2.8 The Gaelic Revival

While most Irishmen were happy with the work of the Irish MPs at Westminster, others did not like waiting for Home Rule to be passed. After all, this would only be done when the Liberals were ready to try again. While the Home Rule leaders were waiting for this to happen, those unhappy at the delay turned to different ways of showing their nationalism. One thing was clear; they were Irish, not English, and they wanted to show this. So even before 1900 a new movement had appeared which helped to spread fresh ideas about Irish Nationalism.

The Gaelic Athletic Association

This began in 1884 when the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) was formed in Co Tipperary. It organised the playing of Irish games such as hurling and Gaelic football to replace English games such as cricket, rugby and tennis. Soon the GAA had 50,000 members, and it was very strong in rural areas. At Parnell’s funeral GAA members, carrying their hurleys like rifles, formed a guard of honour.

The League shall be strictly non-political and non-sectarian.

Item 8 of the Gaelic League constitution.

When we look out on Ireland we see that those who believe ... in Ireland a nation are, in fact, Catholics ...

From the newspaper which supported the Gaelic League, July 1901.

These two stamps were issued by An Post (the Post Office of the Republic of Ireland) to mark the centenary of the Gaelic Athletic Association. The one above, 22p value, pictures hurlers from Cork (red) and Kilkenny (stripes). The other one, 26p value, shows footballers from Kerry (green and gold) and Dublin (blue).
These two stamps were issued by An Post in 1993 to celebrate the centenary of the Gaelic League. They show different aspects of Irish culture.

The Gaelic League

Yet even more important than the GAA was the Gaelic League. It was founded in 1893 by Douglas Hyde, the son of a Protestant minister from Co Roscommon, and Eoin MacNeill who grew up in Glenarm, Co Antrim. Hyde and MacNeill wanted Irish people to use the Irish language or Gaelic as it was known. It had almost died out and was spoken only in the poorer areas in the far west of the country. The Gaelic League soon attracted new members who could see that reading and speaking Irish was the best way to show that they were different from the English. This type of nationalism was known as cultural nationalism. Unlike the GAA, the Gaelic League was stronger in towns where its language classes were very popular with younger, well educated people.

1 Which English sports do hurling and Gaelic football resemble?
2 One founder of the Gaelic League was a Protestant from the province of Connaught. The other was a Catholic from Ulster. What does this tell you about the founders of this movement?
3 Does Source B suggest that the Gaelic League (Source A) was successful in being non sectarian?
4 Why do you think this was?
5 Which aspects of Irish culture are shown in Source E?