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## *Shinty, Land Wars and Celtic Radicalism*

Between 1870 and 1939 the traditional Celtic sport of shinty developed the structures and activities associated with modern sport. This included a core of clubs, a national governing body and a national competition. It has been suggested that this was an opportunity for the Camanchd Association (CA) to extend its hegemony over the sport and to establish shinty as a symbol of Celtic culture. Various radical forces that oscillated on the political landscapes of the Scottish Highlands and Ireland contoured the development of shinty during this period.

This paper critically evaluates the impact of two interconnected dimensions of radical activity: the campaign for land reform in the Highlands and the nationalist politics of Ireland and its links with the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). The paper examines three key issues: the extent to which the development of shinty converged with this radical social and political environment, shinty Celtic's role as vehicle for nationalism and identity in Scotland, and the ways in which political relationships between Britain and Ireland contoured sporting links between shinty and hurling. It argues that there were specific ways in which shinty intersected with organisations which comprised Highland civil society and that shinty was an important activity through which a distinctive cultural identity was expressed. The Highland Land Law Reform Association (1883) emerged from this same civil society to provide a distinctive Highland political forum. It drew support from the Irish Land League and from supporters of Irish Home Rule. This connection with Irish politics caused a schism in the Highland Land Reform movement. Evidence suggests that during the 1920s and 1930s there were a number of attempts to establish formal sporting links between CA and the GA. These efforts were abruptly concluded in the 1930s due to the wider social and political tensions between the British and Irish states. It is concluded that although shinty was promoted as a symbol of distinctive cultural identity and autonomy in the Highlands, this did not embrace the radical philosophies that underpinned the land wars and nationalist politics.

In order to examine the specific questions raised the paper has been developed from archive research of primary resources held in Scottish libraries. These include newspapers and magazines such as *The Highlander*; *Celtic Monthly*, the *Inverness Courier*; the *Oban Times* and the *Celtic Times*; the Minutes of the CA from its formation in 1893 until 1939; and parliamentary reports such as the Napier Commission Report (1884) into the conditions of crofters and cotters in the Highlands. The analysis of primary material has been incorporated into a social historical analysis of shinty during a period of radical political activity in both the Highlands and Ireland. The paper provides a unique synthesis of theoretical primary and secondary resources to illustrate the relationship between Celtic sport, nationhood and cultural identity in two related, but different Celtic communities.