

‘A TERRIBLE DANGER TO THE MORALS OF THE COUNTRY’:¹
THE IRISH HOSPITALS’ SWEEPSTAKE IN GREAT BRITAIN, 1930–87

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[Received 4 February 2004. Read 18 October 2004. Published 23 September 2005.]

ABSTRACT

The principal focus of this paper is to examine the importance of British contributions to the success of the Irish hospitals’ sweepstake. In its early years, up to three quarters of Irish sweepstake tickets were sold in Britain, bringing millions of pounds into Ireland annually for expenditure on improving the state’s hospital services. The vast amount of money leaving Britain in this way angered the British government and forced them to introduce new legislation to curtail the activities of the sweep. The paper will highlight the extent to which the success of the Irish sweepstake depended on the market for tickets in Britain; the danger posed to the survival of the sweep by the restriction of its activities in Britain after 1935; the role of the sweepstake controversy in further exacerbating already strained relations between the governments of Great Britain and the Irish Free State in the 1930s; how the success of the sweep in Britain raised the issue of legalising a British lottery; and the eventual decline of the Irish sweepstake as a force in British gambling circles in the post-war years.

Introduction

The Irish hospitals’ sweepstake was established by legislation in the Irish Free State in 1930 to raise funds for the state’s voluntary hospitals, which were enduring a financial crisis precipitated by political upheaval both at home and abroad during the 1910s. Inflation during the First World War had greatly reduced the value of their charitable endowments, and following independence from Britain in 1921 a number of erstwhile supporters of the Protestant-run hospitals left the state. These problems were compounded by the increased cost of and demand for medical treatment, a reduction in the number of medical students and thence in income generated from tuition fees, and the limited availability of medical cover for insured workers. With the infant Dublin government unwilling to undertake the financial burden of supporting the hospitals, a solution was eventually found in 1930 with the legalisation of the hospitals’ sweepstakes, three of which were run every year on the major English horse races to raise funds for the hospitals. The population of Ireland was too small to support the sweepstakes and so the promoters sought to sell the vast majority of their tickets abroad, especially in Great Britain and North America, with little regard for the prohibition on gambling in these areas.²

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¹ Ramsay MacDonald’s condemnation of the Irish sweepstake, *Argus* (Melbourne), 2 June 1931.

² For a more detailed account of the establishment of the Irish sweepstakes see Marie Coleman, ‘The origins of the Irish hospitals’ sweepstake’, *Irish Economic and Social History* 29 (2002), 40–55.

The popularity of Irish sweepstakes in Britain

Lotteries had been outlawed in Great Britain and Ireland under the provisions of the 1823 Lottery Act. Nevertheless, numerous small charitable lotteries continued to proliferate in Ireland throughout the nineteenth century. In 1874 the British home secretary referred the matter of illegal Irish lotteries to the lord lieutenant in Dublin Castle, but the Irish law officers decided against taking legal proceedings to prohibit such enterprises. This blind-eye policy of the Irish administration allowed Irish lotteries to flourish in Britain much to the chagrin of the law enforcement authorities there.

The majority of Irish lotteries advertising their tickets for sale in Britain in the late nineteenth century were organised to raise funds for religious or sporting bodies. A bazaar and prize-draw in aid of the Sacred Heart Home, Drumcondra, advertised in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1887 offered £1,000 worth of valuable prizes, chief among which was 'A beautiful cameo likeness of his Holiness Pope Leo XIII, set in fine gold and precious stones, the gift of his Holiness to the bazaar'.³ Dublin's Mater Hospital, Belfast's Distillery and Milltown Football Clubs and the Ballymacarrett Masonic Hall joined the motley collection of Irish organisations advertising their lottery tickets in British newspapers at this time. The reluctance of the authorities to interfere with such illegal enterprises might have stemmed from the prominent patrons often associated with them: the Archbishop of Dublin and Home Rule Party MPs Thomas Sexton and Dr J. E. Kenny lent their names to the Sacred Heart Home lottery, while the Lord Mayor and High Sheriff of Dublin were among the 'leading citizens of the City' who helped promote the Mater Hospital's venture.⁴

The 1920s witnessed a huge increase in the popularity of gambling in Britain, due in part to the post-war increase in wages, overtime and leisure hours, and evidenced by the success of the football pools—introduced in 1922—and greyhound racing with electric hares, which was started in 1926.⁵ Greyhound racing was claimed by some to 'have been introduced primarily to exploit the gambling spirit';⁶ the number of greyhound tracks that provided betting facilities increased from one in 1926 to 226 in 1932. The opening of tote clubs that provided facilities for ready-money betting in many towns and the continued problem of illegal street betting compounded the difficulties generated by the increased problem of gambling in Britain.⁷ In spite of growing demands to liberalise British lottery laws, successive home secretaries throughout the 1920s refused to move on the issue.⁸

The popularity of gambling in Britain during the 1920s was reflected in the ready market that was found there for illegal Irish sweepstake tickets. Prior to the

³ National Archives of Great Britain (NAGB), Home Office (HO) HO 45/9964/X16006; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 24 August 1887.

⁴ NAGB, HO 45/9964/X16006.

⁵ Roger Munting, *An economic and social history of gambling in Great Britain and the USA* (Manchester, 1996), 32–3.

⁶ NAGB, HO 45/18783, B. E. Astbury, 'The Betting and Lotteries Act, 1934', *Social Science Review* (January 1935), 5.

⁷ NAGB, HO 45/16318, 'Note on the Betting and Lotteries Act for the chancellor'.

⁸ See, for example, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 164, 2352 (7 June 1923); J. R. Clynes, *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 241, 1448 (17 July 1930).

legalisation of the hospitals' sweepstake in 1930, sweepstake gambling as a method of fundraising for charities, schools, churches, hospitals, sports clubs, trade unions and numerous other societies and organisations was quite prevalent in Ireland. Access to a large market, the appetite for gambling, and the substantial Irish population living there, made Britain a popular destination for tickets in these lotteries. A significant proportion of the prize-winners in all of these competitions was British.⁹

In 1923, Sir Ernley Blackwell of the Home Office complained to his counterpart in the Irish Department of Home Affairs (later Justice) about the proliferation in Britain of advertisements for sweepstakes organised by Irish promoters R. J. Duggan and Fr. John O'Nolan.¹⁰ In response to the British representations, and alarmed at the rapid spread of sweepstakes, the Irish Free State government introduced new regulations that sought to outlaw lotteries offering substantial cash prizes and to prevent the sale of Irish lottery and sweepstake tickets in Britain. Neither of these endeavours proved particularly successful, as evidenced by L. S. Amery's 1926 complaint to the Free State's governor general, T. M. Healy, that the number of Irish lotteries advertised in Britain had actually increased in the intervening three years.¹¹ The Dominions Office provided the Irish Department of Justice with a list of the individuals and organisations whose lottery tickets were known to be on sale in Britain, which included a number of hospitals and churches, as well as the Hermitage Golf Club, Leinster Cricket Club, Neptune Rowing Club, the St Vincent de Paul, the British Legion and the Irish Clerical Workers trade union.¹² In response to the British representations, the Irish Free State government undertook to instruct the postal authorities to detain and open any letters entering their jurisdiction that were believed to contain lottery remittances.¹³ Nevertheless, tickets for lotteries, raffles and sweepstakes organised by a myriad of Irish charities, churches, clubs and other organisations continued to circulate in Britain throughout the 1920s.¹⁴

The problem of Irish sweepstake tickets circulating illegally in Great Britain became a very serious one for the British authorities in 1930, when the legalisation of the Irish hospitals' sweepstake introduced sweepstakes on a grand scale. In the run-up to the inaugural Irish hospitals' sweepstake on the 1930 Manchester November Handicap, the *Daily Express* reported that 'A flood of tickets for the sweep have reached England and Scotland, and can be bought almost anywhere'.¹⁵ Almost 57 per cent of prize-winners in this sweep were British. An analysis of the country of residence of prize-winners during the 1930s shows that almost two thirds of prizes in each sweep—and more than three quarters in the case of the 1932

⁹ Coleman, 'Origins of the Irish hospitals' sweepstake', 42–8.

¹⁰ National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Department of Justice (DJ), H69/20, E. Blackwell, Home Office, to secretary, Minister for Home Affairs, 15 January 1923.

¹¹ NAI, Department of An Taoiseach (DT), L. S. Amery, Dominions Office, to T. M. Healy, 3 April 1926.

