of *Cornish World*, in welcoming the decision by the European Union to recognise Cornish as an endangered minority language, reminded readers that, '...there is another, equally old and important part of our culture that requires similar attention.'³⁸ He appealed to his readers to not let Cornish wrestling die and suggested '...it would be better to support it now than try to bring it back from the dead.'³⁹ In January 2001 the BBC 2 television series, *Close Up*, dedicated one of its weekly programmes in the south west region to the sport, warning that it was in danger of disappearing completely. The programme, which was entitled *The Final Round?*, was narrated by the veteran broadcaster, Ted Gundry of BBC Radio Cornwall, whose great, great grandfather was Capt. Tom Gundry, the famous wrestler of the mid nineteenth century. The main focus of the programme was the build-up to the Cornish wrestling heavyweight championship tournament held at St Minver in 2000 and especially the personal contest between the defending champion, Glyn Jones, from Quintrell Downs and Gerry Cawley, originally from St Mawgan. The match had an added competitive edge as Jones, who is a black belt *judoka*, with twenty four years experience, had dominated Cornish wrestling since he first took up the sport in 1998, whereas Cawley, who at the time was thirty eight and had wrestled for twenty three years, resented the corrupting influence of judo upon his sport and was determined to regain the title.⁴⁰ Although the contest was won by Jones for the third consecutive year, Cawley later regained the title at Helston in 2007 at the age of forty four. Jones won the title again in 2001 which proved to be the last contest he fought, as he decided to retire from the sport, due to the attitude of the Cornish wrestling fraternity, who he felt never made him feel welcome. In response to comments made by the chair of the CWA at its annual dinner, when he warned that the sport was facing extinction unless more

wrestlers and officials could be found,⁴¹ Jones submitted a letter to *The West Briton*, in which he stated:

In my opinion all the people who are on the committee and who run the wrestling have their heads stuck in the last century and refuse to move with the times. If you are not Cornish [he was originally from North Devon, but lived in Cornwall since 1981] or in a real Cornish job [he worked for McDonalds, the restaurant chain] then you are a real pariah. They do not actively teach the sport and do nothing to publicise it, and then wonder why nobody turns up on the day to fight.⁴²

Jones's comments must have struck a chord, as the CWA introduced a number of initiatives in the 2000s in order to ensure the survival of the sport. Firstly, it affiliated to the British Wrestling Association (BWA), the national governing body for amateur wrestling in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in order to raise its profile.⁴³ Secondly, four young members of the CWA travelled to Greater Manchester, the home of the BWA, to train as coaches and were given the role to establish training centres in strategic parts of Cornwall, recruit youngsters and coach them in the techniques of Cornish wrestling. There are now successful training centres in west and north Cornwall.⁴⁴ Thirdly, the CWA produced a coaching DVD of forty two minutes duration, intended for schools and youth groups, in which the major holds and throws used in Cornish wrestling are demonstrated.⁴⁵ Use has also been made of *YouTube*, with several videos of wrestling bouts uploaded on the site. Fourthly, the CWA holds three or four exhibition or demonstration bouts each season to popularise the sport, including a regular appearance at the Royal Cornwall Show each June.⁴⁶ Lastly, in order to assist with the cost of staging tournaments the CWA has relatively recently accepted sponsorship from local businesses, something which has been a regular feature of most amateur sport in this country for many years; for example the tournament held on Cathedral Green, Truro, in September 2008 was sponsored by Winter Rule, a firm of chartered accountants and Kall Kwik Printing.⁴⁷

Throughout the entire post-war period the CWA has constantly had to face funding shortages, which has meant that it has not been able to stage many tournaments; for example, throughout the 2000s there have been no more than five or six each season, mostly to decide the championships at the different weight categories, although occasionally there are open tournaments.⁴⁸ For many local wrestling committees the cost of staging a tournament has been beyond their resources; for example in 1959 at Truro the cost of staging a tournament was over £34, yet only £14 was received through entrance fees.⁴⁹ This led some local wrestling committees to give up staging

tournaments due to a lack of funds; for example, Tresillian noted in 1965 that two traditional wrestling venues, Chacewater and St Columb had decided not to hold tournaments any more.⁵⁰ The problem of funding was recognised by Tregoning Hooper junior, who noted that without the support of a few generous donors, such as the Old Cornwall Societies, the London Cornish Association and the Duchy of Cornwall, who provided voluntary contributions the sport would have to cease, a situation which has not changed dramatically in the past forty years.⁵¹ Apart from donations, income was raised by a combination of affiliation fees from wrestlers through their local wrestling committees and gate receipts from spectators, which were used to assist the cost of staging the annual tournaments, including the cash awards to the winners, the expenses paid to the beaten wrestlers, the sticklers' fees and the insurance premium in the event of any injuries to wrestlers. There was also the need to build up a fund to host Inter-Celtic tournaments. Hooper therefore had no alternative but to appeal for donations from interested individuals or organisations throughout Cornwall, asserting that Cornish wrestling was '...worthy of preservation, developing as it does the physique, manliness and character of our Cornish youth...'⁵² Similarly in 1971, Rawe indicated that as the CWA needed £500 to host an Inter-Celtic tournament at Wadebridge in the following year, it needed donations and therefore appealed to '...anyone sufficiently patriotic and interested in inter-Celtic relations to contribute...'⁵³ Plummer also suggested that a lack of funds prevented many youngsters from taking advantage of the training sessions at Carn Brea Leisure Centre, as they had no transport.⁵⁴ More recently the CWA made an application for a small grant to the South West England Heritage Lottery Fund, but was rejected on the grounds that the funding body '...did not want to encourage Cornish nationalism.'⁵⁵ Angarrack also noted that an application by the CWA for assistance from the European Union Social Fund was simply ignored and the Cornish cultural element of Objective 1 was spent in enhancing and promoting the tourism industry.⁵⁶

