

NOTES

Finnegans Wake: The Dating Game

Peter J. Reichenberg

Some people believe football is a matter of life and death. I'm very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that.

Bill Shankly, 1981

James Joyce leaves us in no doubt that the events portrayed in his novel *Ulysses* take place on 16 June 1904. Unfortunately, he is not as forthright in providing an equivalent date for *Finnegans Wake*. Instead he provides only riddles wrapped in mysteries inside enigmas. But, perhaps there is a key.

In "*Wake*" Rites, George Cinclair Gibson explores three major theories regarding the controversy surrounding the date of the *Wake*: Easter, the vernal equinox, and the Celtic May Day (Beltane).¹ He presents compelling evidence that the *Wake* is actually based on the *Teamhur Feis* (Festival of Tara) conducted on Easter Sunday, A.D. 25 March 433, and the extraordinary convergence of Christian, pagan, and seasonal events occurring on that day.

Prior to reading "*Wake*" Rites, I had started my own research into the possible date of the *Wake*. While the *Teamhur Feis* may indeed be the definitive model for *Finnegans Wake*, I believe I can establish a modern-day equivalent for at least a portion of the *Wake*. The events in chapter 11 (Book II.3, pages 309-82) occur inside HCE's public house. The key is the radio or, to be more precise, what we hear and what Earwicker and his patrons hear on the radio. Joyce left us an indisputable factual clue to the exact date of the proceedings inside the tavern.

Throughout the chapter, the transmission of a radio broadcast is heard in the background noise of the pub. At FW 378.17-19, we read the following: "He's alight there still, by Mike! Loose afore! Bung! Bring forth your deed! Bang! Till is the right time. Bang! Partick Thistle agen S. Megan's versus Brystal Palace agus the Walsall! Putsch!" The names of four association football (soccer) clubs are coupled in this passage: Partick Thistle, St. Mirren, Crystal Palace, and Walsall. Their placement together suggests a specific date when these teams competed and the results of the matches then broadcast over the radio that night. I checked the number of times the teams played each other in their respective leagues from the date of the publication of *Ulysses* in February 1922 to that of *Finnegans Wake* in May 1939.

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During these years, Partick Thistle and St. Mirren competed in the Scottish Football League (First Division). In the eighteen football seasons spanning these years, they faced each other a total of thirty-seven times.² There were thirty-three league games, three Scottish Cup games, and the Paisley Charity Cup Final in 1936. Crystal Palace and Walsall competed in Division Three (South) in England, and from 1922 to 1939, they had fourteen league encounters.³ These two English teams met less frequently than their Scottish counterparts since Walsall played only seven seasons in the southern section during this period.

In the seventeen years Joyce was writing *Finnegans Wake*, the twin pairing of Partick Thistle versus St. Mirren and Crystal Palace versus Walsall occurred once and only once. On that day, St. Mirren played host to Partick Thistle in a 2-2 draw, "afore!" at Love Street, Paisley, Scotland. At Selhurst Park, London, Walsall was defeated by a four-goal margin ("Loose afore!"), as Crystal Palace secured a 5-1 victory at home. The reporting of the results of these two specific football matches accounts for the simultaneous mention of all four teams on the radio sports bulletin heard that evening in HCE's pub.

The day is Saturday, the date, 7 April 1928. It is Holy Saturday. The following day is Easter Sunday.

The following entries are in one of the last notebooks to be compiled by Joyce circa late 1937-early 1938 (*JJA* 39:79, 89-90).

