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# James Joyce's "Fearless Thurles"

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One aspect of James Joyce's work which has received little attention is the place of the G.A.A. in his work, particularly the indifferent knowledge he displays in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* of both Tipperary hurling and Tipperary geography. The central passage of the relevant section reads as follows:

Stephen had turned his smiling eyes towards his friend's face, flattered by his confidence and won over to sympathy by the speaker's simple accent.

- I was away all that day from my own place over in Buttevant. - I don't know if you know where that is — at a hurling match between the Croke's Own Boys and the Fearless Thurles and by God, Stevie, that was the hard fight. My first cousin Fonsy Davin was stripped to his buff that day minding cool for the Limericks but he was up with the forwards half the time and shouting like mad. I never will forget that day. One of the Croke's made a woeful wipe at him one time with his caman and I declare to God he was within an aim's ace of getting it at the side of his temple. Oh, honest to God, if the crook of it caught him that time he was done for.

The speaker is Davin, who appears as Madden in *Stephen Hero* and is based on Joyce's close friend at U.C.D., George Clancy (1879-1921), later murdered by the Black and Tans when Lord Mayor of Limerick. Clancy, like Davin in *A Portrait*, "had sat at the feet of Michael Cusack, the Gael" and was committed to both the G.A.A. and the Gaelic League. He even succeeded in briefly enticing Joyce to attend Irish classes given by Patrick Pearse. Cusack is, of course, the prototype of the nationalist caricature, the Citizen in the Cyclops episode of *Ulysses*.

Joyce had little direct acquaintance with hurling, although he may have played the game while attending North Richmond Street C.B.S., an episode of which he was deeply ashamed and of which little is known. His friendship with Clancy gave him every reason to associate hurling with "the Limericks", the team for which Fonsy Davin was "minding cool".

What is puzzling, however, is that if one of "Croke's Own Boys" made a "woeful wipe" at Fonsy, then Fonsy can only have been playing against "Crokes" and for "the Fearless Thurles". Accordingly, while the geographical details given in relation to the Buttevant - Kilmallock area, where the action occurs, are remarkably accurate, it appears from the textual evidence that Joyce thought of "the Fearless Thurles" as coming from Limerick!

The team titles appear to be Joycean inventions and are in keeping with the satirical tone of the passage. The "Fearless Thurles" is an obvious reference to the Thurles Blues; but I have been unable to find any reference to a Limerick club with a title approximating to "Croke's Own Boys". Two of George Clancy's brothers, Jack and Ned ("Agan"), were noted players with Fedamore, and it is with this club that George would, presumably, have played. However, I have failed to find any reference to him as a player outside Dublin.