Another major problem that has affected Cornish wrestling in the post war period has been the increase in counter-attractions. As early as 1958, Hooper suggested that football, tennis, cricket, the cinema and motorbikes posed a big threat to the survival of Cornish wrestling, as they were proving to be more appealing to young men than Cornwall's oldest sport.⁵⁷ It was also suggested that, as many youngsters played other sport on Saturday afternoons, the CWA should investigate the possibility of staging tournaments on Sundays.⁵⁸ However, it was the growth in the popularity of judo which became a particular issue for the CWA. Between 1965 and 1977 the number of judo

clubs affiliated to the British Judo Association, the national governing body for the sport in the United Kingdom, nearly doubled, which resulted in a dramatic rise in the number of individual members, especially amongst juniors (see table 7.1). This growth can partly be explained by the inclusion of the sport in the Olympic Games programme from 1964, but also the popularity of martial arts in general. It is unclear how many judo clubs and junior members were actually created in Cornwall, what is known is that many young men with judo experience entered Cornish wrestling tournaments as novices. Many talented wrestlers, such as Keith Sandercock, Chris Hunt, Richard Rowe in the 1970s and Glyn Jones more recently, first entered the ring as novices but with judo experience,⁵⁹ and were successful, which made some members of the wrestling fraternity resentful, ‘...seeing it as an intrusion on a previous Cornish preserve and fearing it now may bastardise the Cornish style.’⁶⁰ One writer complained that ‘...Cornish wrestling is a game of close encounters: the “Cornish hug” was a by-word and the wary, arms-reach circling of Judo do not seem to be in keeping.’⁶¹ Fearing the deleterious influence of judo upon Cornish wrestling, the CWA introduced a rule that barred those with a brown belt or above from entering novice competitions, which has only served to maintain the gulf between the two sporting traditions.⁶² According to Thomas, a retired farmer who is also a member of the CWA, ‘[w]restling is open to all comers and we do get some judo players in these days and these black belts they are handy chaps...but thankfully the Cornish boys can usually beat them – they can hold their own.’⁶³

Table 7.1: Trends in judo club membership⁶⁴

	1965	1970	1975	1978	1979	1980
Clubs	580	509	993	1,014	901	953
Individual seniors		7,800	12,300	7,300	7,600	9,830
Individual juniors		4,900	3,700	27,410	27,650	32,180

Some commentators have suggested other factors which have adversely affected Cornish wrestling. For example, Lawrence noted that at one time it was common practice for fathers to teach their sons how to wrestle, but the ‘Great Migration’ led to less fathers in Cornwall, leaving sons without tutors.⁶⁵ However this tradition has not disappeared completely; for example in a recent interview Ashley Cawley stated that,

The first person to teach me was my Dad [Gerry], as it should be done – passed down from father to son. Took me out on the green with a canvas loose jacket, two ropes on the front, and showed me some of the throws and moves...it's part of our Cornish heritage, I love how it's passed down from father to son, it's unique from every other sport and I want it to live on, and be passed down and I'll pass it down to my sons.⁶⁶

Related to this, Mudd suggested that, despite the 'baby boom', the average size of families has been reduced and this has '...coincided with the fall-off of support and interest in Cornish wrestling from the mid 1960s onwards.'⁶⁷ The reduced number of wrestlers also had the effect of reducing the number of sticklers, as they were almost always recruited from a pool of retired wrestlers⁶⁸ and those that do act as sticklers have been neutralised '...in favour of the committee man bustling from his tent in case of a doubtful decision.'⁶⁹ Mudd suggests another reason why Cornish wrestling lacked public support, was because it was too gentlemanly. He recounts the occasion when Tregoning Hooper, senior, was stopped by a man whilst walking in St Columb, who accused him of ruining Cornish wrestling by making it too respectable, '...the working man wants to see blood fights, two punch-drunk men in the ring...you have stopped all that.'⁷⁰ More recently, Thomas observed that the CWA are reasonably successful at getting youngsters to attend training sessions and encouraging them to enter tournaments where they might win a minor trophy, '...but when the competition gets a little bit stronger and they don't win anything then we don't see them anymore.' He also noted the training sessions are free to youngsters and '...I think sometimes people are happier to pay for sport/entertainment,' they seem to value it more.⁷¹

Inter-Celtic wrestling tournaments

The rehabilitation of the Cornish Revival in the post war period was clearly manifested through the re-establishment of the Inter-Celtic wrestling tournaments that were such a feature of the 1930s, which according to Mudd, '...did so much to revive the sport in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s.'⁷² The first of these tournaments was held in August 1947 at Plouay, in Brittany (see appendix 22), witnessed by the entire village, who turned the event into a festival in honour of their visitors. Apart from the fact that the Cornish team was victorious and three members of the Chapman family won their bouts, a significant feature of this tournament was the publicity it received from *Picture Post*, the popular photojournalistic national weekly magazine of the 1940s and 1950s, which not only published an article under the title, *Britons meet Bretons*, but also emphasised the common ancestral background of the two groups.⁷³ This was not the

first occasion when Cornish and Breton wrestlers had met since the previous official Inter-Celtic wrestling tournament was held at Newquay in 1936. In 1945 Ealing Studios released the film *Johnny Frenchman*, directed by Charles Frend and produced by Michael Balcon, which was about the rivalry before and during the Second World War between Cornish and Breton fishermen. It was filmed in Mevagissey and included real Cornish villagers and members of the Free French resistance movement amongst the cast. Interestingly, the exiled French actor, Francoise Rosay, who plays the matriarchal owner of a fishing boat, was unable to understand the Breton language used by the crew.⁷⁴ One of the scenes involves a wrestling tournament between the Cornish and Breton fishermen and held in a Breton village, in which the two rivals for the affections of the same girl, played by Patricia Roc, are matched against one another in the final and deciding contest. The Cornishman controversially wins the contest when he uses a move thought to be unsporting by the Bretons and his opponent is forced to retire through injury. The contest that preceded this includes actual Cornish wrestlers, who are not credited, but believed to be two of the Chapman family. Although the film was not critically acclaimed, it is interesting to note that the director could have chosen a fist fight to depict the rivalry between the Cornish and Breton fishermen, but chose wrestling instead as a deliberate marker of Cornishness.⁷⁵

In August 1948 a Breton team visited Cornwall and the Inter-Celtic wrestling tournament was held at Newquay, when the home team won four bouts to one, with all winners coming from the Chapman family (see appendix 21). There was no tournament held in 1949, but in 1950 the Cornish team visited Brittany, where the wrestling formed part of the *Fête de Cornouaille*, at Quimper, when the Cornish team were soundly beaten five bouts to nil.⁷⁶ In August 1951, the Inter-Celtic tournament was again held at Newquay before a large Bank Holiday crowd, which the Cornish team won three bouts to two. Originally Tregoning Hooper had planned to stage a tournament in Cornwall as part of the Festival of Britain, to celebrate the 600th anniversary of *La Bataille de Trente* fought in Brittany on 26th March 1351 between thirty largely English knights and thirty French and Bretons, however this did not take place.⁷⁷ In August 1952 the Inter-Celtic tournament was held at Callac, in Brittany, when again four members of the Cornish team were from the Chapman family, but only one of them was able to win his contest, the Cornish team losing five bouts to one. This proved to be the last Inter-Celtic tournament for eleven years, due to the death of Tregoning Hooper, senior and internal strife within the *Fédération des Amis des Lutttes et Sports Athlétiques Bretons*

