

THE PHOENIX CLUB

THE EARLY YEARS



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Phoenix, the first cricket club in Ireland, was founded in 1830. Although reference was made to cricket in Trinity in the 1820s, the Dublin University Cricket Club (DUCC) was not founded until 1835. The members met and practised in the park until 1834 and the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) has a painting of cricket being played near the Wellington Monument circa 1830. In 1835 the club moved to fields behind Baggot Street, south of the Grand Canal, relocating in 1838 to another site in the park near the Wellington Monument. The men responsible for all this organisation and movement were VE Alcock and the Lords Dunlo and Clonbrock, both members of the MCC. The year after Chesterfield Avenue was widened in 1846 the club moved to the present site; the move was financed by the Board of Works at a cost of £75. In the 1850s Phoenix, now described as 'The Premier Club' in newspapers, began entertaining prestigious visitors such as the MCC and I Zingari. A professional cricketer, Charles Lawrence, was employed and for ten years he was the driving force behind the continued development of the club, the standard of the cricket played, the encouragement of clubs throughout the country and the creation of an international side. The pavilion was built in 1851 and the simple changing facilities and caretaker's quarters were to remain until redevelopment in the 1970s. The curved front facade was open, as can be seen in the team photograph of 1882, and was enclosed by windows and front door about 1884. Today the brickwork of the original pavilion can be compared to that of the curved front.



Ninety four members of Phoenix played in Irish internationals between the first match in 1855 and the outbreak of the Great War. This appears to be an extraordinary number from one club. However, the Phoenix club was at the centre of Irish cricket in this period and attracted many of the top players. In fact, Phoenix became somewhat akin to an Irish version of the MCC at Lord's. There was no cup or league structure and most players were members of two or more clubs. Good players from clubs such as Dundrum, Kingstown, County Kildare, The Garrison and many others might also have been members of Phoenix in order to play in the most challenging games. There was also a well beaten path from DUCC to the Park. In some periods Phoenix had a measure of control over the selection of Irish teams and in 1901 there was a serious dispute with other clubs, notably Leinster and Pembroke, about selection for a game against the South African tourists. Phoenix was not part of the Leinster Branch of the Irish Cricket Union, who objected when Phoenix organised this fixture without reference to the Union. A boycott ensued, leading to an Irish selection with eight Phoenix players who lost the match in Phoenix by five wickets. The dispute was resolved the following season.

The United All Ireland XI played their first match in 1855 under the aegis of Charles Lawrence. There were nine Phoenix representatives in the game against the Gentlemen of England and it was won by 107 runs. In the 19th century there were as many as seventeen pitches surrounding Phoenix, representing numerous clubs, plus the Viceregal ground set up by Lawrence in the 1850s (now partly a rose garden). Civil Service survives and there was an overlap of members there as well.

1. Cricket in Phoenix Park, circa 1830 – the ground in front of the Wellington Monument (MCC).
2. Phoenix 1st XI in 1882, with the open curved front of the pavilion visible.