The Isle of Man TT Races

The Isle of Man TT Races: Motorcycling, Society and Identity

By

Simon Vaukins

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In memory of Jeffrey Vaukins

Historian, Manxman and Sportsman

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

—Theodore Roosevelt, "The Man in the Arena"

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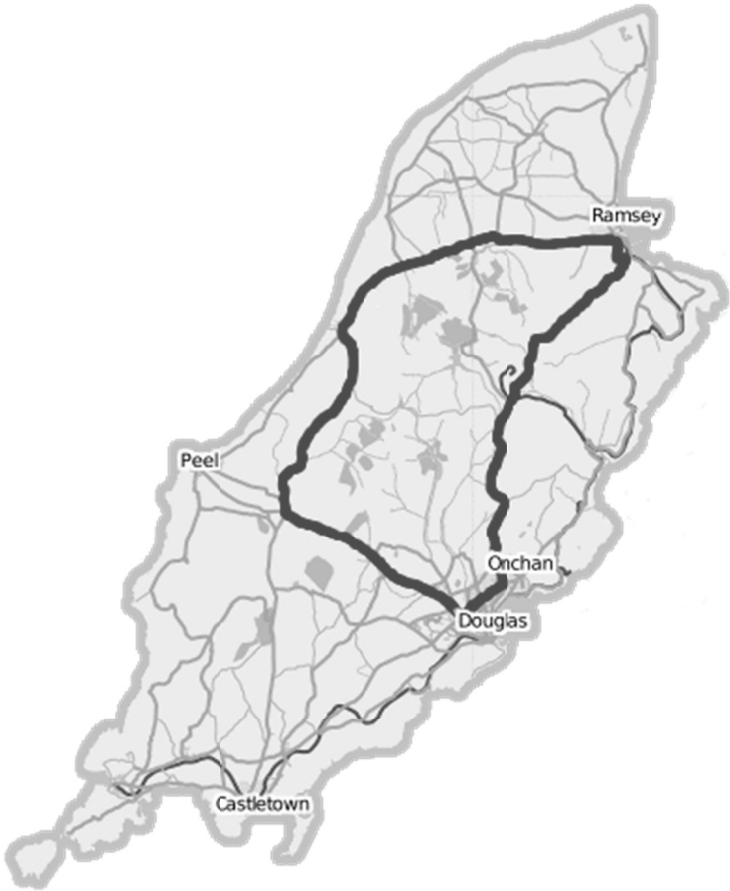
My family has not always understood why I have pursued this work; they perhaps understand less why I choose to relax by running marathons. But, they have always afforded me the time and space to complete both and for this I am grateful.

The Isle of Man TT Course



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INTRODUCTION

THE ISLE OF MAN TOURIST TROPHY RACES

The Isle of Man is home to the most unique and perhaps the most controversial motor racing event in the world. It is an event that places a small island, situated in the heart of the Irish Sea, firmly on the world map. The Isle of Man is thirteen and a half miles wide and 32.5 miles long, home to a population of approximately 80,000 people and is situated at the very heart of the British Isles, but despite its size and location the island maintains a distinctive and diverse sense of identity. It has its own unique system of government, the more than 1000 years old Tynwald assembly. There is a well-developed and internationally renowned heritage industry, an established film industry and, of course, an abundance of outstanding natural beauty. However, if you were to ask any Briton, European or indeed any world citizen if they know the location of the Isle of Man, you might receive the reply "is that the home of the TT races?" or be met with quizzical expressions. This might be an exaggerated claim, but, nonetheless, over the past 100 years or so the Tourist Trophy (TT) motorcycle races, held annually on the Isle of Man, have helped this small island stand out on the world map.

The start of the summer on the Isle of Man is signaled by the roaring of thousands of motorcycles disembarking at Douglas harbour from one of the ferries that serve the island. Coming to the island via Liverpool and Heysham, motorcyclists travel from all corners of the world to make what could be described as a pilgrimage to what they regard as one of the most outstanding events on the motorcycling calendar. Interest in participation in the event is massive. By way of illustration, in 1994 there were 620 entries in eight events involving 572 competitors, from 20 countries ranging from the USA to New Zealand. Racers completed 4,137 laps, totaling 156,089 miles in practicing and racing.[1] In 2007 the TT celebrated

[1] TT media pack issued by the Isle of Man Department of Tourism in 1995, as cited in R. Faragher, 'Cultural History: Motor Sport' in J. Belchem (ed.) *A New History of the Isle of Man Volume V: The Modern Period 1830-1999,* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp.410-14.

its centenary and the popularity of the event was unabated, with an estimated 60,000 people visiting the Isle of Man during TT week, generating revenue of £48,000,000. As the *Guardian* stated in 2005: "every year 40,000 leather clad bikers make their pilgrimage to what they describe as the best festival of their sport. It is about celebrating fraternity and a way of life."[2]