(FALSAB), the governing body of Breton sports, established by Dr Charles Cotonnec in 1930, which included *gouren*.⁷⁸ FALSAB was divided into two opposing camps, which had striking parallels with the schism that affected Cornish wrestling in the 1930s; there were those who supported modernisation of Breton wrestling, with the introduction of such things as time limits, weight categories and a points system; whilst the other group insisted that the traditional summer tournaments should be conducted *mod kozh* ('old style'), on sawdust rings with wrestlers issuing challenges as they competed for a ram.⁷⁹

The Inter-Celtic wrestling tournaments were revived in August 1963, at Belle-Ile en Terre in Brittany, when the Bretons won four bouts to two and were presented with the W. Tregoning Hooper Memorial Cup, a perpetual trophy given by Mrs Hooper senior, in memory of her late husband, to be competed for at Inter-Celtic tournaments. Although the Cornish were beaten, FALSAB '...were so impressed by our wrestlers that they have extended a further invitation for us to visit them again in 1964...' which had the beneficial effect of delaying the problem of raising funds for hosting the Bretons in Cornwall.⁸⁰ The Bretons retained the W. Tregoning Hooper Memorial Cup in 1964, when the tournament was held at Plouaret, in Brittany, witnessed by 3,500 people. Two further tournaments were held in Brittany during the visit; one at Benodet, between the Cornish team and the inter-regional champions of Brittany, watched by 1,000 people; and the other at Le Resto, before 4,000. Although the Cornish only lost the Inter-Celtic championship narrowly, they also lost the other two tournaments and '[i]n general the Breton wrestlers are superior to our men, especially when wrestling in their close-fitting Breton shirts,' which Hooper thought was due to the '...greater opportunities for competition in Brittany.'⁸¹ In 1964 there were 150 wrestlers registered with FALSAB and had staged seventy tournaments, whereas the CWA had only fifty wrestlers and organised six tournaments.⁸² Despite losing the tournament the Cornish wrestlers were held in high regard, which is indicated by the following poem written by Angela Deval, the renowned 'Peasant Poetess', who farmed in the hamlet of Traoñ an Dour:

To the Wrestlers of Cornwall
In celebration of their visit to Traoñ an Dour on 11th August 1964

Welcome! Brothers from overseas
Britons fine and hardy
Thank you for the honour
Which you do to Traoñ an Dour

Fearless Cornishmen
Descendants of Arthur
My home and my heart
Are open to you

And may we always be
As family for ever
Brothers in the struggle
For the honour of our homeland⁸³

The Inter-Celtic tournaments continued to be held from the 1960s through to 1980, when due to continual funding difficulties experienced by both wrestling governing bodies, they ceased to be staged. During this entire period the vast majority of tournaments were won by Brittany and they therefore retained the Tregoning Hooper Memorial Cup, with the notable exception of 1979 at St Stephen-in-Brannel, when Cornwall won the encounter five bouts to two, which ‘...was a tremendous victory by the Cornish wrestlers considering the Bretons have 1,000 to pick from in comparison with our 50...’⁸⁴ Although the original intention was to hold annual tournaments, alternating between Cornwall and Brittany, this was not always possible; for example, successive tournaments were held in Brittany in 1963 and 1964, 1966 and 1970, and 1976 and 1978 (see appendix 22). Between 1928, with the first tournament in Brittany and 1980, Inter-Celtic tournaments were held in Brittany on twenty four occasions, but only nine occasions in Cornwall. In the period between 1947 and 1980, although both the CWA and FALSAB struggled financially to stage the tournaments, the Cornish seemed to have more problems. The costs of staging an Inter-Celtic tournament not only included the wrestling, but also such things as the accommodation, food, visits to local landmarks, and other forms of entertainment, all borne by the hosts. Each time the Cornish and Bretons met, the wrestlers, officials and others were typically entertained for more than a week, with more than one tournament in this time; for example, in 1972 the entire visit of the Bretons to Cornwall took nine days, with the first contest, which was the ‘official’ Inter-Celtic tournament that decided the Tregoning Hooper Memorial Cup, held at Tredinnick, near Wadebridge; the second held at St Stephen-in-Brannel; and the third held at Redruth.⁸⁵ All meetings of the Cornish and Bretons were accompanied by much ceremony, mostly instigated in the early encounters by Tregoning Hooper and Dr Charles Cottonnec. This typically consisted of a formal procession of wrestlers and officials, often through the hosting town, accompanied by music; a line up of all wrestlers on the wrestling field facing their individual opponents; the wrestlers’ oath taken in four languages; and the playing of four ‘national’ anthems.

Between the early to mid 1980s there were no Inter-Celtic wrestling tournaments staged, largely due to the continuing problem of raising sufficient funds to either host an event or the cost of travel to the host's venue, however, in the mid 1980s attempts were made to renew contact. A group of Cornish wrestlers were invited to Concarneau in 1985 including Gerry Cawley, who wrestled Jean-Yves Péran, the heavyweight champion of Brittany, for the film entitled, *Once in a Lifetime*, produced by Yorkshire television and shown across the ITV network later that year.⁸⁶ Cawley had a good record against the Bretons, winning his contest at the Inter-Celtic tournament in 1979 in the under eighteen category and in the following year as a middleweight. Although not designated as an 'official' Inter-Celtic tournament a further meeting was held in 1986, when five Breton wrestlers competed at the Lostwithiel tournament, as part of the Rotary Club Regatta.⁸⁷

There were no Inter-Celtic tournaments held between the mid 1980s and the early 1990s, but in 1992 a 'friendly' tournament took place at Chacewater as part of the Harvest Fair and was reciprocated by the Bretons in the following year.⁸⁸ There were again no tournaments between 1994 and 2003, but in 2004 the idea of a revival was mooted and a 'mini' Inter-Celtic tournament was held at Wadebridge Sports Centre between a Breton team and a group of local wrestlers, which was designed to pave the way to re-introduce the full Inter-Celtic tournaments.⁸⁹ At the end of this event the Cornish were presented with items for an exhibition by the President of the *Archives et Memoires de la Lutte Bretonne* (ARMEL), which celebrated the Inter-Celtic tournaments held between 1928 and 1985 and later displayed at the Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro.⁹⁰ Since 2004 there have been Inter-Celtic tournaments held at alternate venues each year, the latest one, which celebrated the 80th anniversary of these meetings, held in July 2008 at Wadebridge Cricket Club ground, when the Cornwall team won sixteen points to eight. Significant features of this tournament were that it included a girls' contest and the winner of the heavyweight category was Ashley Cawley, the son of Gerry, which again clearly demonstrates the continuing influence of families in Cornish wrestling.⁹¹