¹² NAI, DT, S3828/A.

¹³ NAI, DT, S3828/A, T. M. Healy to L. S. Amery, 17 August 1926.

¹⁴ NAI, DJ, H240/38.

¹⁵ NAI, Department of Tourism, Transport & Communications (DTT&C), I+F41218/62(I), extract from *Daily Express*, 31 July 1930.

Derby sweep—were won by British residents (see Table 1). Given the random nature of the draw, these figures probably correspond quite closely to the numbers of tickets sold there. Clearly, the success of the Irish hospitals' sweepstake in its early years depended on its market in Great Britain.

TABLE 1—Percentage of Irish hospitals' sweepstake prizes won by British residents, 1930–4.

<i>Sweepstake</i>	<i>% of prizes won by British residents</i>
1930 Manchester November Handicap	56.96
1931 Grand National	65.69
1931 Manchester November Handicap	65.89
1932 Grand National	65.20
1932 Derby	76.09
1932 Cesarewitch	69.05
1933 Grand National	61.99
1933 Derby	68.88
1933 Cambridgeshire	56.00
1934 Grand National	61.25
1934 Derby	57.51
1934 Cambridgeshire	44.90

The figures were calculated from lists of names and addresses of the prize-winners printed in the Irish daily newspapers after each sweepstake draw.

Undoubtedly, the popularity of Irish sweepstakes in Britain owed much to the large number of people of Irish descent living there. In 1931 the Irish-born population of England and Wales was 381,081, accounting for 1.4% of the total population, while in Scotland 124,296 Irish-born citizens made up 2.6% of that country's population.¹⁶ These figures grew during the 1930s as the numbers of Irish emigrating to Britain increased, partly due to a corresponding decline in emigration to the United States, where the more stringent impact of the depression curtailed employment opportunities. 13,200 Irish people emigrated to Great Britain in 1932, a considerable increase on the previous year's figure of 9,800. This jumped further to 16,400 in 1934, 22,100 in 1935 and 32,300 in 1936.¹⁷

It was not difficult to buy an Irish sweep ticket in Britain in the early 1930s. According to the Metropolitan Police they could be obtained easily in Mooney's Irish Bar on The Strand, the Oxford Street branch of Lloyd's Bank, which acted as an agent for Irish banks, Ladbrokes and other well-known bookmakers, the Forum picture house on New Street and a number of other businesses located throughout London. The catering branch of the Transport and General Workers' Union appears to have acted as an agency for distributing tickets in the 1930 Manchester

¹⁶ Enda Delaney, *Demography, state and society: Irish migration to Britain, 1921–1971* (Liverpool, 2000), 84, table 2.11.

¹⁷ Delaney, *Demography, state and society*, 45, table 2.3.

November Handicap sweep.¹⁸ Ease of travel and organisational links between both countries made the transfer of tickets relatively easy and detection by the British postal authorities correspondingly difficult. It was very easy for travellers between Ireland and Britain to conceal sweepstake tickets in their luggage.¹⁹ When customs officials at Holyhead began to search the luggage of travellers between Ireland and Britain for surreptitious sweep tickets it produced an outcry in the House of Commons; the Conservative MP Colonel Charles Howard Bury, who had a residence in Ireland, complained indignantly that 'the luggage of passengers arriving from the Irish Free State, including their private papers, is being ransacked in search of sweepstake tickets, their cheque books are opened and examined...', while Sir William Davison demanded the prompt return of 'the old green flag of the 2nd Battalion Connaught Rangers [seized] on its way from Ireland to the Old Comrades' Association regimental dinner in London, on the ground that Irish sweepstake tickets were enclosed with the regimental colours'.²⁰

The British government sought in vain to use the powers of the Post Office to curb the flow of sweepstake correspondence between Britain and Ireland. The principal tool in the Post Office's anti-lottery armoury was a warrant issued by the home secretary in 1920 authorising the postmaster general '[to] detain and open any postal packets observed in course of transmission by post believed to contain advertisements or circulars relating to lotteries promoted in the United Kingdom or abroad.'²¹ In November 1930, the assistant postmaster general, S. P. Viant, told the House of Commons that 9,031 letters had been opened by the Post Office and a sum of £6,960 returned to would-be subscribers to the 1930 Manchester November Handicap sweep.²² In order to evade detection by the postal authorities, Hospitals' Trust Limited, the promoters of the sweepstake, advised its customers in Britain not to correspond directly with them but to send their subscriptions through a bank, business house, participating hospital or acquaintance resident in the Irish Free State.²³ The number of British subscribers and prize-winners in the Irish sweep during the early 1930s was evidence of the absolute inability of the Post Office, acting under the home secretary's warrant, to prevent citizens of Great Britain contributing to it.

The Irish sweepstake appears to have taken over the British market for illegal lotteries in the 1930s, to the detriment of established rivals. By 1932 the Royal Calcutta Turf Club's Derby sweepstake was reported to have 'sunk to very small proportions' because of the competition from the Irish sweepstake, which had also killed off smaller lotteries from continental European countries.²⁴ The deputy com-

¹⁸ NAGB, Metropolitan Police files (MEPO), MEPO 2/2279.

¹⁹ NAGB, MEPO 2/2279, F. Warner, inspector, metropolitan police, to chief inspector, 5 December 1930.

²⁰ Howard-Bury, *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 251, 343 (28 April 1931); Davison, *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 253, 1014 (10 June 1931).

²¹ NAGB, HO 45/25958.

²² *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 245, 433 (19 November 1930).

²³ NAGB, Dominions Office (DO), DO 35/446/6, extract from *Evening News*, 9 December 1930.

²⁴ NAGB, HO 45/15218, 'Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Lotteries and Betting', evidence of Sir Ernley Blackwell, 30 June 1932, 18–19.

missioner of the London Metropolitan Police concurred that the popularity of the Irish sweepstake reduced 'the activities of the fraudulent sweepstake promoter'.²⁵

The national government's Liberal home secretary, Sir Herbert Samuel, told the Commons that an estimated £3,785,000 had been contributed by British people to the 1932 Derby sweepstake,²⁶ and the following year parliament was told that approximately £2.5 million had been subscribed to the 1933 Derby sweepstake, and the total subscribed to the nine sweepstakes held until then was estimated at £21.2 million.²⁷ The response to these concerns from the promoters of the Irish hospitals' sweepstake was that most of this money eventually made its way back into Britain in the form of prize money and also to purchase equipment for the building and refurbishment of the Irish hospitals, and through more indirect channels:

money originating from salaries and sweep expenses, which is spent on British merchandise, British-provided entertainment, and British holidays. In addition, a large percentage of foreign and Empire-won prizes is spent by the winners on British merchandise and left in British banks.²⁸

Unsurprisingly, the British government was not convinced by such logic, claiming that the amount won in prize money was equivalent to about two-thirds of the amount subscribed.²⁹

The amount of money leaving Britain at a time of economic depression was becoming a source of concern and annoyance to the British government, which was exacerbated by an increased animosity in Anglo-Irish relations generally after the accession of Eamon de Valera's Fianna Fáil government in 1932. The financial imbalance in the form of millions of British pounds flowing into the coffers of the sweepstake was increased by the refusal of the new government to repay land annuities after 1932 and the imposition of stamp duty on the hospitals' share of sweepstake proceeds in 1933. Other policies of the new Irish government, especially the removal of the oath from the Irish Free State constitution, further annoyed its British counterpart. Concern about the noticeable increase in Irish immigration into Britain in the 1930s, referred to above, added to the atmosphere of antipathy to all things Irish that appears to have existed in Britain during the decade of the 1930s. At one point the Home Office considered restricting the entry of Irish citizens to Great Britain, and in areas of considerable Irish immigration, such as Liverpool and Scotland, local concerns about the influx of Irish were voiced frequently during the 1930s.³⁰

The extent to which British money was funding Irish hospitals did not go unnoticed by the cash-strapped hospitals in Britain. Sir Gordon Campbell, the chairman of St Bartholomew's Hospital in London, wanted to organise his own sweepstake,

²⁵ NAGB, MEPO 2/5555, 'Statement submitted by the deputy commissioner of the police of the metropolis' to the Royal Commission on Lotteries and Betting.

²⁶ *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 266, 1926 (8 June 1932).

²⁷ *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 279, 309–10 (15 June 1933).

²⁸ Spencer Freeman, quoted in *Irish Times*, 20 September 1933.