The Isle of Man TT course is composed of 37 and three quarter miles of public roads, stretching across much of the northern half of the island and passing through the island's two largest towns, Douglas and Ramsey and through small, sleepy villages like Glen Vine and Kirk Michael. The course has long, fast straights and sharp bends flanked by stonewalls or, on the mountain section, by sheer drops. The stern test of riding skill and sharpness of reflex has, to date, taken the lives of 240 riders. At points around the course are memorials to riders who have made their name at the TT: Birkin's bends, Handley's corner, and, the Guthrie memorial.[3] These are continued reminders of the immense challenge posed by the course. In one lap the competitors will pass through areas of outstanding natural beauty, past sites of historic interest and within touching distance of residents' doorsteps at speeds of up to 180 miles per hour, in front of spectators lining the hedgerows to witness the event. It is an event that like no other, places the modern firmly alongside the traditional. The riders' ultimate goal is to make it to the end of this historic course. At the time of writing, the current lap speed record held by Morecambe's John McGuiness stands at 131.617 miles per hour (mph).

It might be considered odd that, in the modern day, such an event is permitted to take place. But, there has never been any organised protest against the continuation of the TT races on the Isle of Man; or none that I have uncovered during the course of my research. This is despite the inconvenience caused by road closures, the fatalities in the event and the racing of motorcycles at high speeds around the island's roads. Another, similar motorcycle race does take place in Northern Ireland but on a much smaller scale. Similarly, Formula One cars also race annually around the streets of Monaco, and in France public roads are also closed for the Tour De France Bicycle race. No event, however, is quite the same as the Isle of Man TT. The event presents an obvious inconvenience to Manx residents, but also the location of the TT, on an island in the Irish Sea, remains an inconvenience for competitors and overseas spectators alike. Yet motorcycle

[2] *Guardian,* 4 June 2005.

[3] A further, and more extensive discussion of memorialisation at the TT can be found in: 'The Island of Blood': death and commemoration at the Isle of Man TT Races, *World Archaeology*, Volume 4, Issue 2, 2012.

manufacturers, motorcyclists and fans still travel to the Isle of Man every year to compete in the event, watch the races and participate in the festival that surrounds the TT. This is partly the result of the spectacle provided by the races, but also perhaps because ordinary riders, not competitors as such, are able to test themselves against the course on what has become popularly known as "Mad Sunday". "Tomorrow they will open up their throttles and ride the circuit themselves on a day called Mad Sunday", observed the *Guardian*, and "they do it in the full knowledge that it can be carnage, with riders falling off all over the course."[4]

Moreover, and somewhat remarkably, the TT also continues despite the deaths and injuries caused not only to competitors but also to spectators and those policing the course. This has not deterred fans from turning up or motorcycle racers from entering the TT, which is unsurprising when it is considered that one report from the 1970s claimed that "all the competitors … were fascinated by the race." One rider declared that the TT was "the finest road race in the world unconditionally", whilst a Yorkshire rider suggested more crudely that he rode in the race "because I'm a bloody twat, that's why. It's self-inflicted pissin' torture."[5] The danger inherent in the event appears to secure the TT's place as the best motorcycle race in the world. The TT, of course, still draws criticism. A 2003 article in *Sports Illustrated* questioned the purpose of the event when it asked "is there a sporting event more perilous than the Tourist Trophy races in the Isle of Man?" It was vigorously stated, "this festival of speed is how boosters on this tiny Irish Sea island bill its mad scramble of mopeds, motorcycles and motor scooters. Dead is how participants often wind up."[6] Yet despite the dangers presented by the course and the criticism of the event, the TT still continues today. In a 2013 article the *Independent* described this as a race that "defies the nanny state."[7]

Jeffrey Hill, in his wide-ranging work *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth Century Britain* suggests that sport may be regarded as a process "shaped" by economic, political, demographic or intellectual forces. Hill suggests that this helps to "understand how the process of modernization affected sport, but it stops short of affording any autonomous agency to sport itself. The history of sport becomes a 'window' through which to study developments in other areas of society."[8]

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[4] *Guardian*, 4 June 2005.
[5] R. Mutch, *The Last of the Great Road Races*, pp. 12-13.
[6] F. Lidz, '38 Miles of Terror', *Sports Illustrated*, 9 (2003), p. 16.
[7] *The Independent*, 9 June 2013.
[8] J, Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth Century Britain*, (Hampshire, Palgrave, 2002), p. 2.