Throughout the entire period that the Cornish and Bretons met in the wrestling ring there were few disputes, however, in 1979 one writer reported that the Bretons had two major complaints about the tactics of the Cornish wrestlers at the Inter-Celtic

tournament held at St Stephen-in-Brannel in that year. Firstly, the Bretons complained that the Cornish were brutal with no sense of fair play, in particular they disliked the big heavy jacket, which can be twisted to throttle an opponent, and wrestling on grass that can be very hard in a long dry summer. The second complaint was that Cornish wrestling had moved away from the traditional Celtic style to one more akin to judo, with few close encounters.⁹² In response to this, the chair of the CWA at the time, Brian Kendall, did not consider the Breton complaints well-founded and suggested that the Bretons have always complained about the Cornish jacket and it is for this reason that to avoid any dissension a coin is tossed to decide whether it, or the Breton *chemise* is worn in the first round of competition.⁹³ He also suggested that as Cornish wrestling tournaments were open to all-comers it was a fact of life that judo players would enter.⁹⁴

Other features of the Cornish Revival

The Inter-Celtic tournaments were not the only manifestation of the Cornish Revival that impacted upon Cornish wrestling in the post war period, especially from the 1970s. Other significant features have included either demonstrations or tournaments of Cornish wrestling with small groups of wrestlers at various ‘Celtic’ events in and outside of Cornwall; the interest shown in the sport by Cornish nationalists; and the establishment of the International Federation of Celtic Wrestling, with which the CWA has had some contact. In August 1972 officials of the CWA took a team of wrestlers to the Inter-Celtic Festival, held at Lorient in Brittany, an annual event based largely on music, dance, literature and other cultural activities. The tournament was held in the town’s square with thousands watching and the ring consisted of thick rubber mats covered in a thick layer of sawdust. On the following day another tournament was held in the pouring rain at a venue 150 miles from Lorient in rural Brittany, but still watched by 4,000 people.⁹⁵ In 1973 the CWA took part in the Pan-Celtic Festival held at Killarney, Ireland, another annual event largely based on cultural activities which is organised to foster better relations between the Celtic nations, and in the following year six Cornish wrestlers competed against a team from Brittany, who were also present, and won five bouts to one. Also in August 1973 a team of wrestlers from Cumberland and Westmorland competed in tournaments at St Mawgan and St Stephens,⁹⁶ which was reciprocated by a visit of Cornish wrestlers to Cumberland in 1974.⁹⁷ In 1975 they visited Cornwall again and ‘...they performed very well with our jackets, much better than we performed without the jackets when our team visited Cumberland last September.’⁹⁸

More recently small groups of Cornish wrestlers, organised by the CWA have performed demonstrations as part of various ‘Celtic’ events; for example in 1994 at the Celtic Congress held at Pendennis Castle, Falmouth,⁹⁹ and again at Bude in 2000;¹⁰⁰ in 2002 at Falmouth as part of the first Dehwelans (‘Homecoming’), a modern biennial festival designed to entice people of Cornish descent from outside Cornwall to visit the county, which also included activities such as music, theatre, film, seminars, walks and exhibitions;¹⁰¹ in 2003 at Gorseth Kernow’s Gathering of the Bards of Cornwall, held at Launceston Castle;¹⁰² and in 2006 as part of the St Piran’s Day Celebrations, at Colliford Lake Park on Bodmin Moor.¹⁰³ One of the more interesting modern events is Aberfest, described as a ‘...festival celebrating all things Cornish and Breton,’¹⁰⁴ which is held at Easter time every two years in Cornwall, alternating with the Breizh-Kernow festival, in Brittany. Aberfest involves a wide range of cultural activities, which typically includes wrestling; for example, on Easter Saturday in 2008 a team of Cornish and Breton wrestlers competed against one another at Tregajorran, near Redruth and on the following day the Bretons gave a demonstration of their style of wrestling on St Michael’s Mount.¹⁰⁵

During the 1960s Cornish nationalists ‘adopted’ Cornish wrestling and promoted it in various ways; for example, husband and wife Richard and Ann Trevenen Jenkin co-edited *New Cornwall*, regarded as the forerunner of other nationalist magazines, which regularly published articles about Cornish wrestling.¹⁰⁶ They were also both heavily involved in the Gorseth Kernow; Richard Jenkin was initiated as a bard in 1947 with the name of Map Dyvroeth (‘Son of Exile’) and was Grand Bard between 1976 and 1982 and again between 1985 and 1988; Ann Trevenen Jenkin was initiated in 1957 taking the bardic name of Bryallen (‘Primrose’) and was Grand Bard between 1997 and 2000.¹⁰⁷ During the 1970s and early 1980s regular articles about Cornish wrestling appeared in *Cornish Nation*, the official journal of Mebyon Kernow.¹⁰⁸ One article published by this journal was a report of the second *Gwary Myr* festival held at St Just-in-Penwith in 1979, which included a demonstration of Cornish wrestling and a novice competition held on the *Plen an Gwary*.¹⁰⁹ The festival was organised by *Cowethas an Gwary Myr*, which comprised of representatives from a number of local organisations including Mebyon Kernow (MK) and the Federation of Old Cornwall Societies. The first festival, which was held in 1978 and was organised by the St Ives branch of MK had as its primary aim, ‘...to bring together as many aspects of Cornish cultural and

sporting life as possible, with a particular emphasis on youth and on the Cornish language.¹¹⁰ The winner of the novice competition received his prize, a silver cup, from the Grand Bard, Richard Jenkin. It was also reported that the organising committee was planning to extend the festival to a week's duration and invite people from Wales and Brittany and to publish a bi-lingual programme; it is not clear whether this took place. Interestingly the *Cornishman* newspaper refused to print an advertisement for the festival in the Cornish language.¹¹¹