VI.B.41-247	S Megan's
VI.B.41-267	Partick Thistle
	V-S. Megan
VI.B.41-268	Brystal Palace
	Walsall
	Putch

Then in a handwritten notation, Joyce incorporates these lines into the typescript (*JJA* 55:512), probably in 1938, according to David Hayman's draft catalogue: "MS47480-281v Bang! Partick Thistle agen S. Megan's versus Brystal Palace agus the Walsall! Putsch!"⁴

But why select these four teams out of the scores of Scottish and English football clubs that competed on that day? Keep in mind that we are talking about two lesser-known Scottish teams and two English teams playing in the third division of their league. Outside of their local inhabitants and football enthusiasts, these are not familiar place names, Crystal Palace being the exception because of its connection to the Great Exhibition of 1851. Joyce had to have seen or heard of these football clubs and attached a special significance to them to include them at this time.⁵ Perhaps the names appealed to him, and he used them to identify the date of this portion of the *Wake*.

Partick Thistle and St. Mirren evoke the names of two Irish saints: Saint Patrick and Saint Mirren. The name Partick, from the Gaelic *aper dhu ec*, means the place at the mouth of the dark river.⁶ Partick is an area of Glasgow on the north bank of the River Clyde. Saint Mirren was an Irish monk, the founder and abbot of Paisley Abbey, Renfrewshire, Scotland. He is the patron saint of Paisley and of the St. Mirren Football Club. The actual Megan “was a Welsh saint who has no football connection,”⁷ and neither does Saint Michan, a Danish bishop, for whom St. Michan’s Church, Dublin, was named; among others, the mummified remains of the 1798 Rebellion leaders, brothers John and Henry Sheares, are interred in the subterranean vault there.

The thistle is the symbol of Scotland as the shamrock is of Ireland. The thistle also suggests a connection to HCE’s Scandinavian origins. The legend behind the Scottish thistle involves Viking raiders approaching a group of sleeping clansmen. Under the cover of darkness, the Vikings removed their shoes to ensure a silent advance, but they ended up in a field of thistles in their bare feet. Their shouts of pain waked the Scots who went on to defeat the Norse invaders.⁸

Joyce lived in the Victoria Palace Hotel in Paris in 1923-1924, and he possibly associated the name with the original Crystal Palace built during the reign of Queen Victoria. The word Brystal is used as a substitute for Crystal to connect us to the city of Bristol cited in the Lord-Mayor’s speech as “Tolbris” (FW 545.20-21). In 1172, Henry II made a grant of the city of Dublin to his men from Bristol. Bristol entered our 1928 holiday weekend again when Bristol Rovers hosted Crystal Palace on Easter Monday, Bristol versus Palace, hence “Brystal Palace.”⁹

The name Walsall is thought to have derived from the Saxon words “Walh halh,” meaning “valley of the foreigners” and referring to the Celtic (Welsh) inhabitants of the area prior to the Saxon invasion.¹⁰ The word Walsall suggests the image of a wall, the Magazine Wall, and the fall.

The actions within Earwicker’s pub thus take place from sundown, Holy Saturday, 7 April 1928, to the early morning of Easter Sunday, 8 April 1928. On Holy Saturday, Jesus descended into hell, and on Easter Sunday He ascended to heaven. *Finnegans Wake* is a tale of fall and resurrection. Joyce selected Easter for its symbolism and imagery—the same reason Patrick Pearse chose Easter to initiate the 1916 Rebellion (“Putsch!”) against the British occupation of Ireland.

And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee,
To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.
St. Luke, 23:43

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This essay is dedicated with love and affection to my wife Bernadette and to the members of both the Finnegans Wake Society of New York and the New York Celtic Supporters Club. Hail, Hail!

¹ George Cinclair Gibson, "Wake" Rites: *The Ancient Irish Rituals of "Finnegans Wake"* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2005), pp. 25-34.

² Match information was provided in a 13 February 2007 letter from Robert Reid, the Honorary Vice President of the Partick Thistle Football Club Ltd., and a 15 February 2007 e-mail from Alastair Maclachlan, the Press Officer for the St. Mirren Football Club Ltd.

³ Match information was provided in an 8 February 2007 letter from Marc Harrington, Communications Officer for the Crystal Palace Football Club Ltd., and in season-by-season charts from Geoff Allman, the Club Historian for the Walsall Football Club Ltd.