Taking influence from the above, this book is *not* intended to be a history of winners and losers in the TT and nor will it discuss the events of specific races or the breaking of lap records; it will show how the Isle of Man TT can be used as a means by which to examine the links between sport, society and national identity, and to show how sport can illuminate the political, economic, social and cultural history of a particular locality. For this reason it examines *how* and *why* the Isle of Man has become internationally associated with motorcycle road racing and the consequences of this association. Over the course of this book we will see a change from a small-scale "domestic" event into an internationally known competition. This analysis is based around the discussion of the growth of political support for the TT on the Isle of Man; the evaluation of the economic commitment to the TT by the Manx and motorcycle manufacturers; and, it will show that as a result of the growing economic and political commitment the TT has become ingrained in constructions of a Manx identity over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The themes of politics and economics are easily understood. Under the broader heading of politics falls an examination of how the TT races were established and sustained on the Isle of Man alongside changes to the structure and practice of government on the island. The economic, or capitalist theme explores the way that the TT races were exploited by the Manx government in advertising the island and further the way the TT was an event used by motorcycle manufacturers in selling their products. The most contestable of these themes is that of national identity. National identity is a term that is necessarily multi-dimensional. Any definition of national identity might encompass such aspects as a common language, a common political structure, a shared history and a common culture. These are all factors present on the Isle of Man. It is the plurality of identity that will be explored throughout this book. It will ask whether the different ingredients employed in the construction of Manx identity throughout the twentieth century, which included the TT races, clashed as might be expected, or if they existed harmoniously alongside each other. Together, the themes of politics, economics and national identity begin to answer how and why the TT has been sustained over the past 100 years or so.

It is, however, difficult to judge how far the TT races have become part of an insular Manx identity and just how far the Manx people associate themselves with motorcycle racing. That is to say that the Manx people are aware that this event takes place every year and they attach themselves to

the opportunities presented by the event.[9] For example, as a result of the TT taking place on the island, residents will set up campsites away from the course where spectators and competitors can rest; they even open their homes to these visitors. They attach themselves to the opportunity for prosperity that is presented every year. Faragher comments that the races are "a salient part of Manx consciousness."[10] The TT races are not consciously flagged in the Manx press, and they are not constantly flagged in the Isle of Man. The subconscious reminding, and the reason that the Manx people readily accept the disruption caused by the TT races each year, is because they are continually reminded that the event will take place annually as the public roads on the island form part of the race course; the grandstand is a reminder which is present all year round; and, there are countless reminders around the course. So commonplace are these symbols and so familiar are the TT races to the Manx, that it was not until I left the Isle of Man that I realised the importance and indeed the enormity of the event.

[9] In his work *Banal Nationalism*, Michael Billig suggests that nationalism in not merely an intense political spectacle, but is omnipresent and commonplace and there are certain 'flags', which subconsciously assert a national identity. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not the flag being waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging outside the public building. See, M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, (London, Sage Publications, 1995).

[10] Faragher, 'Cultural History: Motorcycle Road Racing', p. 410.

PART I

1904-1914

Whatever the Gordon Bennett Cup did, or did not, achieve, it certainly introduced motor racing to the Isle of Man. Indirectly it also introduced motorcycle racing, for the Act passed through the House of Keys, the Island's Parliament, in 1904 to authorize the British eliminating trials provided a precedent for the whole succession of motorcycling events held there since"
—Lord Montagu of Beaulieu

Lord Raglan had prosecuted me; Lord Raglan had presided over the Court which sentenced me to prison; Lord Raglan alone was now capable, according to the Home Secretary of giving me my release. The Lord High Executioner in the 'Mikado' was a novice in authority and official status compared with the Lieutenant Governor. He was Caesar in the Isle of Man.
—Samuel Norris, *Manx Movements and Memories*

CHAPTER ONE

ON THE STARTING LINE: THE ORIGINS OF THE TT RACES

When the first motorcycle Tourist Trophy (TT) race took place on the Isle of Man in the summer of 1907, motor racing was still relatively new to the island.[1] Despite this, it has been claimed that the island's reputation as a venue for such events had already begun to spread worldwide. Robert Kelly suggests, somewhat spuriously, that the motor-mad Emir of Afghanistan believed "that the Isle of Man [was] such a splendid place" and asked "would the British consider an exchange – his kingdom and wives for the Isle of Man."[2] The Isle of Man was not the UK's to exchange, but this was a nice sentiment. Even in the modern day the Isle of Man is an odd location for a motor race. It must be considered an even stranger location at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1904 the island was not easy to access and it was costly to travel to; it is, after all, separated from mainland Britain by the often-hostile Irish Sea. There were other more accessible locations that might have been used for motor racing. If the automobile club had in mind hills and twisting roads for the early reliability trials then they might have made use of the roads in the Chilterns, in North Wales or in the Lake District.