Mebyon Kernow was not the only nationalist group that promoted Cornish wrestling. In 1981, *Cornish Life* reported that the Cornish Nationalist Party (CNP) was staging a tournament later that year, open to all young wrestlers, but especially those in the Truro and St Austell areas and they were also providing all the trophies, which would be decorated with a Celtic design.¹¹² The CNP also included articles about Cornish wrestling in its journal, the *Cornish Banner*.¹¹³ In more recent years *Cornish World*, a bi-monthly magazine launched in 1998 with the aim of keeping '...the Cornish diaspora around the world in touch with home...' ¹¹⁴ has not only carried the occasional article about Cornish wrestling,¹¹⁵ but also regularly reports on current affairs in a much more 'political' fashion than its coffee table competitors, despite not being aligned to any political party.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, against the backdrop of the revival of traditional sports and games in Europe, there were a number of people who wished to see the preservation and celebration of the different traditional 'Celtic' styles of wrestling which culminated in a meeting at Cardiff in November 1985 when the Fédération Internationale des Luttes Celtiques (FILC) or International Federation of Celtic Wrestling was established, with William Baxter, a former captain of the Great Britain Olympic Games wrestling team, elected as President and Guy Jaouen as Vice-President. Cornish wrestling was represented at the meeting by some members of the Penwith Wrestling Association, but not the CWA, who did not send an official representative.¹¹⁶ According to Baxter, the individuals from Cornwall who were present, later attempted to persuade the CWA to join FILC, but failed. At the time *gouren* experienced fragmentation with more than one organisation representing the sport and the CWA, '...backed the wrong boat [and] they insisted that [it] could not join because of loyalty to the smaller organisation.'¹¹⁷ However since 1985 all Breton wrestling groups have become members of the Fédération de Gouren, which is now recognised as the official

governing body of the sport by the Fédération Française de Lutte, the governing body of amateur wrestling in France. In 2006 the Fédération Internationale des Lutttes Associées (FILA) or the International Federation of Associated Wrestling Styles, the international governing body of amateur wrestling, which oversees freestyle and Graeco-Roman styles of wrestling and also recognises folk or traditional wrestling, finally recognised FILC. Current members of FILC includes, Brittany, Canary Islands, England (ie the Cumberland and Westmorland style), Fryslân, a province in the north of the Netherlands, Iceland, Ireland, Leon in north-west Spain, Salzburg, a state and duchy of Austria, Sardinia, Scotland, and Sweden. FILC holds annual championship tournaments, alternating between member countries each year, in different weight and age categories, for both men and women, with one wrestler per category per team. As it is impossible to have a standardised style or to expect wrestlers to learn all styles from the different member countries, each tournament comprises of two styles, a jacket style (*gouren*) and a fixed-hold style (the back-hold of Cumberland and Westmorland). In 1986, the first year that the FILC championships were held, at Lorient in Brittany, the programme also included Cornish wrestling, with an Irishman, Seamus McCarthy, one of only two wrestlers representing Cornwall.¹¹⁸ The CWA have recently explored the possibility of joining FILC.¹¹⁹ In 2007 a book entitled *Celtic Wrestling The Jacket Styles* was published, which includes the history and techniques of Cornish and Breton wrestling, emphasising the close affinity between the two styles. In fact, in the section on techniques, the authors include photographs of Breton wrestlers performing all the moves used in both styles of wrestling, the only differences are the names given to them.¹²⁰

Cornish wrestling in the diaspora

The revival of Cornishness in the diaspora, noted in chapter one, inevitably led to a desire to learn more about Cornish wrestling. Thomas stated in an interview that,

We get letters from around the world, there's a lot of interest about the sport outside of Cornwall – a tremendous amount. It's amazing over in Australia I've been in contact with a few people who do it... We even sell jackets and send jackets abroad to various countries.¹²¹

The interest in Australia is largely due to the efforts of one man, Colin Roberts, originally born in St Columb, who emigrated to Australia in 1986, settling in the state of Victoria.¹²² His uncle Bill was heavily involved in the CWA, acting as President for a number of years and his uncle Mike was one of only two men¹²³ who were champions

at every weight in Cornish wrestling¹²⁴ and who also won his contests against Breton opponents in the Inter-Celtic tournaments of 1963 and 1964 at middleweight.¹²⁵ Soon after emigrating Colin Roberts joined the Cornish Association of Victoria (CAV) and when requested he often gave lectures on various themes, including Cornish wrestling. In 1998 he was asked by the CAV to present a demonstration of Cornish wrestling at the National Celtic Folk Festival held at Geelong, but he did not know how to wrestle, despite having family members who did.¹²⁶ He therefore researched the subject, mostly using Kendall's booklet,¹²⁷ gave a demonstration of some of the throws with one of his sons, and also had a 'stooge' placed in the audience who volunteered to wrestle when Roberts called for challengers. The performance proved so popular with the public that he was asked to repeat it in 1999. In that year he used a group of junior wrestlers in his demonstration with whom he had spent several weeks training and billed it as the unofficial Australian Cornish Wrestling Championship, which was televised by Melbourne's Channel 31 company. The television coverage aroused much interest in Victoria and beyond, attracting the attention of Gavin Dickson from New South Wales and David Stone from Victoria, both experienced amateur wrestlers, who both taught and competed in a variety of styles and who started to train youngsters in Cornish wrestling.¹²⁸

In March 2000 a celebration of St Piran's Day at Castlemaine, Victoria included the first National Cornish Wrestling Championships, organised by Colin Roberts, which was the first tournament in Australia for one hundred years. Prior to this only Colin Roberts and Doug Jones had wrestled in the Cornish style and then only in demonstrations at the National Celtic Folk Festival at Geelong. Roberts had trained several adults and juniors in preparation for the championships and so had Gavin Dickson and David Stone. In an interview David Stone stated that,

At this stage Cornish wrestling is still in its infancy. Presently only the die-hard wrestling fanatics take part, but as it gets introduced to new audiences, it is growing. Most tournaments take place at Celtic gatherings. Most wrestling fanatics train all year round in informal 'clubs' or 'academies' (which usually refers to a nice grassy area!!).¹²⁹