²⁹ NAGB, DO 35/446/6, W. Peters, UK trade commissioner, Dublin, to Cabinet Irish situation committee, 22 March 1933.

³⁰ Delaney, *Demography, state and society*, 85–90.

which he saw as the best means of stopping money leaving Britain for the Irish sweepstake.³¹ In view of the large proportion of sweepstake contributions emanating from Britain, it was suggested that the sweepstake promoters should give a proportion of their proceeds to British hospitals.³² Some needy hospitals appealed directly to the Irish government for assistance.³³ London's Royal Eye Hospital based its request for £30,000 to rebuild the hospital on the service it provided to the Irish population of London: 'This Hospital serves that part of London in which the majority of Irish people reside and nearly 25% of our patients attending here are Irish or of Irish descent.'³⁴ All such requests were met with the simple rebuff that the legislation establishing the sweepstake only permitted the funds raised to be used for hospitals in the Irish Free State.³⁵

Not all British hospitals shared this envy of the Irish sweepstake, however, and many were anxious lest the Irish example be adopted in Britain. Philip Inman, house governor of the Charing Cross Hospital, feared that the introduction of a hospitals' sweepstake in Britain would lead to a loss of idealism.³⁶ Lord Londonderry, who was to emerge as one of the strongest parliamentary opponents of the Irish sweepstake, speaking in 1932 at a meeting of the Chelsea Hospital for Women, feared that the introduction of such a system would 'dry up' the 'charitable fountain'.³⁷

Protestant religious leaders joined both the government and the British hospitals in their opposition to the activities of the Irish sweepstakes in Britain. The large windfalls accruing from the sweepstakes were anathema to Protestant ideals of earning money as a reward for work. The use of the ill-gotten proceeds of gambling for such charitable purposes as building and equipping hospitals was also strongly opposed. Revd J. Hutchinson-Cockburn of Dunblane Cathedral in Scotland saw the sweepstakes as 'a symptom of our times; they have given enlarged opportunity for the vice of gambling, which flourishes all the more because times are hard and money scarce and men and women are hopeful even to folly', and complained that sweep promoters were 'destroying the voluntary generosity of the nation, and degrading the world with an orgy of gambling'.³⁸ On the other hand, Roman Catholics, among the leading organisers of small sweepstakes in Ireland for general fund-raising purposes, had few qualms about indulging in such gambling so long as it complied with a number of conditions: the seller must give the buyer the exact chance he purchased, in other words his ticket must be placed in the draw, which in turn should be a fair one; the price paid for the chance must be a fair one; and ticket buyers should not buy what they cannot afford.³⁹ A similar dichotomy of opinion on the subject of sweepstakes between Roman Catholics and various

³¹ *Irish Times*, 24 November 1930.

³² NAI, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) 34/13, A. J. Cunningham to J. W. Dulanty, 24 November 1931; *Irish Times*, 30 November 1931.

³³ NAI, DFA 34/13(C), D. S. London, Prince of Wales general hospital, London, to J. W. Dulanty, 11 April 1934.

³⁴ NAI, DFA 34/13 (C), F. E. Dalton to J. W. Dulanty, 30 October 1935.

³⁵ *Irish Times*, 23 December 1930.

³⁶ *Irish Times*, 29 November 1930.

³⁷ *Irish Times*, 6 April 1932.

³⁸ J. Hutchinson-Cockburn, *The Christian outlook on lotteries, betting and gambling* (London, 1932), 1.

³⁹ Revd David Barry, 'The moral aspect of sweepstakes—from a Catholic and a Protestant viewpoint', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 38 (fifth series, September 1931), 307–9.

Protestant religions also existed in Ireland, where the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Gregg, was among the chief opponents of the legalisation of the hospitals' sweepstakes, and the Church of Ireland-run Adelaide Hospital refused to participate in the sweepstakes until financial necessity eventually forced it to do so during the 1960s.⁴⁰

The flood of Irish hospitals' sweepstake tickets into Britain from 1930 onwards, and the flow of substantial amounts of money in the opposite direction, forced the British government to consider the adoption of new measures to curtail the traffic in foreign lottery tickets. In December 1930 Home Secretary J. R. Clynes reported to his Cabinet colleagues that 'A situation of considerable difficulty is developing in connection with sweepstakes'. Immediate measures were required to prevent the 1931 Grand National sweepstake achieving the same success in Britain as the 1930 Manchester November Handicap sweep had. The notion of completely suppressing the sweepstake was impossible, but he believed that 'a great deal can be accomplished by such measures as the stoppage of literature and books of tickets at the Customs and in the post and by the prosecution of the principal distributors of tickets'. He also felt that the Irish Free State government should be requested to discourage the promoters from selling tickets in the UK;⁴¹ however, the Dominions Office was wary of such an approach:

The idea that the Government of one country is to take steps to prevent the people of another country committing crimes in that other country would lead to all sorts of absurdities.

Are we to refuse any spirit licences unless the licences are put under terms not to export to the U.S.A.?⁴²

Besides, it was considered unlikely that the Free State government would impose any conditions on the sale of sweepstake tickets.⁴³ At last, the Irish hospitals' sweepstake's onslaught on the British market had brought the home secretary around to the realisation of the need to review and possibly change British lottery legislation.⁴⁴

In February 1932 Samuel brought a memorandum to Cabinet outlining the options available to the government for dealing with the new circumstances that had arisen regarding lotteries since the establishment of the Irish sweepstake. The simple option of admitting defeat and legislating to legalise lotteries was deemed to be too controversial and likely to lead to considerable opposition, and if adopted, to an undesirable increase in gambling. Approaching the problem from a financial rather than a judicial angle, such as confiscating prizes, or appealing to the patriotism of the British public by encouraging them not to send large sums out of the country,

⁴⁰ *Irish Times*, 11 May 1931; David Mitchell, *A peculiar place: the Adelaide Hospital Dublin, 1839–1989* (Dublin, 1989), 164.

⁴¹ NAGB, DO 35/446/6, memorandum from home secretary to Cabinet on sweepstakes, 9 December 1930.

⁴² NAGB, DO 35/446/6, minute by Mr Bushe, 9 December 1930.

⁴³ NAGB, DO 35/446/6, minute of meeting with Home Office, Scottish Office and customs officials, 8 December 1930.

⁴⁴ NAGB, DO 35/446/6, memorandum from home secretary to Cabinet on sweepstakes, 9 December 1930.

was not suitable either. The final suggestion was to hold an enquiry, possibly in the form of a royal commission, into the issue, the option that was eventually adopted.⁴⁵

The Royal Commission on Lotteries and Betting

In April 1932 Samuel announced the establishment of a twelve-member Royal Commission on Lotteries and Betting, chaired by an eminent judge, Sir Sidney Rowlatt, and charged with the task of inquiring 'into the existing law, and the practice thereunder, relating to lotteries, betting, gambling and cognate matters, and report what changes, if any, are desirable and practicable'.⁴⁶ The Royal Commission, which sat for just over a year from April 1932 to June 1933, heard evidence from many of those associated with the betting industry as well as senior civil servants from the Home Office and the police. Sir Ernley Blackwell of the Home Office gave evidence on the substantial sums of money leaving Britain for the Irish sweepstake, and the deputy commissioner of the Metropolitan Police informed the Commission of the difficulty of enforcing the current law on gambling, especially in view of the difference between small private charitable lotteries and enormous public lotteries on the lines of the Irish sweepstake: 'it would be better to authorize lotteries, under proper control within certain limits as to the amount, and for approved objects rather than to continue in a position that has become almost farcical'.⁴⁷

The final report of the Royal Commission, issued in June 1933, came down heavily against legalising lotteries, domestic or foreign.⁴⁸ The money drain to foreign lotteries was cited as a reason for their continued prohibition. The ineffectiveness of the existing restrictions on foreign lotteries fostered contempt for the law and led to many of the 'evils' associated with unregulated lotteries, especially fraud, of which there was evidence in connection with the sale of Irish sweepstake tickets in Britain.

As the existing situation was no longer sustainable, the members of the Royal Commission considered there to be two alternative courses available to the government: the establishment of large public lotteries to compete with and combat the popularity of the Irish sweepstake, or the introduction of more stringent measures to prevent the sale of lottery tickets in Britain.⁴⁹ The first option was never seriously considered. The Commission did not believe that there was any 'justification for assuming that there is a sustained or insistent demand in this country for this type of gambling facility', and those who were demanding that lotteries be legalised did not fully appreciate 'the difficulties and disadvantages involved'. Even if lotteries were legalised, the Commission did not feel that it would have the desired effect of stopping 'the sale in this country of Irish sweepstake tickets'. Therefore, the Commission's overall recommendation was 'that the law against foreign and illegal lotteries should be re-enacted and strengthened', although certain exemptions for small lotteries could be considered.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ NAGB, DO 35/446/6, memorandum from home secretary to Cabinet, 24 February 1932.