There was, however, *no* chance of a motorcar race being held on public roads in England, or Britain at this time. This was due to restrictive legislation and the negative opinion of some MPs towards the motorcar in the pre-war period. Historically, motorcars and motorcycles had been "vociferously opposed by the carriage-owning classes and the many railway directors in Parliament."[3] UK legislation reflected this. In 1865 the "Red Flag" Act had restricted cars to four miles per hour (mph) in the countryside and two mph in urban areas. Moreover, legislation also

[1] 'Tourist' in Tourist Trophy, should be taken to mean the everyday motorcyclist who did not use their motorcycle for racing but for making trips for pleasure or commuting to work.
[2] R. Kelly, *TT Pioneers*, (Douglas, The Manx Experience, 1996), p.91.
[3] H. Perkin, *Age of the Automobile*, (London, Quartet Books, 1976), p.35.

required automobiles to have three attendants, including one to carry a red flag sixty yards in front of the vehicle. Even more restrictive were rules that prohibited the sounding of a whistle by the driver of a motor vehicle and those allowing any person on horseback or in a horse-drawn carriage to demand that the motorcar be stopped while they passed. Local authorities could even regulate the time at which motorcars could pass through towns and villages. Motorcar drivers were permitted few liberties, and it has been suggested that the development of the motorcar in Britain came to a halt as a result of such restrictive legislation.[4] However, legislation was amended in 1878 making it possible for local authorities to repeal red flag restrictions, but they were not repealed all together. The most significant breakthrough came in 1896 when the Locomotives on the Highway Act raised the permissible maximum speed limit to fourteen mph. This legislation and the improvement in conditions for motorists were celebrated on "emancipation" day, 14 November 1896, with a demonstration run of motorcars between London and Brighton. But, racing on public roads was still prohibited, and although further legislation – the Motor Car Act 1903 – raised the speed limit to twenty mph, the prohibition of racing on public roads was not repealed.[5]

Early motorcars were very much the preserve of the wealthy enthusiast, as the first motorcars were costly to purchase and to run. Sir Robert Ensor has suggested that at this time "only rich men could afford them; and as they dashed along the narrow untarred carriage ways, frightening the passer by on their approach and drenching him in dust as the receded, they seemed visible symbols of the selfishness of arrogant wealth."[6] This negativity towards motorcars was also demonstrated in a House of Commons debate over the speed of such vehicles, in June 1903. Cathcart Wason, MP for Orkney and Shetland, was typical of the voice that spoke out in opposition to motorcars. In his opinion "a few people [claimed] the right to drive the public off the roads. Harmless men, women and children, dogs and cattle, have all got to fly for their lives at the bidding of these slaughtering, stinking engines of iniquity."[7] Although Wason's opinion was based in his experiences outside Shetland and Orkney, and he admitted there was not a single car in his constituency, he assured MPs that irritation had begun to occur in the countryside because cars were beginning to monopolise public roads. Wason believed that

[4] Perkin, *Age of the Automobile*, p. 35.
[5] S. O'Connell, *The Car in British Society: Class, Gender and Motoring 1896-1939,* (Manchester, Manchester University Press 1998), p. 13.
[6] R.C.K Ensor, *England 1870-1914,* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1936), p.510.
[7] *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 11 June 1903, (4th Series), Vol. 123, col 698.

motorcar owners had the right to amuse themselves and gratify a "satiated and vitiated palate" by coming into close contact with death, but he did not agree with them doing it at the expense of the general public.[8] Clearly this was an argument against motor racing on public roads.

The general attitude towards the motorcar and motor racing in Britain was not representative of the feeling across Europe. Motor racing was becoming increasingly popular on the continent at the beginning of the twentieth century and a number of races were held on the European mainland, such as the International Gordon Bennett Race between 1900 and 1905 and town-to-town races such as the much-maligned 1903 Paris to Madrid race. American newspaperman Gordon Bennett had established the International Gordon Bennett Race in 1900.[9] As a result of British success in the 1902 International Gordon Bennett race, the 1903 event was to be held in England. As there was no chance of a race in England because of legal restrictions, the 1903 Gordon Bennett race was staged in Ireland in July of that year. A lack of success for the British team in this event led to the first motorcar race being held on the Isle of Man under the provisions of the Highways (Light Locomotives) Act 1904 – a trial for the 1904 Gordon Bennett Race. What took place in Ireland in 1903, therefore, set the precedent for later events in the Isle of Man.

The Irish Precedent

When the English driver Selwyn F. Edge had won the 1902 Gordon Bennett race held in France, he had given the Automobile Club of Great Britain and Ireland a difficult decision to make. After exploring a number of different possibilities, their eyes inevitably fell on Ireland. Why did a motor race on public roads take place in Ireland in 1903, when legislation prohibited such events in Britain? The answer seems to be fairly simple: Ireland was far enough on the periphery for this not to be a problem.