Also in June 2000, during the Queen's birthday weekend at the National Celtic Folk Festival, Geelong, the tournament attracted fifteen adults and juniors, which was reported as the largest entry for over one hundred years and the first time since the revival that wrestlers competed in official weight divisions.¹³⁰ These events were

followed by several other competitions around Victoria and also in South Australia, although they were very much a novelty with no infrastructure, however, they attracted much interest from schools and enquiries from the public.¹³¹ Consequently, Colin Roberts visited primary and secondary schools in Victoria and South Australia to teach children the rudiments of Cornish wrestling so they could enter the National Championships. In May 2001 the second National Cornish Wrestling Championships were held as part of Kernewek Lowender at Yorke Peninsula, where Colin Roberts also ran a series of workshops demonstrating throws and moves.¹³² The third National Cornish Wrestling Championships were held at Bendigo, Victoria, with the National Cornish Festival as the backdrop, with Colin Roberts explaining moves whilst acting as announcer. The tournament, which lasted for two and a half hours, included junior and senior girls' competitions for the first time, the Gathering of the Bards, prizes donated by the CAV and presented by the Grand Bard of the Gorseth Kernow, John Bolitho, who pledged to raise the money to take a small team of wrestlers from Cornwall to Australia in 2004.¹³³ Although this visit did not take place due to the failure to raise sufficient funds it has not lessened the desire of those in Australia to make contact with wrestlers in Cornwall and compete against them.¹³⁴ For example, when asked what his ambition was for Cornish wrestling in Australia, Roberts stated '...to take a team of wrestlers over to Cornwall and Brittany to compete against the original practitioners of the sport.'¹³⁵ In a recent interview, Thomas stated that '...we're waiting for them to invite the Wrestling Association over, all expenses paid. We could take a team over and show them how it should be done.'¹³⁶

There has also been a revival of interest in Cornish wrestling in North America. In July 1999 at the tenth Gathering of Cornish Cousins in Pennsylvania, Arnie Weeks, from Ontario, Canada organised a demonstration of Cornish wrestling, which he learnt from his grandfather and father. Weeks's grandfather, Thomas Henry Weeks, who lived in Nanaimo on Vancouver Island won the British Columbia Wrestling Association Championship in 1914, after beating an American champion. Arnie Weeks's father was also a Cornish wrestler, who established and instructed a dozen French and Cornish Canadian youths at a local wrestling club. However, Weeks notes that Cornish wrestling was replaced by the catch-as-catch-can style and by the 1920s jackets were no longer worn and men wrestled only in trunks. Interestingly, there were some Devonshire style wrestlers who wore clogs up until the 1920s.

When Weeks went to the University of British Columbia he attempted to form a team of Cornish wrestlers to compete at the British Empire Games, as there was a resurgence of interest amongst second generation Cornish Canadians, who were discovering their heritage. However, although Weeks later represented Canada in wrestling, the officials of the British Empire Games ruled out Cornish wrestling as it was not regarded as a proper sport. Despite organising a number of successful demonstration events at various venues in Canada and the USA, Weeks has attempted but failed to recruit third generation Cornish Canadians to wrestle in the Cornish style, as they have become fully assimilated as Canadians and prefer to play mainstream sports.¹³⁷

Conclusion

The period since the Second World War, described by Payton as the phase of ‘Third Peripheralism’ in his ‘centre-periphery model’, is characterised by fluctuations in the fortunes of Cornish wrestling. Although the sport has managed to survive, it has at the same time suffered from a number of problems common to many other minority activities, particularly the recruitment and coaching of new wrestlers, the attempts to attract sufficient spectators and the continued shortage of funding, set against the backdrop of a growth in the number of counter-attractions, which has had a deleterious effect upon the activities of the CWA, especially the number of tournaments it has been able to stage. Despite these problems Cornish wrestling has benefitted from the rehabilitation of the Cornish Revival, with the renewed sense of Cornishness within Cornwall and in the diaspora, especially since the 1970s. This is manifested in particular through the revival of the Inter-Celtic tournaments and the number of Cornish wrestling demonstrations given by the CWA, which are now regular features of festivals and other cultural events with a ‘Celtic’ theme, especially in Cornwall and Brittany.

The period is also characterised by a continued tension between tradition and modernity. Despite the introduction in the 1920s and 1930s of timed rounds and a points system, there are some features of Cornish wrestling that have not changed, including the distinctive jacket, the types of throws and foul moves, wrestling outdoors on grass in the summer months, the control of bouts by sticklers, the staging of tournaments by local wrestling committees and the continuing influence of families in learning the rudiments of the sport. Some in the wrestling community would clearly prefer to keep

things as they are; for example, in a recent interview, Thomas stated that Cornish wrestling is,

...run as traditionally as is possible to keep it traditional. What you see in Cornish wrestling today should be exactly as it was at least a hundred years ago. I have been involved now for forty years, maybe a little bit more, and it hasn't changed, not one iota. We must try and keep it traditional. I think the holds are unique to the Cornish soil and the jackets are unique to the Cornish soil.¹³⁸

Despite this preference for tradition, members of the Cornish wrestling fraternity have also embraced modernity, exemplified by the formation of coaching centres where youngsters are introduced to the sport by qualified coaches; the production of a coaching DVD intended for use in schools and youth centres; the use of new technology, especially the internet; the realisation that all amateur sport relies upon sponsorship from local businesses; the introduction of wrestling for junior and senior women; and the affiliation of the CWA to the British Wrestling Association, to provide the sport with a higher profile. These developments together with the number and quality of wrestlers currently active, who have acquitted themselves well against Breton wrestlers, who have greater numbers and better resources to support them, makes those involved in Cornish wrestling optimistic for the future of the sport.

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CONCLUSION

The aim of the current study was to provide a full and thorough historical analysis of the development and survival of Cornish wrestling and in particular to address the following key questions: How has Cornish wrestling developed as a sport? Why is Cornish wrestling ‘different’? Why has Cornish wrestling survived? It was argued that in order to provide an adequate historical analysis it was necessary to locate the sport within an appropriate and relevant conceptual framework. Two fields of enquiry were identified as having the potential to provide this; mainstream British sport history and the ‘new Cornish Studies’. The main ideas and debates that form the basis for these two areas were reviewed and it was argued that British sport history offered only a partial interpretation for the history of Cornish wrestling as the evidence suggests it is different from other sports. It was further argued that with its emphasis upon ‘difference’ the ‘new Cornish Studies’ in general and Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’ in particular offers a more appropriate conceptual framework, which is also rooted in a relevant local context. Payton developed his model to answer a number of questions relating to Cornwall’s distinctiveness: Why is Cornwall ‘different’? Why has this persisted? Why is there a strong sense of ‘Cornishness’ and separate identity which has survived until today? He concluded that Cornwall’s ‘difference’ has persisted because of its historical experience, which in each period has been distinct from other areas of Britain and has led directly to a unique identity.

In Payton’s model, the privileged ‘centre’, which is the location of power and influence, is based largely in London and the south-east of England; whereas the ‘periphery’ is geographically remote from the ‘centre’, but dependent upon it. Payton proposed three phases of peripherality: ‘First’ or ‘Older Peripheralism’, characterised by geographical and cultural isolation from the centre; ‘Second Peripheralism’, which recognises the central importance of industrial change, producing economic and social marginality and ‘Third Peripheralism’ characterised by a ‘branch-factory’ economy promoting a process of ‘counter-urbanisation’. Despite peripherality changing over time, both geographical location and the physical distance from the ‘centre’ remain as ‘constants of peripherality’.

