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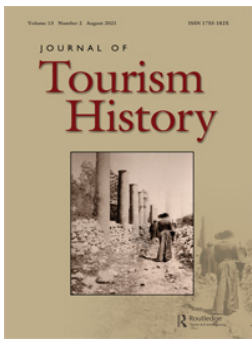
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'Come alive in '85': the Isle of Man Year of Sport, the first Island Games, and the shifting sands of sport event tourism*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines 1985's Isle of Man Year of Sport, an attempt by political leadership in the British crown dependency to host and create a series of sporting events which would serve as a platform to help reverse the dramatic decline of UK and Irish holidaymakers. To Manx parliamentarians and policymakers, sport provided a logical starting point for attracting tourists due to the island's association with the Isle of Man Tourist Trophy (TT) motorcycle road races, even though holding a Commonwealth Games in the island – a desired option – was considered unfeasible. The Isle of Man Government was additionally pursuing a strategy of themed 'years' to provide events to stimulate tourism. The Year of Sport's events included the Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships, the Isle of Man Special Olympics, and academic conferences. Its longest lasting contribution to sport, however, has been the first Island Games (known here as the Inter-Island Games), held every two years since (with the exception of 2021) in small-island polities/'nations' on the Atlantic Rim. The Year of Sport was reflective of both small-island politics and of an emerging (if debatable) consensus in tourism and sport management circles about the tourism legacies, inclusive of soft power, of sporting events.

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Introduction

Mike Huggins's introductory article to the *Journal of Tourism History's* 2013 special issue on sport tourism made the case that sport tourism, despite being a crucial element of the global sport industry, had yet to receive the attention it deserved from academic historians. Crucial to this problem, he noted, was the tendency to focus on the tours of elite athletes, as well as the issues surrounding sporting mega-events.¹ A decade later, there are clearly still gaps within the historiography – and accordingly tourism and sport academic literature – when it comes to smaller scale events outside of the 'big two' of the Summer Olympics and the men's football World Cup.² This article examines a sporting

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*The official motto of the Year of Sport.

¹Mike Huggins, 'Sport, Tourism, and History: Current Historiography and Future Prospects', *Journal of Tourism History* 5, no. 2 (2013): 107–30.

²John Harris, Fiona Skillen, and Matthew L. McDowell, 'Introduction: The Contested Terrain of Major Sporting Events', *Sport in Society* 20, no. 3 (2017): 325–7.

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event programme designed explicitly to attract tourists, both athletes and spectators, to the Isle of Man. 1985's Year of Sport had been planned and created by elected officials in the British crown dependency as part of a larger drive to reverse declining tourist numbers. It featured a large number of sporting events – some new and novel, others well-established within broader competitive sport circuits. Central to this was the ability of the Manx Parliament, Tynwald, having significant enough powers to be able to create such a programme, and thus these series of events were closely connected to the Isle of Man's own political context, which at the time was seeing a considerable shift in terms of executive authority, if not necessarily culture. One of the more significant outcomes of the Year of Sport was the creation of a new biennial sporting event, the Island Games, attracting participation by various other islands, many with a similar political status to the Isle of Man. Since 1985, the Island Games have been held every two years in polities on the Atlantic Rim, the exception being the 2021 Games in Guernsey, postponed to 2023 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.³

The timing of the Year of Sport was crucial in terms of its being reflective of a changing tourism and sport industry, in which sporting events were increasingly purported to provide a catalyst for economic development for those hosting them. The organisers of the Year of Sport as well as the Manx press made continual references to both the previous year's Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, and the then forthcoming 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh. Both have since cast long shadows over the sport industry (positively in the case of the former, negatively in the case of the latter) in terms of sport development, facility management, and location branding, as well as tourism – in general, as harbingers of rapidly shifting expectations regarding the quality, scale, and international politics of sporting events.⁴ Whilst the term 'legacy' was not yet commonly used within the tourism and sport industries, this article will argue that Manx policymakers, managers, media, and others were conceptualising the Year of Sport as having longer-term benefits than a simple spike in tourism for 1985: to the effect that the concepts of 'legacy' and even 'soft power' amongst rival polities, if rarely explicitly stated, were nevertheless integral to what they hoped to achieve. This research thus examines a relevant, smaller-scale historical example, at a crucial juncture in the development of knowledge-making in the tourism and sport industries, to an ever-growing body of often critical research on the long-term outcomes of *mega*-sporting events.⁵ Additionally,

³2021 Island Games in Guernsey Postponed', *Guernsey Press*, September 26, 2020.