In contrast to the opinions of the majority who believed that motorcars were an outrage, the Automobile Club believed that the Gordon Bennett Cup and motorcar racing generally were beneficial to the development of the motorcar. It was the opinion of the Automobile Club that prolonged

[8] *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 11 June 1903, (4th Series), Vol. 123, col 699.
[9] The Gordon Bennett Cup had been designed by American newspaperman James Gordon Bennett who had come to Paris to found the continental edition of the *New York Herald.* He was keen on sport and became a founder member of the French Automobile Club. The Gordon Bennett Race was proposed in 1900 as a 'regularised international motor race to evidence the advance of the nations in motor car construction', as quoted in Holliday, *Racing Round the Island*, p. 11.

races on public roads had led to great improvements in motorcar design and construction.[10] It was also believed that the Gordon Bennett Cup was to motor racing what the America Cup was to yachting: an opportunity for nations to pit themselves against each other in competition and at the same time test new technology.[11] Evidence for this, argued the Automobile Club, was provided by the French supremacy in the motorcar industry that, it was claimed, was the result of the French authorities providing their manufacturers with the chance to test cars at high speeds along public roads. The French motor industry was far ahead of the British. In 1898, for example, the French had produced 1,850 vehicles and exported seven per cent of these to Britain. By 1904 Britain was selling two cars per month in France and importing 400 in return.[12] A Gordon Bennett Cup race in the UK would add impetus to the British motor car industry, suggested the Automobile Club, and would further educate the public in the value of these vehicles.

Further to this, the relationship between motor car racing and the manufacture of vehicles for domestic use was also highlighted in a letter to *The Times* by Scott Montagu who argued that the modern racing machine had no purpose and "the rules of motor racing ought now to be altered, not only in the interests of the public and the competitors, but for the eventual advantage of manufacturers as well."[13] O'Connell in *The Car in British Society*, suggests that in order to redress this balance, the British manufacturers had to demonstrate the benefits of the motor car to the public, convincing them that it would carry them securely from A to B; it was for this reason that part of the marketing of the motor car revolved around road races and reliability trials.[14] If the Gordon Bennett race were transferred to France, as would be the case if a suitable venue were not found in Britain, a valuable opportunity to improve the manufacture of British motorcars would be lost and the technological gap between the British and the French would widen. Members of the political elite, whose negative opinion was discussed earlier, would need to be convinced.

The Automobile Club had then settled on the idea of racing in Ireland, but it was still necessary to first pass legislation that would permit the

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[10] *Petition for Racing to be held in Ireland 1903,* (Churchill College Archives, Cambridge).
[11] *Petition for Racing to be held in Ireland 1903.*
[12] K. Richardson, *The British Motor Industry 1896-1939*, (London, MacMillian Press, 1997), p. 53. See also D.G. Rhys, *The Motor Industry: An Economic Survey,* (London, Butterworths, 1972), p.9.
[13] *The Times*, 27 May 1903, p.12.
[14] O'Connell, *The Car in British Society*, p.14.

closing of public roads for motorcar racing. In January 1903 the *Autocar* carried a message in its editorial advocating this. If legislation were not passed the race in Ireland would: "not only be illegal, but, further to that, would almost be certain to be stopped at an early stage, and this would be grossly unfair to the competitors and especially to those who came from abroad. If the race cannot legally and openly be held, it will not take place in this country [Ireland]."[15] Members of the motoring community thus realised the need for legislation. Contrary to this, however, one Irish columnist believed that "the English [were] far too law-abiding altogether, we are prepared to hold the race, official approval or not!"[16] Additionally there was also a feeling that such legislation would bring a sense of unity to the Irish. Commenting on the passing of legislation to permit the race, the ultra-Orange publication *Northern Whig* reported, "we see a wonderful blending of the Orange and Green. There is about this a matter of unanimity of which some people considered Irishmen to be incapable."[17] Irish MPs such as Sir Edward Carson, leader of the Irish Unionists, and John Redmond, leader of the Irish Nationalist Party would support this legislation. They were fiercely divided politically, but were brought together by the promise of motor racing in Ireland.

The Light Locomotives (Ireland) Bill was given its first reading in the House of Commons on 20 February 1903, received its second reading on 26 February and was considered in committee and given its third reading and passed on 2 March. Nothing was said against the passage of the bill.[18] The bill was passed onto the Lords and received its first reading on 3 March, the second reading on 16 March and was passed on 24 March.[19] Once again nothing was said in protest. Despite minimal debate over the legislation the notion, or at least promise, of unity was expressed. In the House of Lords Earl Spencer found it "gratifying and a new sensation … to find a Bill dealing with Ireland on which all sides, both in the other House and in this are united."[20] His opinion was echoed in the Commons by Saunderson, MP for Armagh North, who asked "is his Majesty's Government aware that this is a rare occasion on which the whole of the

[15] *Autocar*, 4 January 1903.
[16] As quoted in B. Lynch, *Triumph of the Red Devil,* (Dublin, Portobello Publishing, 2002), p.38.
[17] As quoted in Lynch, *Triumph of the Red Devil*, p.39.
[18] See *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 20 Feb. 1903 (4th Series), Vol. 118, col 404; 26 Feb. 1903, col. 1004; 2 Mar. 1903, col. 1216.
[19] See *Parliamentary Debates (Lords),* 3 Mar. 1903, (4th Series), Vol. 118, col. 1220; 16 Mar. 1903, col. 818; 24 Mar. 1903 (4th Series), Vol. 120, cols 3 and 66.
[20] *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)*, 16 Mar. 1903 (4th Series), Vol. 119, col. 820.