The structure of the thesis followed the phases of peripherality and argued the evidence is consistent with Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’. During the phase of ‘First’ or

‘Older Peripheralism’ the evidence, although fragmentary demonstrates that Cornish wrestling originated in Cornwall at a time when there were people who can be described as ‘Celts’ and therefore it is a ‘Celtic’ sport. It was also a widespread activity that was recognised by many non-Cornish writers as a distinctive feature of Cornwall, in particular, the Cornish were confirmed as the best wrestlers in the kingdom and they took pride in that accolade. Despite the resemblance to wrestling in Brittany and Devonshire, the style practiced in Cornwall, even in this early period was unique, with its distinctive jacket, the combination of holds and throws and the absence of grappling on the ground. The description of Cornish wrestling provided by Carew¹ suggests that not only did the sport have a level of sophistication far removed from other contemporary activities, but it also possessed many ‘modern’ characteristics, three hundred years before the emergence of truly modern sports in the mid nineteenth century. Therefore, the Cornish were ‘different’ and so was their sport.

Between the beginning of the eighteenth century and the mid nineteenth century, during the phase of ‘Second Peripheralism’, Cornish wrestling experienced a ‘Golden Age’, when it developed into a major spectator activity, which reflected the growth of the Cornish economy, led by the mining industry. The period was characterised by a large number of wrestlers, many of whom were miners, entering numerous tournaments for very lucrative money prizes. Cornish wrestling which was truly a county-wide sport, with tournaments and challenge matches held throughout Cornwall, was held in mid-week when wrestlers and spectators were free, during major holidays such as Whitsuntide and parish feasts and other events such as fairs and ‘Ridings’, and often lasted more than one day. The evidence also suggests the large crowds that gathered to watch wrestling were largely well behaved, much to the chagrin of Methodists who attacked the sport throughout the period. A significant feature of the period was the development of a self-confident, assertive, vigorous identity based on industrial prowess, including a sense of independence and individualism. The Cornish were proud of their reputation as world leaders in deep metal mining and it was argued this was reflected in the pride they had in their achievements in tournaments and challenge matches wherever they were held, especially against Devonshire kickers and this demonstrated that the distinctive Cornish style was superior to any other, in its range of techniques and level of skill.

In the second half of the nineteenth century Cornish wrestling suffered a gradual decline, so much so that by the turn of the twentieth century the sport had almost died out completely, which must be seen against the backdrop of social and economic marginalisation in Cornish society that characterised the mature manifestation of ‘Second Peripheralism’ in Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’. The decline manifested itself in the decreasing number of tournaments and challenge matches; a smaller number of active wrestlers; less lucrative prizes; the dwindling size of wrestling crowds; and the reduction in mid-week tournaments and those lasting more than one day. It was argued that the main reasons for the decline were, the depopulating effects of emigration, which left the sport with fewer wrestlers, sticklers and spectators; the opposition by moral reformers, especially the Methodists; the practice of ‘faggoting’, which brought the sport into disrepute; the emergence of a number of counter-attractions that were more appealing to the sporting public; and the reduction of leisure time. There were also some writers who thought the decline was due to a poor set of rules which made the sport boring to watch, especially when compared with ‘modern’ sports.

An important feature of the mature phase of ‘Second Peripheralism’, dating between the mid nineteenth century and the end of the Second World War, was the ‘Great Migration’. The evidence suggests that wherever the Cornish moved to, whether that was the USA, Australia, Latin America, South Africa, or countless other places, they stuck together in distinct ethnic communities, sustaining a strong sense of identity, based on industrial pride and prowess. It was argued that Cornish wrestling became an important icon of Cornishness throughout the diaspora, as important as Methodist chapels and choirs, brass bands, self-help societies, the distinctive foods of pasties and saffron cake, and the Cornish dialect. The characteristics of Cornish wrestling tournaments and challenge matches in the diaspora resembled those in Cornwall; they took place during a holiday period such as Christmas or Easter, often lasting more than one day; they were promoted by publicans and were held on land adjacent to a public house or hotel; the prizes consisted of money; they were witnessed by large and knowledgeable crowds; they provided successful wrestlers with the opportunity to gain the prestige of becoming a ‘champion’ of the community or district; and they provided the opportunity to express rivalries, especially against Devonshire wrestlers, but increasingly the Irish, who also competed against the Cornish in the employment sphere.

Another important feature of the mature phase of ‘Second Peripheralism’ was the Cornish Revival, reflected in the renewed fortunes of Cornish wrestling in the inter-war period, which was manifested by the modernising developments initiated by the Cornwall County Wrestling Association (CCWA) from 1923, which led directly to an increase in the number of regular fixtures; the introduction for the first time of championship contests in different weight categories; the proliferation of prizes in the form of cups, medals, trophies and especially belts; the introduction of rules controlling the conduct of wrestlers, including penalties for infringements; and the introduction of timed bouts with an associated points system to determine winners. The revival was also characterised by the involvement of renowned figures from the much wider Cornish Revival who viewed Cornish wrestling as integral to the Celticising of Cornish culture; the constant problems of funding shortages; and the schism between the CCWA and the East Cornwall Wrestling Federation. It was also argued that the introduction of Inter-Celtic tournaments was a Revivalist project *nonpareil*, which was much more successful than other concerns of the Revivalists, such as the revival of the Cornish language, that had little relevance for ordinary Cornish people.

The period since the Second World War, which is also the phase of ‘Third Peripheralism’ within Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’ is characterised by fluctuating fortunes for Cornish wrestling, with alternating periods of decline and revival reflected in continuing funding shortages; the decline in the number of active wrestlers; and the attempts made by the Cornish Wrestling Association to recruit more wrestlers. Other significant features of the period are the rehabilitation of the Cornish Revival, especially since the 1970s, manifested by the interest taken by Cornish nationalists; the involvement of Cornish wrestlers in Celtic festivals and other cultural events; and the revival of regular Inter-Celtic tournaments. The period has also witnessed the introduction of many developments characteristic of ‘modern’ sports, including the establishment of coaching centres in mid, north and west Cornwall, the use of new technology, the affiliation to a national governing body and the adoption of sponsorship for tournaments.