⁴Mark Dyreson and Matthew Llewellyn, 'Los Angeles is the Olympic City: Legacies of the 1932 and 1984 Olympic Games', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, no. 14 (2008): 1991–2018; Matthew Llewellyn, John Gleaves, and Wayne Wilson, 'The Historical Legacy of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 1 (2015): 1–8; Wayne Wilson, 'Sports Infrastructure, Legacy, and the Paradox of the 1984 Olympic Games', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 1 (2015): 144–56; Matthew L. McDowell and Fiona Skillen, 'The 1986 Commonwealth Games: Scotland, South Africa, Sporting Boycotts, and the former British Empire', *Sport in Society* 20, no. 3 (2017): 384–97; Derek Douglas and Derek Bateman, *Unfriendly Games: Boycotted and Broke – The Story of the 13th Commonwealth Games* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1986).

⁵Holger Preuss, 'The Conceptualisation and Measurement of Mega Sport Event Legacies', *Journal of Sport and Tourism* 12, no. 3–4 (2007): 207–27; Idem., 'Event Legacy Framework and Measurement', *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 11, no. 1 (2019): 103–18; Laurence Chalip, 'Towards Social Leverage of Sport Events', *Journal of Sport and Tourism* 11, no. 2 (2006): 109–27; Alana Thomson, Kate Schlenker, and Nico Schlenker, 'Conceptualising Sport Event Legacy', *Event Management* 17 (2013): 111–22; Johan Fourie and María Santana-Gallego, 'The Impact of Mega-Sport Events on Tourist Arrivals', *Tourism Management* 32, no. 6 (2011): 1364–70; Steven E. Moss, Kathleen H. Gruben, and Janet Moss, 'An Empirical Test of the Olympic Tourism Legacy', *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure, and Events* 11, no. 1 (2019): 16–34; Jonathan Grix, 'Image' Leveraging and Sports Mega-Events: Germany and the 2006 FIFA World Cup', *Journal of Sport and Tourism* 17, no. 4 (2012): 289–312; Jonathan Grix and Donna

this article discusses an example from recent history regarding the ability of what Godfrey Baldacchino and David Milne refer to as sub-national island jurisdictions (SNIJs) to use their unique status to effect policy and economic change whilst remaining under the effective umbrella of a ‘mother country’ or colonial power; and accordingly, there is considerable debate on how truly effective this is, including for the Isle of Man.⁶ It hints that geopolitical considerations regarding the hosting of so-called ‘second-order’ sporting events (those at a lower level than the Olympics or the men’s Football World Cup) were already being made by polities like the Isle of Man long before David Black addressed the issue in his 2008 article.⁷

To these ends, this article uses primary archival research from the Isle of Man Public Record Office, particularly the papers and official literature of the Year of Sport Committee – most notably Year of Sport Organiser Geoffrey Corlett’s official report. This research also makes use of historical newspapers based in the Manx National Heritage Library, as well as oral histories used for the Our Sporting Life exhibition in the Manx Museum in 2011 – for the occasion of the hosting of the Commonwealth Youth Games on the island. The author consulted the official record of Tynwald (Hansard). This article also includes two interviews performed by the author in October 2015 with participants based within the Isle of Man Government at the time: their names have been anonymised.

The historical and political context of tourism in the Isle of Man

The Isle of Man, located in the Irish Sea and within easy reach from Liverpool, Belfast, and other urban centres by boat, was a popular tourist resort amongst working-class British and Irish people (especially families and single younger men) both in the Victorian and Edwardian eras and in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.⁸ Douglas, the capital, in particular, shared characteristics with other British seaside resorts. However, the Isle of Man was still a distinctive destination in part due to, especially after 1945, a heightened culture clash between tourist arrivals and more conservative Manx residents and politicians: for example, the existence of corporal punishment for youths, a development itself allowed through the Isle of Man’s status as a crown dependency, and the existence of Manx laws and legislative bodies.⁹ The overreliance on UK and Irish tourists was to become a major economic problem by the 1970s.

Lee, ‘Soft Power, Sports Mega-Events and Emerging States: The Lure of the Politics of Attraction’, *Global Society* 27, no. 4 (2013): 521–36; Jung Woo Lee, ‘A Winter Sport Mega-Event and Its Aftermath: A Critical Review of post-Olympic PyeongChang’, *Local Economy* 34, no. 7 (2019): 745–52.