Irish people are at one? Taking this fact into consideration, will his Majesty's Government give a favourable reply?"[21] This was a comment that was met by laughter in the House, suggesting that the question of holding a motor race in Ireland was viewed as a light-hearted matter. Whyndham, Chief Secretary for Ireland, was confident that legislation would be passed and did "not like to contemplate the possibility of other members of the Commons opposing this measure" and believed further that "no one can be opposed to it."[22] Politicians at Westminster then praised the unity inspired by the proposal of a motor race in Ireland; they were not, it seems, put off by the danger and inconvenience posed by such an event. There was no intention of passing legislation to allow motor racing in England (or in Scotland or Wales) but it was accepted without demur as fair to allow motor racing to take place in Ireland. The Light Locomotives (Ireland) Act received the Royal Assent on 27 March 1903, having had its first reading in the Commons only a month earlier, on 20 February.[23]

It was not left up to MPs alone to put forward the benefits of a motor race in Ireland. Whilst legislation was being debated at Westminster the Automobile Club embarked on a direct mail campaign, designed to foster support for a motor race in Ireland. Letters were sent mostly to members of the Irish elite, but were also sent to some who it was believed would benefit from the staging of a motor race in Ireland, for example, railway companies and hoteliers. All in all, letters were sent to 102 Irish MPs, 300 newspapers, 34 chairmen of county and district councils, 34 county secretaries, 26 mayors, 90 Irish peers, 41 railway companies, 460 hoteliers, 13 parish priests and to the Bishop of Kildare and Leiglin.[24] The letter stressed the benefits that the Gordon Bennett race would supposedly bring locally and suggested that the event would benefit the Irish economy to the tune of £20,000. It is unclear how this figure was reached, but it would have included revenue generated by visitors who would travel to Ireland exclusively for the race. This was, after all, an international competition. The letters also promised that rigorous safety measures

[21] *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 23 Feb. 1903, (4th Series), Vol. 118, col. 510.
[22] *Parliamentary Debates (Commons),* 23 Feb. 1903, (4th Series), Vol. 118, col. 511.
[23] Montagu states in *The Gordon Bennett Races* that the bill passed through in record time 'receiving the Royal Assent on 27 March 1903, a bare seven days after it first reading in the Commons' (p.65). Since the bill was read first time in the Commons on 20 February 1903 this assessment is incorrect. See *Parliamentary Debates (Commons),* 20 Feb. 1903 (4th Series), Vol. 118, col. 404.
[24] Montagu and Sedgwick, *The Gordon Bennett Races*, p. 63. See also copy of the petition held at RAC Archives, Churchill College, Cambridge.

would be taken and assurances were given by the Automobile Club that the race would not be held on a Sunday but on a weekday, thus winning over the influential Catholic Church. To avoid interference with local businesses, the race would be held on a public holiday.[25]

Reaction to the letters was positive and members of the Automobile Club reported that they had met little opposition whilst touring the Irish countryside. The Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin it was suggested had declared himself to be an ardent advocate of the race.[26] County councils, who would be responsible for making necessary arrangements for the race in Ireland, unanimously approved the plans especially after they learned that they would not foot the bill for preliminary road repairs.[27] The race then was an attractive proposition. Potentially roadways could be approved at no cost to the local council. Although a softening up process was taking place, it must be remembered that legislation was being passed by Westminster, not by an Irish parliament and it was the Irish periphery that was being softened up. It may have been considered insensitive for the Automobile Club to see legislation passed and then simply turn up and race. Although this would not be impossible, the Automobile Club wanted to be seen to do the right thing in terms of gauging public opinion.

Legislation had been passed, and, selectively, public opinion seemed to be in favour of the event. However, there still existed the need to construct a course. Before deciding to hold the event in Ireland, the Automobile Club had pursued various other ideas in their ambition to hold races on home soil. These included the construction of a course over the flat land of Lincolnshire, building a course in Surrey and even the suggestion of holding the race in Scotland, as was proposed by the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch.*[28] Richard Mecredy, proprietor of the *Motor News* magazine, was asked if he could suggest a suitable course, after which it was proposed that the Irish race be held over closed public roads.[29] It was on Mecredy's instigation that a reconnaissance party from the Automobile Club was sent to Ireland in November 1902 and inspected the areas to the South and West of Dublin. One racing enthusiast has gone as far as to suggest that this reconnaissance party displayed "a rare unity of Saxon energy and Celtic ardour as English and Irish officials inspected

