

## MacCarthy, Thomas St George

by Sean Kearns

MacCarthy, Thomas St George (1862–1943), athlete, RIC officer, and co-founder of the GAA, was born 9 June 1862 at Bansha, Co. Tipperary, second of four children of George MacCarthy, constabulary officer, and Margaret MacCarthy (née Doherty). His father, a native of Kerry, had joined the Irish Constabulary as a cadet in 1857 and was posted as a sub-inspector to Co. Tipperary. He was appointed as an RM for Co. Meath in 1871 and served later in the counties of Tipperary and Galway before returning to Meath in 1883; he retired in 1896.

Thomas was educated at the Tipperary grammar school, where his prowess as an athlete first emerged. He played cricket and rugby for the school, as well as competing in a variety of athletic events, and in 1880 played with the Clanwilliam rugby club in Tipperary. He moved to Dublin later that year to study at TCD, although it seems clear that his intention from the start was to enter the RIC as a cadet as he simultaneously attended the academy run by Michael Cusack (qv), where he played hurling and rugby. In 1881 he was half-back on the TCD rugby team that contested the inaugural Leinster senior cup tie versus the Phoenix club, and on 18 March 1882 he was on the TCD side that overcame Kingstown 1–0 in that competition's first final. His energetic tackling and accuracy with the drop kick led to his selection on the Irish team that played Wales on 18 January 1882 in the first meeting between the two countries. His career as an athlete was cut short, however, when he came first in the 1882 examinations for the RIC and was immediately transferred as a sub-inspector to Templemore, Co. Tipperary.

His chief fame lies in his attendance on 1 November 1884 at the first meeting of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Hayes's Commercial Hotel in Thurles, although for many years it was unclear why he was present. Although several writers have suggested he was reporting on the meeting for the RIC, it now seems clear that he attended at the invitation of Maurice Davin (qv) after a chance meeting in Thurles earlier that day. He knew Davin through athletics and was probably eager to meet his old tutor Cusack, with whom he had developed a close relationship in Dublin. He took no real part in the business that day, and did not attend any further meetings of the association or help with its development, even before the ban on RIC participation in Gaelic games came into operation in 1887.

His later career in the RIC was in sharp contrast to that of his father, almost certainly because of his heavy drinking. He was disciplined on several occasions and regularly transferred from station to station, serving in Fermanagh, Derry, Dundalk, and Longford. In 1912 he retired early from the force at the rank of district inspector, first class.

He married (18 November 1887) Mary Lynch of Dublin; they had one son and one daughter. He retained an interest in both hurling and rugby throughout his career and regularly attended matches at Croke Park and Lansdowne Road. He was the only surviving founder when the GAA celebrated its golden jubilee in 1934, although this went unrecognised by the association. After his retirement he lived at Oakley Rd, Ranelagh, and Morehampton Rd, Donnybrook. He died 12 March 1943 at the Linden Convalescent Home, Blackrock, and was buried in Deansgrange cemetery.

---

R. M. Peter, *Irish football annual* (1880); T. F. O'Sullivan, *The story of the GAA* (1916); *Dublin University rugby club 1854–1954* (1954); *Ir. Independent*, 30 Dec. 1959, 6, 11 Jan. 1960; *Dublin Evening Mail*, 17 Aug. 1960; *Sunday Independent*, 23 Dec. 1973; W. F. Mandle, *The GAA and Irish nationalist politics* (1987); Marcus de Burca, 'The curious career of sub-inspector Thomas St George McCarthy', *Tipperary Hist. Jn.* 1988, 201–4; *Fyffes*; Seamus Ó Riain, *Maurice Davin: first president of the GAA* (1994); Marcus de Burca, *The GAA: a history* (1999)