⁴⁶ *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 264, 290 (7 April 1932); vol. 266, 527 (26 May 1932).

⁴⁷ NAGB, MEPO 2/5555, 'Suggestions as to amending the law regarding betting, gaming and lotteries', undated.

⁴⁸ *Royal Commission on Lotteries and Betting, 1932–3: Final Report*, 129–38.

⁴⁹ *Royal Commission on Lotteries and Betting, 1932–3: Final Report*, 138–9.

⁵⁰ *Royal Commission on Lotteries and Betting, 1932–3: Final Report*, 143–6.

The Betting and Lotteries Act (1934)

The ensuing Betting and Lotteries Bill was first introduced in the House of Lords at the end of March 1934, where its principal proponent was the Marquess of Londonderry, a hospital governor who was strongly opposed to the idea of funding hospitals with lottery proceeds: 'I am quite convinced that the adoption of the system of public lotteries for the support of our hospitals would be disastrous.'⁵¹ The bill passed the Lords easily on 19 June and was sent to the Commons.⁵² Explaining the need for new lottery legislation, Home Secretary Sir John Gilmour highlighted the introduction of the Irish hospitals' sweepstake, the increased popularity of greyhound racing and its attendant betting, and the 'mushroom growth of tote clubs in London and in the other large towns'.⁵³

The role of the Irish hospitals' sweepstake in necessitating the need for new lottery legislation in Britain was highlighted by many of the MPs who spoke on the bill, and some, like Captain F. F. A. Heilgers, were particularly scathing about what they saw as the Irish Free State's exploitation of Britain:

I not only hate the idea of the Irish sweepstake but I hate sending so much money to de Valera by which he is able to make up his balance in trade by the invisible exports we are sending him as a result of the Sweep. But I hate still more the fact, I regard it indeed as an insult, that these sweepstakes are based on the results of races in this country instead of on Irish races, and the fact that there are these great sweepstakes on our races is an inherent danger to racing in this country.⁵⁴

Sir William Davison, a backbench Conservative MP, failed to have an amendment adopted that would have allowed for the conducting of a national lottery;⁵⁵ the bill passed the Commons in November, it was returned from the Lords without amendment, received royal assent on 16 November and came into force on 1 January 1935.⁵⁶

The Betting and Lotteries Act (1934) was composed of two parts, the first dealing with betting and the second with lotteries.⁵⁷ The second part of the act, concerning lotteries, raffles and prize draws, modernised the law by repealing the outright ban on all such competitions to permit the holding of small lotteries and raffles where there were no cash prizes or prizes greater than £10 in value and where the proceeds were not used for private gain. The principal aim of this section of the act was to clamp down on large public lotteries, in particular the Irish hospitals' sweepstake. The provisions of the act were aimed at curtailing lotteries by limiting their publicity and targeting ticket sellers rather than purchasers. Publication of any other material deemed likely to act as an inducement to participate in a lottery was also outlawed.

⁵¹ *Hansard, series 5 (Lords)*, vol. 91, 782 (26 April 1934).

⁵² *Hansard, series 5 (Lords)*, vol. 93, 29 (19 June 1934).

⁵³ *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 291, 1137–8 (27 June 1934).

⁵⁴ *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 291, 1235 (27 June 1934).

⁵⁵ *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 293, 967–98 (6 November 1934).

⁵⁶ *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 293, 2154 (15 November 1934), 2305 (16 November 1934); NAGB, HO 45/18783, circular letter to police on Betting and Lotteries Act.

⁵⁷ NAGB, HO 45/18783, extract from *Daily Telegraph*, 15 November 1934; *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 291, 1139–40 (27 June 1934).

Importing tickets, advertisements and other lottery literature into Britain also became an offence, as did sending money or counterfoils out of the country.⁵⁸

The publication of lists of prize-winners, which in the case of the Irish hospitals' sweepstake prior to 1934 often occupied three or four pages of a broadsheet newspaper, was prohibited. The government saw such publication as providing free publicity for the sweepstake and encouraging more people to buy tickets. While the press publicity was the principal target of the Betting and Lotteries Act, efforts were also made to censor references in film that could be deemed as encouraging the sale of sweepstake tickets. A scene depicting the Irish hospitals' sweepstake draw was cut from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's *The winning ticket* (1934)—'a not unamusing comedy concerning the vicissitudes of a winning ticket in the Irish Sweep'—by the British Board of Film Classification prior to the film's release in Britain in 1935. The BBFC also persuaded film agents not to book the silent documentary *Dublin of the welcomes* (c.1936), made on behalf of Irish Hospitals' Trust Limited and essentially a publicity film for the sweep, as it was deemed to contravene the Betting and Lotteries Act.⁵⁹

The Betting and Lotteries Act did not apply to Northern Ireland, yet the government there shared the concerns of the British government about the prevalence of sweepstake tickets and publicity in its jurisdiction. Though the first ever winner of a prize in the Irish hospitals' sweepstake was a Northern Ireland civil servant, the North accounted for less than two per cent of prize-winners in most sweepstakes during the 1930s. Initially, Northern Ireland sought to use its Post Office to detect illicit sweepstakes correspondence, similar to the situation in Britain prior to 1935.⁶⁰ As the sweepstake became more popular, Minister for Home Affairs Dawson Bates sought to introduce extremely stringent censorship banning all advertisements for and reports about the sweep contained in any newspaper circulating in Northern Ireland.⁶¹ British newspapers took particular exception to this: the *Sunday News* accused the Northern Irish government of 'an attempt to dictate to the British press what it shall and shall not publish in its news columns'. Noting that '[p]articulards of the Calcutta and other sweepstakes have been circulated in Northern Ireland for year after year without any protest on the part of the Government', the *Sunday News* speculated that the motivation of the government may have been more political than moral: 'we must therefore conclude that the objection [to] sweepstake news is if and when it emanates from Dublin'.⁶² Eventually, this draconian plan was abandoned in the face of opposition from the Home Office in London.⁶³

The impact of the Betting and Lotteries Act

Reports from various sources in early 1935 indicated that the Betting and Lotteries Act was having the desired effect of reducing the sale of Irish hospitals' sweepstake

⁵⁸ *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 291, 1148 (27 June 1934); NAGB, HO 45/18783, circular letter to police on Betting and Lotteries Act.

⁵⁹ NAGB, HO 45/19481.

⁶⁰ *Irish Times*, 13 March 1931.

⁶¹ Peter Martin, 'Censorship in the two Irelands, 1922–1939', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Dublin, Trinity College, 2002, 324–6.

⁶² NAGB, HO 45/24893, extract from *Sunday News*, 5 April 1931.

⁶³ Martin, 'Censorship in the two Irelands', 326.

tickets in Britain. According to the sweep's nemesis in the British press, the *Daily Mail*, 'the restrictions imposed by the Betting and Lotteries Act have had a salutary effect on the Irish sweepstake'.⁶⁴ The United Kingdom's trade commissioner in Dublin agreed 'that the proportion of money subscribed by United Kingdom residents has considerably decreased'. He estimated that British contributions to the 1935 Grand National sweep did not account for much more than 40 per cent of the total.⁶⁵ The decline was also noticed by the Irish Free State's high commissioner in London, J. W. Dulanty, who 'expressed the opinion...that the number of tickets sold in this country [Britain] had dwindled to a tremendous extent since the Betting and Lotteries legislation was passed'.⁶⁶

This trend is confirmed by an examination of the destination of prizes in the various sweepstakes held after the introduction of the Betting and Lotteries Act. The decline was already perceptible in the last sweepstake prior to the act's introduction, in which 44.9 per cent of prizes went to British residents, the lowest proportion in any of the sweepstakes held up to that date. Following the introduction of the Betting and Lotteries Act, the sweepstake announcers refused to give the precise address of British prize-winners, using the euphemism 'Europe' instead. 'Europe' accounted for 41 per cent of prize-winners in the 1935 Grand National sweepstake, and in the remaining sweepstakes held until the end of 1939 that figure fluctuated between approximately one quarter and one third of the total prizes won (see Table 2). This represented a significant decline on figures for the first four years of the sweepstakes, when approximately two thirds of prizes went to Britain. A correspon-

TABLE 2—Percentage of Irish hospitals' sweepstake prizes won by residents of 'Europe' [i.e. Britain], 1935–9.