[25] Montagu and Sedgwick, *The Gordon Bennett Races,* p. 63.
[26] Montagu and Sedgwick, *The Gordon Bennett Races,* p. 63.
[27] Members of the Lords believed this to be the case. See *Parliamentary Debates (Lords),* 16 March 1903, p. 819.
[28] Montagu and Sedgwick, *The Gordon Bennett Races,* pp. 59-60.
[29] Montagu and Sedgwick, *The Gordon Bennett Races,* pp. 59-60.

nominated areas."[30] The party found potential to close roads and construct a course in the Kildare-Naas area. This area was well served by railways and roads out of Dublin, reducing the problem of transporting spectators, competitors and racing machines. The area was also thinly populated, with the exception of the main towns – Carlow, Kildare and Athy – which meant that the number of controls, and subsequently costs, could be kept to a minimum, showing that those in charge of organizing the race realised the inconvenience that would be caused to the public by the necessary road closures.

Everything appeared to be going along smoothly, but the Automobile Club de France (ACF) was not enthusiastic about the idea of a closed course race. They disliked the shortness of the proposed course and hoped that legislation would not be passed to allow the race to go ahead. It was in the interest of the French to not see racing go ahead, as the race would be held in France. However, this sentiment was not shared by *Le France Automobile* who attempted to placate the ACF, reminding them that they had been losers in 1902 and "a little indulgence would not be misplaced."[31] The Automobile Club was quick to respond to this, arguing that the French were scared of British ascendency in world matters or at least in the French-dominated automobile industry. Dublin's *Evening Mail* also spoke out against the opinion of the ACF remarking that "we are not aware that they do things better in France - witness the Paris-Madrid motor race disaster."[32] A more positive opinion was offered by one of the competitors, the American Percy Owen. He commented that "we couldn't have better roads. They are marvelous, nothing in America can compare, and they are as good as any in France, though not so wide."[33]

The organisers then faced one further problem: the Paris-Madrid motor race held in May 1903. A large number of fatalities in the race had seen the event ended at Bordeaux. There were now doubts over the safety of the Irish race. The attitude of MPs at the time, as we have seen above, was that motorcars were unsafe and motorcar races were unnecessary. This town-to-town race did little to prove the safety of motor racing and did little to quell the debate against the motorcar. In fact, English writer S.C.H Davies was compelled to comment that "for a while it seemed as thought [sic] racing might be stopped for good and all, and that made one sick at

[30] Lynch, *The Triumph of the Red Devil,* p. 37.
[31] Montagu and Sedgwick, *The Gordon Bennett Races,* p. 60.
[32] *Evening Mail* as quoted in Lynch, *Triumph of the Red Devil,* p. 46.
[33] Lynch, *Triumph of the Red Devil*, p. 37.

heart."[34] *The Times* reported that "an examination of yesterday's incidents seems to prove pretty conclusively that it is well nigh impossible to escape serious accidents in such races on the public roads under existing conditions."[35] Concerns over the events of the Paris-Madrid race were also raised in the House of Commons, and worries were expressed over the safety of the proposed Irish race. It was emphasised, by its supporters that the race would be held under entirely different circumstances and that vigorous safety measures would be put in place by members of the Irish constabulary and the military, supplemented by stewards supplied by the Automobile club.

The Paris-Madrid race did not deter the members of the motoring community from showing their support for racing. *The Times* published a letter from John Scott Montagu who argued that fatalities that had occurred in the Paris-Madrid race had no bearing on the future of motor car racing, or indeed a proposed Gordon Bennett race in Ireland. The two races, he claimed, would be entirely different and he argued that negative opinion caused by the events in France was entirely unreasonable. In his opinion motor racing was no more dangerous than other sports: "every year people are killed and injured in the following sports:- football, at cricket (a few), steeplechasing, polo, hunting, shooting, yachting: and yet no one clamours for the abolition of these contests."[36] For Montagu, motor racing was just another sport, not matter how dangerous it was. In short the Paris-Madrid race had done little to reduce the enthusiasm for motor racing among the elite. Despite the reaction in England to the events on the Paris-Madrid race, the Irish Gordon Bennett race was still scheduled to go ahead.