It is acknowledged that although Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’ and the ‘new Cornish Studies’ framework in which it is situated is convincing in its elucidation of Cornish ‘difference’, it has not been uncontested. Stoye has anticipated this by what he calls a ‘Kernowsceptic backlash’, when in a review of the recent historiography of early

modern Cornwall, noted that ‘...as books and articles which challenge the traditional, Anglocentric view of Cornwall’s past become [...] “increasingly fashionable” so they run the risk of attaining the status of a new orthodoxy: one which is vulnerable to attack in its turn.’² The aim of such an attack is to ‘...thrust the historiography of early modern Cornwall firmly back into the box labelled “English local history”, and to nail down the lid.’³ An example of this approach, which questions Cornwall’s distinctiveness, one of the foundation stones of the ‘new Cornish Studies’, is a study by Cooper, who saw no difference between Cornwall and Devon and regarded them as a single ‘Westcountry’ unit.⁴ He suggests that during the Tudor period Cornwall was not a place of resistance and rebellion as Cornish Studies practitioners assert, but was similar to Devon, an area that demonstrated popular obedience and allegiance to the Crown. He also argues that although the Duchy and Stannaries ‘...contributed materially to peaceful and effective government in the Tudor south-west,’⁵ they were not as important in constitutional terms as some scholars think, partly as not everyone was a tenant or affected by mining. Furthermore he claims that only parishes to the south and west of Helston had a particular identity, based on Celtic features, such as language and patronymics. Payton, in a review of Cooper’s book, suggests his analysis is flawed, with the presentation of only partial and unsatisfactory evidence, which is based upon incomplete churchwardens’ and borough accounts, from locations situated near the county border and therefore more isolated and Anglicised than the rest of Cornwall.⁶ Deacon also notes that Cooper seems to have ignored research in Cornish Studies over the previous decade, especially evidence of the extent of Cornish language speaking in the sixteenth century, although he does admit to some linguistic distinctiveness.⁷

Other scholars who have questioned Cornwall’s distinctiveness, include Duffin, who in a study of the Cornish gentry before the English Civil War, suggests that the majority of Cornish gentlemen were the most Anglicised inhabitants of Stuart Cornwall and she therefore minimises the importance of Cornish distinctiveness.⁸ In contrast, Stoye notes that his research indicates that not only were some gentry proud of their Cornishness, but also amongst the ordinary Cornish of the far west there was widespread awareness of Cornish difference.⁹ Duffin also argues that Cornish Royalism during the Civil War was largely motivated by religious conservatism which led them to seek to preserve the established church from Puritanism,¹⁰ whereas Stoye claims identity and ethnicity were central to Cornwall’s experiences; they fought as a ‘people’.¹¹ Like Duffin, Chynoweth also argues that the Anglicisation of the Cornish gentry was more widespread than

previously admitted, which indicates that Cornish distinctiveness was less important than Cornish Studies practitioners assume.¹² He also claims that the various assertions made by historians that Cornwall was different from other counties ‘...are sufficiently numerous to constitute a theory of Cornish distinctiveness.’¹³ He concludes that each assertion is ‘...either erroneous, or requires substantial qualification,’ and that Cornish difference ‘...has been greatly exaggerated by the proponents of the theory.’¹⁴ In a review of Chynoweth’s book Payton argues that he ‘...fails to take account of a whole raft of recent Cornish and British scholarship which demonstrates unequivocally the importance of Cornish distinctiveness in Tudor times.’¹⁵ Payton also suggests that Chynoweth concentrates on the gentry of Tudor Cornwall, whereas the ordinary Cornish ‘...are by and large rendered invisible.’¹⁶

Some writers have even questioned the validity of the concept of identity. Handler argued that ‘...identity is a “reified concept” that is imposed on past places and times even though it is actually “peculiar to the modern western world”’¹⁷ Kidd also casts doubt on the usefulness of ethnic identities in the pre-modern British Isles; he argues that ‘...ethnic identity was of “second order” importance while the “very notion of “identity”...might itself be anachronistic” when applied to the period before 1700.’¹⁸ Chapman argued that the concepts Celt and Celtic, although having real meaning for people, were externally imposed labels given to groups of people who it was thought shared cultural similarities based on language, material artefacts, social organisation and mythological factors, but who did not use the terms to describe themselves. According to Chapman, the Greeks used the generic label, *keltoi*, to describe barbarians to the north and west and it was also used in the Byzantine empire to refer to an unruly, uncivilised people, but never described to an actual or real group of people; it was therefore a category of ‘Otherness’, which has been used in modern times as a means of self-identification, but is merely an invented tradition.¹⁹ In response to this Payton has argued that, although there is no scholarly consensus about who the Celts were, when they first appeared and where from, theirs is ‘...a coherent culture which in modern times may have undergone re-invention [...] but which is nevertheless tangible in its own right.’²⁰

Furthermore, an important feature of the ‘new Cornish Studies’, is the ability of its practitioners to be more reflexive and self-critical. Payton himself has recognised the so-called ‘mino-centric’ nature of much Cornish Studies scholarship, with its

representations of mining and industrial progress and the absence of alternative perspectives.²¹ At its height in the mid-nineteenth century mining directly employed a third of the working population of Cornwall, with more in support services, which means that two thirds were not so employed and yet these are strangely absent from most narratives. Payton noted that, largely due to the depiction of fishing communities and the fishing industry as non-industrial, by the Newlyn School of painters, the occupation has been virtually ignored by historians and therefore does not feature as part of the Cornish territorial identity. Other Cornish Studies practitioners, have questioned the ‘mining *was* Cornwall and *Cornwall* was mining’ discourse and suggested that there is a need for ‘...intra-Cornwall comparisons and micro-scale studies,’²² especially of fishing communities. Payton has also suggested the need for a thoroughgoing study of Cornwall’s maritime history as a whole and its implications for Cornish identity, and the redressing of the male-dominated nature of current Cornish Studies scholarship.²³ Deacon has also argued that in eighteenth century industrialising Britain there were more than one ‘centre’, which might be problematic for a centre-periphery model that proposes one centre.²⁴

Despite these criticisms, the evidence presented in this study clearly demonstrates that the ‘new Cornish Studies’ in general and Payton’s ‘centre-periphery model’ in particular is a much more appropriate and relevant conceptual framework for the historical analysis of Cornish wrestling than that presented in British sport history. It is argued that in each phase of peripherality, the evidence is consistent with the model. The study has demonstrated that Cornish wrestling is ‘different’ and to paraphrase Payton, that ‘difference’ has persisted over time because of Cornwall’s historical experience, which in each period of peripherality has been distinct from other parts of Britain. Furthermore, throughout the entire period of the study, Cornish wrestling has been, and still remains, an important icon of Cornishness, which has ensured its survival.

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