<i>Sweepstake</i>	<i>% prizes won by residents of 'Europe'</i>
1935 Grand National	41.58
1935 Derby	35.67
1935 Cambridgeshire	36.83
1936 Grand National	35.59
1936 Derby	38.12
1936 Cambridgeshire	33.74
1937 Grand National	30.11
1937 Derby	32.20
1937 Cesarewitch	26.74
1938 Grand National	25.22
1938 Derby	23.79
1938 Cesarewitch	24.00
1939 Grand National	23.27
1939 Derby	26.39
1939 Cesarewitch	13.19

⁶⁴ NAGB, HO 45/19481, extract from *Daily Mail*, 1 April 1935.

⁶⁵ NAGB, DO 35/446/6, William Peters to Comptroller-General, Department of Overseas Trade, 27 May 1935.

⁶⁶ NAGB, DO 35/446/6, report of meeting between Dulanty and civil servants from Home Office and Dominions' Office, 2 August 1935.

TABLE 3—Percentage of prizes won by residents of the USA and Canada, 1930–9.

<i>Sweepstake</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Canada</i>
1930 Manchester November Handicap	5.00	7.59
1931 Grand National	6.50	2.46
1931 Manchester November Handicap	10.85	1.77
1932 Grand National	6.47	2.70
1932 Derby	7.23	1.75
1932 Cesarewitch	9.99	2.66
1933 Grand National	13.10	3.40
1933 Derby	8.90	3.16
1933 Cambridgeshire	13.85	4.70
1934 Grand National	14.59	2.98
1934 Derby	23.05	3.46
1934 Cambridgeshire	29.39	2.17
1935 Grand National	39.82	3.85
1935 Derby	42.41	4.37
1935 Cambridgeshire	43.67	3.22
1936 Grand National	43.77	4.52
1936 Derby	43.92	5.20
1936 Cambridgeshire	47.38	4.80
1937 Grand National	50.81	5.56
1937 Derby	49.75	6.36
1937 Cesarewitch	53.90	6.19
1938 Grand National	53.77	8.13
1938 Derby	57.16	8.82
1938 Cesarewitch	53.86	8.84
1939 Grand National	54.96	7.74
1939 Derby	51.95	8.81
1939 Cesarewitch	61.69	9.34

The figures for Tables 2 and 3 were calculated from lists of names and addresses of the prize-winners printed in the Irish daily newspapers after each sweepstake draw.

ding increase in the proportion of prizes won by residents of the United States and Canada highlights the decision of the sweepstake organisers to seek a new market in North America following the restriction of its British one (see Table 3).

The decline of contributions from Britain also had the effect of reducing sweepstake income (see Table 4). Proceeds from ticket sales, at the cost of ten shillings per ticket, in the 1935 Grand National sweepstake were down by almost £400,000 on the 1934 Cambridgeshire, and the 1935 Derby showed a further reduction, the first time since the 1931 Manchester November Handicap that proceeds were under £2 million. The £2-million figure was regained by the 1936 Cambridgeshire, and proceeds from ticket sales remained at a similar level for the remainder of the 1930s until the threat of war began seriously to affect sales in 1939. The growth of

TABLE 4—Gross proceeds from sale of Irish hospitals' sweepstake tickets, 1930–9.*

<i>Sweepstake</i>	<i>Gross Proceeds £</i>
1930 Manchester November Handicap	666,710
1931 Grand National	1,761,963
1931 Derby	2,827,696
1931 Manchester November Handicap	2,979,851
1932 Grand National	3,409,744
1932 Derby	4,184,485
1932 Cesarewitch	3,670,302
1933 Grand National	3,139,321
1933 Derby	3,010,694
1933 Cambridgeshire	2,726,558
1934 Grand National	3,000,086
1934 Derby	2,835,152
1934 Cambridgeshire	3,234,126
1935 Grand National	2,825,520
1935 Derby	1,935,695
1935 Cambridgeshire	2,267,665
1936 Grand National	2,491,392
1936 Derby	2,063,841
1936 Cambridgeshire	2,706,474
1937 Grand National	2,785,490
1937 Derby	2,682,812
1937 Cesarewitch	2,695,411
1938 Grand National	2,747,656
1938 Derby	2,384,495
1938 Cesarewitch	2,446,282
1939 Grand National	2,433,981
1939 Derby	1,670,839
1939 Cesarewitch	1,353,719

*Audited accounts of Irish hospitals' sweepstake draws, 1930–9, Oireachtas Éireann Library.

the North American market probably accounts for this recovery, although income never returned to the £3–£4-million figures that the sweepstakes enjoyed in the early 1930s.

The promoters of the sweepstake were concerned at the drastic restriction of their British market. In September 1935 the managing director of Hospitals' Trust, Joseph McGrath, outlined the situation:

Since the passing of the Betting and Lotteries Bill in the British Parliament, the prohibition of all publicity and newspaper references calculated to induce people to buy Irish sweepstake tickets has had a serious effect in lowering the amount of British subscriptions. British subscriptions have amounted to an average of 70% of the total moneys received, whereas in the last sweepstake,

the Derby of 1935, the percentage was reduced to 40%, and present indications are that this percentage is further decreasing.⁶⁷

Aware of the threat that the betting and lotteries legislation posed, Hospitals' Trust began to seek alternative avenues of publicity in Britain. In October 1934 they sponsored an entry in the famous London–Melbourne air race. Unfortunately, their plane, named the *Irish Swoop* and piloted by Irish aviation pioneer Colonel James Fitzmaurice, was disqualified before the start of the race in a dispute over its permissible fuel load.⁶⁸ In 1934 and 1935 Hospitals' Trust sponsored a rugby league challenge cup for a trophy based closely on the design of Gaelic football's Sam Maguire, which was competed for in Dublin between Wigan and Warrington in 1934 and Wigan and Leeds in 1935; Wigan was victorious on both occasions.⁶⁹

Hospitals' Trust soon turned its attention to radio broadcasting in an effort to regain the access to its British customers that had been denied to it by the Betting and Lotteries Act. Since 1930 Hospitals' Trust had broadcast a successful sponsored programme on Irish radio, and from 1935 the entire draw was broadcast.⁷⁰ In 1934, in anticipation of the curtailment of its British market, Hospitals' Trust unsuccessfully sought permission from the Irish government to establish its own radio station.⁷¹ The reception of the domestic Irish station on the east and south-east coasts of Britain was poor, and Hospitals' Trust raised the possibility of moving the location of the Irish station from Athlone to the east coast, a proposition that received short shrift from civil servants in the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. Eventually the government agreed to increase the power of the Athlone station to 100kw, to be funded from increasing the fee charged to Hospitals' Trust for its sponsored programme.⁷² These efforts to increase Hospitals' Trust's publicity in Britain signified the success that the 1934 Betting and Lotteries Act had in curtailing its activities there.

Nevertheless, sweepstake activity in Britain did not cease completely. Between one quarter and one third of all prizes, and therefore probably a similar proportion of tickets, still made their way across the Irish sea (see Table 2). The continued flow of tickets to Britain may have been due in part to new measures adopted by Hospitals' Trust in an effort to evade detection of its correspondence: an identification number rather than a name was now used for each correspondent; no addresses were printed on the receipts sent to subscribers; and subscribers were advised to send all correspondence through an intermediary in the Irish Free State or to arrange for a business, institution or friend to transmit correspondence on their behalf.⁷³ The less direct route of smuggling tickets into Britain from France was also used to avoid the close scrutiny of post between Britain and Ireland.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ NAI, DTT&C 20/57 (vol. 1), Joseph McGrath to P. S. O'Hegarty, 14 September 1935.

⁶⁸ Teddy Fennelly, *Fitz—the famous flight* (Portlaoise, 1997), 300–18.

⁶⁹ *Irish hospitals' sweepstakes, 1934—Derby sweepstake draw programme* (Dublin, 1934), 47; *Irish Times*, 13 May 1934; *Irish hospitals' sweepstake, 1935—Grand National draw programme* (Dublin, 1935), 70.

⁷⁰ *Irish hospitals' sweepstakes, 1935—Grand National draw programme* (Dublin, 1935), 79.