⁶Godfrey Baldacchino and David Milne, ‘Exploring Sub-National Island Jurisdictions: An Editorial Introduction’, *The Round Table* 95 (386): 487–502; Adam Grydehøj, ‘Making the Most of Smallness: Economic Policy in Microstates and Sub-National Island Jurisdictions’, *Space and Polity* 15, no. 3 (2011): 183–96; William R. McKercher, ‘The Isle of Man: Jurisdictional Catapult to Development’, in *Lessons from the Political Economy of Small Islands: The Resourcefulness of Jurisdiction*, eds Godfrey Baldacchino and David Milne (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), 91–106; Zachary Androus and Neyooxet Greymorning, ‘Critiquing the SNIJ hypothesis with Corsica and Hawai’i’, *Island Studies Journal* 11, no. 2 (2016): 447–64.

⁷David Black, ‘Dreaming Big: The Pursuit of “Second-Order” Games as a Strategic Response to Globalization’, *Sport in Society* 11, no. 4 (2008): 467–80.

⁸John Belchem, ‘“The Playground of Northern England”: The Isle of Man, Manx-Ness and the Northern Working Class’, in *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of ‘The North’ and ‘Northernness’*, ed. Neville Kirk (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 71–86.

⁹Pete Hodson, ‘The “Isle of Vice”? Youth, Class, and Post-War Holiday on the Isle of Man’, *Cultural and Social History* 15, no. 3 (2018): 433–51.

Through the 1980s, Chris Cooper's and Stephen Jackson's research showed that the Isle of Man was experiencing a long-term downward trajectory in terms of tourist footfall, especially from the United Kingdom. This was in large part due to the island being ill-equipped to manage the proliferation of package holidays to continental Europe and the Mediterranean.¹⁰ In effect, the Isle of Man's decline mirrored that of other mid-sized British resorts, including Irish Sea neighbours Blackpool and Morecambe, in the northwest of England.¹¹

Cooper and Jackson's first study, in 1985, came out the same year as the Year of Sport, and also around the same time as survey findings in an MSc thesis by Chris Lewis at the Scottish Hotel School were released to the *Isle of Man Weekly Times*, which gave the report considerable coverage in its 8 January 1985 issue. In it, Lewis had been deeply critical of the dated hospitality infrastructure of Isle of Man Government bodies which oversaw tourism on the island.¹² The thesis was discussed in the Manx press at the same time as concerns over the sharp decline in tourism were being aired continually within the main newspapers, as well as within civic society. Only a few weeks afterwards, and near the start of the Isle of Man Year of Sport, the *Manx Star's* 25 January 1985 leader compared Douglas negatively with St Helier, the capital of Jersey, and related its relative position to the different class of tourists to whom it catered:

We have our Marks [Marks and Spencer] and our Woolie's [Woolworth's] (nothing wrong with them but excellent as they are they do not exactly draw the moneyed classes) while they have some top-flight department stores, we have cheap teenagers' boutiques and tatty gift shops while they have elegant little emporiums selling high fashion and duty-free watches: we have chips-with-everything eating places and take-away hot dogs while they have expensive restaurants and charming, small tea and coffee houses. Without putting too fine a point on it, while our tourists might not mind mixing with theirs the opposite is certainly not true.¹³

The decline of tourism in the Isle of Man in the 1970s coincided with the building of a more muscular (and very controversial) offshore finance industry, but Brendan Canavan in 2014 noted that there was considerable frustration in Manx hospitality circles that the success of banking was being used as cover for the Government not to invest in tourism and environment to the extent that it should.¹⁴

In 1990, Cooper identified that 'major events (such as Millennium Year 1979)' were largely responsible for somewhat 'reviv[ing] the volume of tourism to the island'.¹⁵ And in 1999, Tom Baum and Laura Hagen noted that one annual event initiated at the Year of Sport, the Student Festival of Sport, was created to offset 'seasonality', 'to

¹⁰Chris Cooper and Stephen Jackson, 'Changing Patterns of Manx Tourism', *Geography* 70, no. 1 (1985): 74–6; Idem., 'Destination Life Cycle: The Isle of Man Case Study', *Annals of Tourism Research* 16 (1989): 377–98; Chris Cooper, 'Resorts in Decline – the Management Response', *Tourism Management* 11, no. 1 (1990): 63–7.

¹¹John K. Walton, 'Seaside Tourism in Europe: Business, Urban, and Comparative History', *Business History* 53, no. 6 (2011): 900–16.

¹²*Isle of Man Weekly Times* (hereafter *IOMWT*), 8 January 1985.

¹³*Manx Star* (hereafter *MS*), 25 January 1985.

¹⁴Brendan Canavan, 'