

## The Bray Horse Show, Carlisle Grounds, August 1898

Horses have been bred for thousands of years in Ireland and had a mythical status in Gaelic culture. The 19th century saw great advances in horse breeding, and corresponding efforts to improve the quality of horses for a range of agricultural, trade and military purposes. Horse racing remained a popular sport, and the first racecourses were constructed in the 1830's, including one on Bray Commons where a stand was erected and the races drew huge crowds. Unauthorized races were sometimes held, and in 1862 John Brennan, owner of the International Hotel, was fined for taking part in one in his carriage, flanked by outriders who cleared the way, on the road between Bray and Deansgrange. The Rathdown Union Farming Society (later the Agricultural Society) organized the first show of farm animals and produce, in a yard and field behind Mr. Quins premises at Bray in 1848. Prizes were awarded for the best animals, vegetables, and grains exhibited by farmers in different categories. Among the exhibits were potatoes which Mr Molloy of Rochestown Avenue had apparently treated successfully for blight. Subsequent meetings, in more auspicious circumstances, included horse, cattle and sheep shows at the field opposite Mr Breslin's hotel, now the Carlisle grounds.

Primarily as the middle classes expanded, there was a growth in leisure and recreational activities, notably in the emerging equestrian disciplines of show jumping, dressage and eventing, which also provided a form of entertainment. Horse shows provided an opportunity for owners and breeders to demonstrate the qualities of their horses, and for riders to demonstrate their skills, especially in the jumping arena. The first horse show in Ireland was held in Dublin in 1864 and was organized jointly by the Royal Dublin Society and Royal Agricultural Society in Ireland. A Bray Horse Show committee was established in 1892, and the annual event quickly became an important part of the social calendar. A report on the forthcoming show in 1897 reads: "The residents of this beautiful seaside resort are to be congratulated on the success that in previous years has attended their horse and pony shows, which after Dublin are among the most attractive events of their kind held in Ireland. On Thursday and Friday, 15th and 16th inst; the seventh annual show will be held in the Carlisle Grounds, entries closing today, 3rd inst. They may be had on application to hon. Secretary in Bray, Mr A. Byrne. Not the least attractive events will be the jumping competition which will be held on each of the two days, and an intercounty jumping competition, consisting of teams of three from any county in Ireland. The Dublin, Wicklow, and Wexford Railway Company will on the occasion afford ample facilities and cheap fares to parties from Dublin and intermediate stations attending the show, and from stations south of Bray (Wicklow News-Letter July 3rd, 1897).

A photograph taken at the Carlisle grounds in August 1898 shows the International Hotel and the Prince of Wales Terrace in the background. Reports of the event say the

weather was good, and although attendance was light in the morning, the jumping competitions in the afternoon drew a large crowd, the reserved enclosure being packed. The 1898 Committee of the Horse and Pony Show was a virtual 'who's who' of the gentlemen who were important figures in the town: Chairman, Sir Henry Cochrane, JP DL; vice-chairman, M Langton TC, hon treas, W G Syme; hon sec, A Byrne; Rev J O'Donnell, CC; E. Breslin, Dr Hanson, Dr Hamilton, Dr N Thompson, H G Crody, HP, FRCS; W P Bolton, N. Doyle, J T Purdon, M J Hanmore, A G Wailes, T O'Meara, T H R Craig, J E McCormick, TC; P McDonnell, W J Richardson MRCVS; M Carroll, MRCVS; E N McCormick, J Coffey, J Merrigan, W Kerr Johnston, T Langton, J W Reigh, J Graham, Dr Eccles, W H Hewlings, E Finnernan, -Brown, J Ramsay, W Miller, P Field, J Robson, C O Sealy, T Boyle, W G Morris, H E B Nuttall, R Gow, J F Lacy, J Mills, W Byrne, J Byrne, M O'Byrne, P S Barrington, C H McCrea, D Molony, T J Molony, R Valentine, T O'Reilly, G McCullagh, J J Fullerton, W Ham, R Buckham, C B Kehoe, C Wallis, - Greene, A McEnery, Capt Irwin, Major Halliwell. Visitors were entertained by the committee at a luncheon in Breslin's Hotel.

Horse shows were held in Bray long into the twentieth century at various venues, including the Glenmalure Hotel on Vevay road, the GAA grounds at Novara, and the Presentation Brothers land on the Putland Road. (Sources : Photo: The Field. Aug 1898; newspapers Wicklow new-Letter July 1897 etc. This post first appeared in the Victorian Bray Facebook page in October 2025)