⁷¹ NAI, DT S7095.

⁷² NAI, DTT&C 20/57 (Vols 1 and 1A).

⁷³ NAGB, DO 35/446/6.

⁷⁴ W. S. Liddall, *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 303, 1284 (27 June 1935).

Seizures of tickets and the prosecution of ticket traffickers served to indicate the continuation of sweepstake activity in Britain after 1934. In March 1936 tickets for the 1936 Derby sweepstake worth £390,000 were seized in south Cumberland.⁷⁵ In 1937 police apprehended John Witts, of Fulham, 'said to be one of the largest distributors of Irish sweep tickets in England', who distributed 800 books of tickets for each sweepstake and had a number of sub-agents throughout England. He was fined £20 for his activities.⁷⁶ Many of these discoveries, however, related to tickets being smuggled into Britain for subsequent transfer to the sweepstake's growing North American market; tickets seized from the *Aquatania* at Southampton in 1938 were intended for New York.⁷⁷

The Liverpool docks were an important centre of operations for smuggling tickets into Britain, both for distribution there and for subsequent transmission to North America. In September 1937 John McDonnell, a labourer at the docks, was fined £15 for distributing tickets and sending counterfoils out of Britain, and in August 1938 Timothy Nesbitt, an assistant superintendent in the investigating department of the Canadian Pacific Railway Steamship Services, admitted to using his office at Gladstone Dock to distribute sweepstake tickets.⁷⁸

In 1937 one of the largest smuggling rings operating out of Liverpool was uncovered. This case proved seriously embarrassing for the law enforcement authorities because two of the ten defendants convicted were police constables, both of whom received prison sentences of nine months for accepting bribes not to interfere with the activities of the smugglers. Among those also imprisoned and given substantial fines were Frederick Woodhall, a club proprietor from Wallasey, believed to be the conspiracy's ringleader, Thomas Woodhall, a tailor from Cheshire and William Newcombe, a clerk, also from Wallasey, all of whom had previously been convicted and fined for possession of over one million sweepstake tickets in June 1936.⁷⁹ The operation, believed to have been carried on between January 1935 and August 1937, when it was detected, involved employees on steamships travelling between Dublin and Liverpool, one of whom was believed to be an employee of Hospitals' Trust, the two police constables, labourers at Princes' Dock and a laundry van driver whose van was used to transport the tickets. The enterprise was finally exposed when the van driver informed the police about it.⁸⁰

Representations made by Britain to the Irish Free State government to take action to prevent the circulation of sweepstake tickets in Britain also serve as evidence that sweepstake activity continued after the Betting and Lotteries Act and that it was still a cause of concern to the authorities. At first Britain considered appealing to the Irish government on the grounds that Hospitals' Trust's activities contravened the 1934 Cairo postal convention, but this approach was considered problematic 'as it would raise the question of the inter-imperial applicability of International Conventions' and was also likely to be met 'at best with neglect and at worst with the refusal to do anything' by the Irish government.⁸¹

⁷⁵ *Irish Times*, 20 March 1936.

⁷⁶ *Irish Times*, 6 May 1937.

⁷⁷ *Irish Times*, 22 January 1938.

⁷⁸ *Irish Times*, 8 September 1937; 17 August 1938.

⁷⁹ *Irish Times*, 20 November 1937; 5 June 1936.

⁸⁰ *Irish Times*, 5 October 1937; 20 October 1937; NAGB, DO 34/898/6.

⁸¹ NAGB, DO 35/446/6.

In February 1935 Labour's Dominions' secretary, J. H. Thomas, brought to the attention of the Irish high commissioner in London, J. W. Dulanty, his government's concern at the new policies adopted by Hospitals' Trust to evade the restrictions of the new legislation. The principal cause for complaint was a circular issued by Hospitals' Trust that advised subscribers on the best means of evading detection and promised to pay the fines imposed on anybody convicted of selling tickets. Eamon de Valera's government sympathised with the British displeasure:

The circulars constituted an interference with the administration of justice in Great Britain, and the Government here were obliged to take cognisance of them because they could not remain passive while the laws of a neighbouring State were being contravened by an institution controlled, however remotely, by the State. We were obliged by the Postal Conventions to prevent our services from being used for a contravention of the law in other countries.

The British complaint was relayed to Joseph McGrath, who was also warned that continued activity of this nature would lead to more restrictive measures being introduced against the sweepstake in Britain.⁸² McGrath replied that the offending circulars had been recalled, the agent responsible for their distribution, Mrs Chapman, 'severely reprimanded', and all agents instructed not to issue similar literature again.⁸³

The intervention of the Irish Free State government on this occasion, while it might have resulted in the withdrawal of an offending circular, did little to stop the transmission of Irish hospitals' sweepstake tickets to Britain, and in mid-1935 British civil servants considered possible representations that could be made to the Irish government to seek their cooperation in curtailing ticket sales in Britain. William Peters, the UK trade commissioner in Dublin, suggested that:

An *effective* undertaking on the part of the Irish Free State authorities that no sales of tickets would be made to residents of the United Kingdom would mean the stoppage of the drain on United Kingdom resources equal to one half of the annual burden of the land annuity payments which have now to be made by the United Kingdom Government.

However, the Home Office was aware that this 'would be to ask the Irish authorities to impose on themselves a very self-denying ordinance'.⁸⁴

The example of British cooperation with the American government to prevent the smuggling of liquor during prohibition was cited but considered difficult to apply in the case of sweepstake tickets because there was no clearance from bond involved as there was with liquor. The Home Office felt that in view of declining sales of sweep tickets in Britain and the Irish Free State's desire for better relations with Britain, the Free State government might be more willing to take stronger

⁸² NAI, DFA 34/13(E), minute by J. P. Walshe, secretary, Department of External Affairs, 19 February 1935.

⁸³ NAI, DFA 34/13(E), Joseph McGrath to J. P. Walshe, 4 March 1935.

⁸⁴ NAGB, DO 35/446/6.

action against the sweepstakes, but the Dominions' Office was more sceptical of the possibility of cooperation, 'unless there is some prospect of a *quid pro quo* which could be given to the I.F.S. Government'. The only practical step taken was to try to convince the Irish government to persuade or compel Hospitals' Trust to stop the sale of tickets to Britain, an idea that was, predictably, unenthusiastically received in Ireland. No action was taken by the Irish government, and the continued activity of the Irish sweepstake in Britain remained a source of concern to the authorities there in the late 1930s.⁸⁵

A British lottery?

On various occasions in the House of Commons during the 1920s the home secretary was urged to consider reform of the lottery laws to permit charities and hospitals to run lotteries to raise much-needed funds. After 1930 many cash-strapped British hospitals began to examine ways of emulating the Irish example in the hope that they might reap a similar windfall and keep British money in Britain to assist British hospitals rather than leaving to fund the Irish Free State's hospital building programme. In November 1930, just after the first Irish sweepstake draw had taken place, it was reported that 'London hospitals, inspired by the success of the great Dublin sweepstake, are now considering the possibilities of holding a sweepstake on similar lines—possibly on next year's Derby—and evading the British lottery ban by organising it abroad'.⁸⁶ In January 1931 it was revealed that A. F. Shepherd, the appeals' director of St Bartholomew's Hospital, visited Paris to examine the possibility of running a rival hospitals' sweepstake from the French capital.⁸⁷ However, there appears to have been no further progress with this venture.

Reports of a similar enterprise of a quite dubious nature appeared in the press in January 1931. A company calling itself Hospitals' Trust Limited, operating from a one-room office in Edgware Road, London, launched a sweepstake on the Grand National said to be in aid of a number of London hospitals, including St Bartholomew's, St Thomas's and Guy's. Two million tickets, at a cost of ten shillings each, were to be distributed through the post. A circular letter accompanying the tickets set out the mission statement of this Hospitals' Trust:

Owing to the existing law in this country, a huge amount of money is being diverted to the Irish hospitals. This is an appalling state of affairs, as our own British hospitals (which are the finest institutions in the world) are so urgently in need of funds. In consequence of this, Hospitals' Trust Ltd., have now put the necessary machinery into motion to circumvent similar loss to British hospitals.

The hospitals upon whose behalf Hospitals' Trust claimed to be acting stated that they had no knowledge of the proposed sweepstake, and a few days later a letter from H. Johnson informed the press that Hospitals' Trust was abandoning its operations 'due to unfavourable comments in the press which made their undertaking

⁸⁵ NAGB, DO 35/446/6.