The race took place at the beginning of July 1903. On the day before the race *The Times* reported that there was a good deal of support for the race in Ireland, stating that "the hotels here [Naas] and in all the other towns on the route are packed to overflowing and the sides of the course were lined this evening with thousands of tents … It is quite certain that a really enormous crowd of spectators from all nations will witness the Gordon Bennett race tomorrow."[37] The so-called "Red Devil" Camille Jenatzy won the race and his victory was reported alongside the "bad-luck" experienced by English drivers. The *Irish Times*, however, reported that "there is no parallel in Irish history for the scenes which were

[34] As quoted in B. Montgomery, *The Irish Gordon Bennett 1903*, (Tankardsdown, Dreoilin Specialist Publications Ltd., 1999), p. 12.
[35] *The Times*, 26 May 1903, p. 5.
[36] *The Times,* 27 May 1903, p. 12.
[37] *The Times,* 1 July 1903, p. 11.

witnessed yesterday along the course traversed by the competitors for the Gordon Bennett Cup", and commented further that "the event was unique so far as this country is concerned and engendered an amount of public excitement which it would be impossible to portray."[38] Despite the success, only one Gordon Bennett race would be held in Ireland. It might be assumed that the lack of achievement by British drivers, coupled with the tardiness of members of the Automobile Club in seeking to have legislation renewed after the 1903 race, as suggested by *The Times*, contributed to trials for the 1904 Gordon Bennett race not being held in Ireland.[39]

In 1904 the Automobile Club were therefore faced with a problem: where to hold trials for the 1904 Gordon Bennett Race if not in Ireland. This race was to be held in Germany and was billed as a race that

> with its accompanying automobile amenities has drawn the nations together on a common sporting ground as no other pastime, industry or interest has ever before …in effect such an international camaraderie of sport is an unsigned treaty of peace and good fellowship.[40]

The German Gordon Bennett race was advertised as an extremely important sporting event, in fact an event that could be likened, in regard to the latter description, with the Olympic Games, which had been revived in their modern form in 1896. The British participants were determined to be successful and keen to make up for their lack of achievement in the 1903 Gordon Bennett Race. A British team could not be selected using the same illegal and rushed trials such as those held on the London to Oxford road before the 1903 race, and since other competing nations were holding their own trials, it was important that the British team did the same.[41] The Automobile Club had only the possibility of racing in Ireland under legislation passed in 1903. However, in May 1904 *The Times* commented that "it was thought that there would hardly be time to renew or extend the Act passed last year [1903] permitting racing in Ireland."[42] This meant that the obvious solution - to hold trials in Ireland - did not happen. But, the unobvious, racing in the Isle of Man, did happen with Irish legislation setting a precedent for Manx legislation.

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[38] *Irish Times,* 1 July 1903, p. 7.
[39] *The Times,* 10 May 1904, p. 13.
[40] From Julian Orde's copy of the book *Offizieller Gordon Bennett Führer 1904,* published to mark the occasion of the Gordon Bennett race in Germany 1904.
[41] Kelly, *TT Pioneers*, p. 15.
[42] *The Times*, 10 May 1904, p. 13.

Structure and Practice of Government on the Isle of Man

In 1904 the Manx government consisted of the lieutenant governor, the Legislative Council and the House of Keys and the two chambers met in Tynwald Court, a practice maintained throughout the period of this study. Boards of Tynwald consisting of Members of the Legislative Council (MLC) and Members of the House of Keys (MHK) directed other administrative duties.

Lord Raglan was appointed to the post of lieutenant governor in 1902, and would enjoy considerable personal authority during his time in office (1902-1919). He had the power to summon and adjourn the Manx parliament and veto expenditure. He was also president of the Local Government Board and head of the police. In fact, such was the power maintained by Raglan between 1902 and 1919 that Hall Caine, a prominent figure on the island, was compelled to compare him with the Tsar of Russia, and Spencer Leigh Hughes commented in *Reynolds Newspaper* in 1911 that "Raglan has more power than the Kaiser."[43] Samuel Norris, a prominent reformist, suggested that the lieutenant governor was "his own Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Home Secretary."[44] The British Crown appointed the lieutenant governor and only the British Crown could remove him from the position.

Yet, despite his considerable power over Manx affairs, Raglan was described in his obituary in the *Manx Quarterly* as intensely companionable, and it was claimed that no one could deliver speeches more gracefully, wittily and pithily.[45] This would indeed be evident in his advocacy of motor races on the island. Even Samuel Norris, one of Raglan's sternest critics and founder of the Manx National Reform League in 1903, conceded that no charitable event lacked his presence or that of his wife.[46] Deemster Callow, a member of the Legislative Council and thus by association a supporter of Raglan, also wrote that Raglan "knew the Island intimately from the Point of Ayre to the Calf [of Man]; he took

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[43] *Reynolds Newspaper*, Feb. 1911 as cited in J. Vaukins, 'The Manx Struggle for Reform', unpublished MPhil thesis, University of Lancaster, 1984, p. 17. Chapter One includes a discussion of the structure of government, laying out the respective roles of the lieutenant governor, the Legislative Council, the House of Keys and Tynwald, see pp. 11-20.

[44] *Liverpool Weekly Mercury*, May 1903 as cited in J. Vaukins, 'The Manx Struggle for Reform', p. 18.

[45] *Manx Quarterly,* 7 (1922), pp. 44 – 47.

[46] S. Norris, *Manx Memories and Movements*, (3rd edition, Douglas, Manx Heritage Foundation, 1994).