⁴ David Hayman, *A First-Draft Version of "Finnegans Wake"* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1963), p. 316.

⁵ Since the first actual writing Joyce produced for *Finnegans Wake* was the "Roderick O'Connor" draft passage, now on pages 380-82—see Hayman (p. 5)—it seems appropriate that Joyce would later insert a clue to the date within this section. This clue is located immediately after the words "Bang! Till is the right time. Bang!" (FW 378.18, my emphasis).

⁶ See Hugh Macintosh, *Origin & History of Glasgow Street Names* (Glasgow: James Hedderwick & Sons, 1902); accessed through the Glasgow Digital Library, <<http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/minstr/minstr06.htm>>.

⁷ See James S. Atherton, "Sport and Games in *Finnegans Wake*," *Twelve and a Tilly: Essays on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of "Finnegans Wake*," ed. Jack P. Dalton and Clive Hart (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 62.

⁸ See Joyce Rushen, "Scotland's Guardian Thistle," *The Highlands: The Magazine of Scottish Heritage*, 36 (November-December 1998), 53. Rushen comments that the legend is thought to have originated during the reign of the House of Alpin in A.D. 880-1000.

⁹ See *The Times (London)*, 44863 (10 April 1928), 6, column 3. This game ended in a 1-1 draw.

¹⁰ Adrian Room, *Placenames of the World: Origins and Meanings of the Names for 6,600 Countries, Cities, Territories, Natural Features and Historic Sites*, 2nd ed. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2006), p. 401.

Making Them in the One Pot

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Buck Mulligan's folkloric offering to Haines in "Telemachus" is one of his better-known comic bits:

-When I makes tea I makes tea, as old mother Grogan said. And when I makes water I makes water. . . .

-*So I do*, Mrs Cahill, says she. *Begob, ma'am*, says Mrs Cahill, *God send you don't make them in the one pot.* (U 1.357-62)

When Mulligan says, very earnestly, "That's folk . . . for your book, Haines" (U 1.365), I think most readers are inclined to disbelieve him; for that matter, so, in all probability, is Haines, who has got off a good line himself ("By Jove, it is tea"—U 1.369). But, in fact, it is folklore, or at least the first part appears as a story told in 1955 by a folk informant, Tadhg Kelly of County Clare:

Father Charlie's Visit to Ryans

The Ryans behind in C. . . were always inviting the priests back for tea, and one time, they had a streele of a lassie as a servant girl. This lady's name was Mollo Quinn and Mrs. Ryan drummed into her that morning that Father Charlie would be coming out for tea that evening, so everything was to be in order. 'Twas the first time that since Mollo went in service to the Ryans that they were having such high company. Anyway things went great, and after the tea been all over, and Father Charlie was sitting down at the table Mollo came along to clear the things away.

"That was a very nice cup of tea, my good woman," he says to her in all sincerity.

"Ah, Father," she says, "there's nothing like a good cup of tea, and when I makes tea I makes tea, and when I makes water I makes water."¹

Patricia Lysaght refers to the passage in *Ulysses* in her *Ulster Folklife* essay but seems to assume that Joyce and Kelly are both repeating a known story. Since the tale recorded in the manuscripts is dated 1955, it is, of course, possible that Joyce's 1922 version was original with him (or with Mulligan or with Oliver Gogarty) and somehow worked its way into the folk imagination, just as W. B. Yeats always hoped to hear his poems sung by the peasantry.² But, unfortunately, I doubt it. We can still speculate as to whether Mulligan's capper line is original with him or, as is the case with so many of his witty comments, it is

also plagiarized.

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¹ This anecdote is quoted in Patricia Lysaght's article, "'When I makes Tea, I makes Tea ...': Innovation in Food—The Case of Tea in Ireland," *Ulster Folklife*, 33 (1987), 62, and was found in the Main Manuscript Collection, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin, folder 1392, item 125.

² See Dorothy Wellesley, ed., *Letters on Poetry from W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1940), p. 122.