⁸⁶ NAGB, MEPO 2/2279, extract from *Daily Express*, 20 November 1930.

⁸⁷ *Irish Times*, 15 January 1931.

look like a fraud'.⁸⁸ There must be a strong suspicion that there was more than just the appearance of a fraud attached to the whole affair.

Parliamentary demands for a review of the country's lottery laws continued.⁸⁹ One of the foremost proponents of a change was the backbench Conservative MP Sir William Davison who, after repeated refusals by the home secretary to re-examine the issue, sought in 1931 to introduce his own bill 'to authorise the raising of money by means of lotteries for the support of hospitals'. Arguing for leave to introduce the bill, he referred to the urgent needs of British hospitals for building, equipment and maintenance, citing the Irish example of raising immense sums through the sweepstake, and the favourable reaction to the idea from supporters of St Bartholomew's Hospital.⁹⁰

Urging the Commons not to allow Davison introduce his bill, Isaac Foot quoted the findings of the 1808 House of Commons select committee on lotteries, which saw in lotteries 'No mode of raising money...so burdensome, so pernicious, and so unproductive; no species of adventure is known where the chances are so great against the adventurer; none where the infatuation is more powerful, lasting and destructive'. He also reiterated the standard arguments against the use of lotteries to raise funds for charity: if one group was permitted to use this method of fundraising others would seek to do likewise; the sources of charity would dry up; the Irish hospitals 'only received a fraction of the sweepstakes' proceeds; hospitals were not in favour of the idea; and it would exacerbate the evils resulting from gambling.⁹¹ The motion to allow Davison leave to introduce the bill was defeated by 181 to 58.⁹²

Davison tried again in March 1932, by which time 130 of those who had voted against his previous attempt had lost their seats in the October 1931 general election. The new parliamentary arithmetic resulted in the passage of the motion to introduce his bill by 176 votes to 123. The second Davison bill envisaged a wider jurisdiction for lotteries 'for charitable, scientific, and artistic purposes, or any public improvement or other public object', not simply for hospitals.⁹³ However, the bill did not progress any further in parliament.

The failure of Davison's parliamentary efforts led to the revival of the idea of organising a sweepstake in aid of British hospitals from a base outside the country. In October 1932 plans were revealed for a British hospital sweepstake to be run under the auspices of the Casino and International Sporting Club of Monte Carlo.⁹⁴ The archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Lang, expressed his 'distress and concern at the proposal to utilise for English voluntary hospitals a huge sweepstake lottery, organised at Monte Carlo, the Mecca of gambling'.⁹⁵ Captain Spencer Freeman, the publicity mastermind of the Irish hospitals' sweepstake, was involved

⁸⁸ *Irish Times*, 19 January 1931; 23 January 1931.

⁸⁹ *Irish Times*, 10 March 1931; Sir William Davison, *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 251, 612 (20 April 1931).

⁹⁰ *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 252, 1781–5 (19 May 1931).

⁹¹ *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 252, 1785–8 (19 May 1931).

⁹² *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 252, 1790 (19 May 1931).

⁹³ *Hansard, series 5 (Commons)*, vol. 263, 877–86 (22 March 1932).

⁹⁴ *Irish Times*, 10 October 1932.

⁹⁵ *Irish Times*, 12 October 1932.

with the scheme, which was eventually abandoned in the face of opposition from the Home Office.⁹⁶

Another prominent individual campaigner for the legalisation of hospital sweepstakes in Britain was the duke of Atholl. The duke was a bitter opponent of the Irish Free State and its sweepstakes; in a speech delivered at Croydon in September 1933, in which he described the Irish sweepstake as a 'national disgrace', he also complained that:

Behind the plea of helping charity something like £25,000,000 has gone into Ireland, a very considerable portion of which, according to *The Times*, Mr Halkett, a distinguished London magistrate, said, goes to help Mr de Valera to carry on his disloyal policy against this country.

In his opinion the only 'good defence against the Irish sweepstake would be an organised legalised sweepstake in this country'.⁹⁷

In 1933 he sought unsuccessfully to run a charity sweepstake on the St Leger. In an attempt to evade the letter of the British lottery law the competition was based on judging the artistic merits of the racing colours of various owners, including the king.⁹⁸ By this means it could be claimed that it was a skill-based competition, but the British authorities were not so easily fooled: 'The scheme was obviously an illegal lottery and after warning by the Commissioner of Police it was abandoned.'⁹⁹ Tickets for the abortive enterprise were said to have been seized by Irish Free State customs officials.¹⁰⁰

Undeterred, the duke opened a new fund on behalf of British charities. When the appeal closed at the end of September 1933 the net proceeds were reported at £95,000, £59,000 of which was to be allocated to various charities. In the prize fund of £36,000, prizes varied in value from between £10 and £2,000. Among the 748 prize-winners was Lady Carson, wife of the former Ulster unionist leader Sir Edward Carson, who scooped £10.¹⁰¹ In spite of the duke's prominent position, he was prosecuted and subsequently convicted under the 1823 Lottery Act for selling tickets in a lottery that had not been authorised by an act of parliament. He was fined £25 and ordered to pay thirty-five guineas in costs.¹⁰² A subsequent appeal was struck out on the grounds of a solicitor's error.¹⁰³ In spite of his conviction the duke saw his venture as having a measure of success:

I think I can lay claim to having had something to do with the fact that the last Irish sweepstake obtained less in contributions from this country than at any time with the exception of the first two efforts. Secondly, the Italian

⁹⁶ *Irish Times*, 21 September 1933.

⁹⁷ *Irish Times*, 19 September 1933.

⁹⁸ *New York Times*, 21 June 1933.

⁹⁹ NAGB, Treasury Secretary's Office, TS 27/1167, 'Opinion of Mr Eustace Fulton on the duke of Atholl's fund', 24 October 1933.

¹⁰⁰ *Irish Times*, 22 July 1933.

¹⁰¹ *Irish Times*, 30 September 1933; 21 October 1933.

¹⁰² *Irish Times*, 15 November 1933; 25 November 1933.

¹⁰³ *Irish Times*, 27 February 1934.

sweepstake promoters acknowledge that the drop in their receipts has been due to the activities in connection with my fund.¹⁰⁴

The results of the 1933 Cambridgeshire sweepstake draw (Table 1) lend some legitimacy to the duke's claims; only 50 per cent of the prizes were won by British residents, the lowest since the sweepstakes started, down over 12 per cent from the preceding sweepstake on the 1933 Derby, and proceeds from ticket sales (Table 4) dipped to their lowest figure since the 1931 Grand National sweepstake.

Public opinion in Britain was far from united on the issue of a British lottery. Clearly, the large proportion of the population that subscribed to the Irish sweepstakes had few qualms about the use of gambling to raise money for charitable purposes. However, the hospitals upon whose behalf the campaign to legalise lotteries was based were divided on the issue. At its annual conference in Eastbourne in June 1931, the British Hospitals' Association passed a resolution stating that it was 'not in favour of amendment of the law affecting public sweepstakes which purports to be for the benefit of voluntary hospitals'.¹⁰⁵ Members of the Protestant churches in Britain, like their Anglican counterparts in Ireland, weighed in against legalising sweepstakes. Where there was support for the idea it was sporadic and usually confined to individual campaigners, like Sir William Davison and the duke of Atholl. The available evidence indicates that there was little official sentiment in Britain that was overwhelmingly in favour of the legalisation of lotteries and sweepstakes.

The Irish sweepstake in post-war Britain

The outbreak of the Second World War curtailed severely the activities of the Irish hospitals' sweepstake. It was forced to operate a much scaled-down series of sweepstakes based on the minuscule Irish domestic market. However, by the late 1940s there were signs of its revival internationally, including in Britain. During the war the British Post Office had suspended the practice of using Home Office warrants to intercept mail suspected of containing lottery-related material. When the practice resumed in March 1947 'a heavy traffic' in Irish sweepstake tickets was revealed that led to a number of prosecutions.¹⁰⁶ In London between May 1947 and May 1948, the Metropolitan Police investigated 804 cases relating to the Irish sweepstake under the 1934 Betting and Lotteries Act, resulting in 500 prosecutions, a massive increase on the annual wartime average of 30 cases and pre-war average of 100 cases.¹⁰⁷

As a result of these prosecutions the sweepstake authorities appear to have sought alternative methods of smuggling tickets into Britain. The 'growth of a messenger service between Great Britain and Ireland' was noticed. Although a decline occurred in the number of sweepstake-related correspondence seized by the Post Office, the value of sterling postal orders cashed in Ireland in the months coincid-

¹⁰⁴ *Irish Times*, 25 November 1933.

¹⁰⁵ NAGB, HO 45/16316, 'Conservative and Unionist party's hints for speakers on Betting and Lotteries Bill', 10 May 1934, 22.

¹⁰⁶ NAGB, HO 45/24349, Royal Commission on Betting, Gaming and Lotteries (RCBG&L), 'Memorandum submitted by Home Office: Irish Hospitals' Trust Sweepstakes'.

¹⁰⁷ NAGB, HO 45/24349, RCBG&L, minutes of evidence, Sir Harold Scott, commissioner, Metropolitan Police, 25 October 1949.

ing with sweepstake draws remained very high, suggesting the use of non-postal methods of communication.¹⁰⁸

A second royal commission on the subject of gambling, which sat from 1949 until 1951, was informed by a number of witnesses that the Irish sweepstake was the principal foreign lottery causing concern in Britain. The commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Harold Scott, told the Commission that the 1934 Betting and Lotteries Act had 'notably failed to stop the traffic in Irish Hospitals Sweepstake tickets'. It was also his understanding that it was 'not too difficult to get a ticket for the Irish sweep if you want to'.¹⁰⁹ Similar evidence was given by police chiefs in other parts of England and in Wales and Scotland.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, the Royal Commission concluded that the significant drop in the annual income of the Irish sweepstake, from over £11 million before the enactment of the 1934 Betting and Lotteries Act to approximately £5 million in the immediate post-war years 'would appear to show that the activities of the promoters in this country have been severely restricted', and did not recommend any new measures to deal with it.¹¹¹

The trend of declining Irish sweepstake activity in post-war Britain identified by the Royal Commission was accurate. From the 1950s onwards the Irish sweepstake ceased to be as much of a problem for the legal authorities in Britain. This may in part be due to the greater availability of alternative forms of gambling. The immediate post-war period saw a massive increase in annual sales figures for the football pools, from £17.5 million in 1945–6 to £42 million in 1946–7 and £65 million in 1948–9.¹¹² In 1956 the Conservative chancellor of the exchequer, Harold Macmillan, introduced a premium bonds scheme, under which the interest accruing from the bonds was allocated to bond holders by means of a lottery.¹¹³ Finally, various measures introduced during the 1950s and 1960s liberalised British betting and lottery laws to permit off-course cash betting, the broadcast of betting odds by the BBC, the licensing of bingo halls, the establishment of casinos and the holding of small public lotteries for charitable and sporting purposes.¹¹⁴

Aware of its shrinking British market, the promoters of the Irish sweepstakes had by this time switched their focus to the more lucrative North American market, which remained their mainstay until the gradual legalisation of state lotteries there in the 1960s also began to erode that market, initiating the eventual decline of the Irish sweepstake. Although it survived until 1987, the Irish sweepstake was effectively finished by the late 1970s. In 1978, when the British government established yet another royal commission on gambling under the chairmanship of Lord Rothschild, the Irish sweepstake, which forty years previously had been the principal cause for establishing such a commission, barely merited a mention.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ NAGB, HO 45/24349, RCBG&L, statement of the director general of the Post Office.

¹⁰⁹ NAGB, HO 45/24349, RCBG&L, minutes of evidence, Sir Harold Scott, commissioner, Metropolitan Police, 25 October 1949.

¹¹⁰ NAGB, HO 45/24349, RCBG&L, minutes of evidence.

¹¹¹ *Report of the Royal Commission on Betting, Lotteries and Gaming* (1951), 39.

¹¹² *Report of the Royal Commission on Betting, Lotteries and Gaming* (1951), appendix II: Expenditure on Football Pools, 149.

¹¹³ Munting, *An economic and social history of gambling*, 59–61.

¹¹⁴ Munting, *An economic and social history of gambling*, 41, 44, 47; J. A. Kay, *Good cause for gambling: the prospects for a national lottery in the UK* (London, 1992), 5, table 1.

¹¹⁵ *Royal Commission on Gambling: Final Report* (1978), 222.

Conclusion

Immediately after its launch in 1930, the Irish hospitals' sweepstake became an instant success. This was due almost entirely to the high level of contributions raised in Great Britain. Indeed, such was the overwhelming success of the sweep in Britain, the government there was forced to introduce new legislation to deal with it. Though other factors, such as the overall increase in the popularity of gambling, were partly responsible for the 1934 Betting and Lotteries Act, there can be no doubt that the Irish sweepstake was the principal cause of its introduction.

The funds accruing from the sweepstake, when prize money and promoters' expenses had been deducted, were used to save the financially straitened Irish voluntary hospitals. With the accession to power of the first Fianna Fáil government in 1932, the scope of sweepstake funding was broadened and became the basis for a nationwide public hospital building programme. In effect, during the early 1930s the Irish hospital service was financed by private individuals living in Britain, making a mockery of Fianna Fáil's drive for self-sufficiency.

In the context of the depressed economic conditions of the 1930s, the huge sums of money that British people were prepared to subscribe to the Irish sweepstake may appear somewhat incongruous. Yet the answer to why so many people were able to afford the ten-shilling price of a ticket, or at least a part share of it, must surely lie in the alluring prize on offer. The jackpots in the early sweepstakes were unprecedented: first prize in the 1931 Grand National sweep was £354,544, and even though first prize was later reduced to £30,000, this was still a substantial amount of money at the time. The prospect of such a massive return for the expenditure of a mere ten shillings was the principal factor motivating British people to contribute to the Irish sweepstake, and in a time of economic depression such a prospect held an even greater attraction. That some of the proceeds were used for such a worthwhile cause as building hospitals may also have been a minor factor encouraging subscribers to the sweepstake.

The context of the economically depressed 1930s and the nature of Anglo-Irish relations after De Valera assumed office in 1932 explain the level of official British annoyance at the activity of the sweepstake in their territory. Millions of British pounds were flowing out of the country when they were badly needed to help prop up the domestic economy, and the balance sheet was tilted more strongly in favour of the Irish Free State by the suspension of land annuity repayments and the imposition of stamp duty on the hospitals' proceeds from the sweepstake fund, which meant that British money contributed to the sweep was going into the Irish exchequer.

Existing British restrictions on lotteries were clearly incapable of dealing with the avalanche from the Irish sweepstakes, and while the situation did improve markedly after 1934, the British government never succeeded in completely eliminating the sweepstake. There were only two alternative policies that could have achieved this end. One would have been to convince the Irish government to halt the sweepstake correspondence at source in Dublin, but no Irish government was going to destroy this lucrative source of funding for such an essential service as its hospital system.

Alternatively, the British could have beaten the Irish at their own game. The millions of British citizens who contributed to each sweepstake and the success of the duke of Atholl's scheme indicated that had a national lottery or sweepstake been established in Britain in the 1930s it would have been a huge success and would

have destroyed the Irish sweepstake. However, there was a noticeable dichotomy between popular and official opinion in Britain on the subject of legalised lotteries. Official reluctance to sanction a lottery in Britain, rooted largely in moral considerations concerning the perceived evil effects of gambling, underlined a fundamental difference of philosophy on the subject of gambling between the Irish and the British. This may in part have been the result of the influence of the majority religion in each state. In Ireland, not only did the Roman Catholic Church have few objections to gambling, members of the clergy were the foremost proponents of sweepstakes as a source of fundraising. Conversely, the Protestant religions in Britain, and also in Ireland, were implacably opposed to the notion of funding charitable works with the proceeds of gambling. British reluctance to introduce a state-sponsored lottery would continue until the National Lottery was introduced in 1994.

The restrictions that the British government was forced to introduce in 1934 to curb the Irish hospitals' sweepstake had a definite adverse effect on its success in Britain. Subscriptions were almost halved after the Betting and Lotteries Act came into effect, forcing the promoters to seek new markets in North America, although this never fully compensated for the loss of the British contributions. Though the sweepstake enjoyed a brief rejuvenation in Britain after the war, it never posed the same problems for the British authorities again, and the gradual liberalisation of restrictions on gambling in the 1950s and 1960s further marginalised the sweep in Britain. By the time the Irish sweepstake was dissolved in 1987 to be replaced by the modern-day Irish National Lottery, it had ceased to be a major player in British gambling circles.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to acknowledge support of the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.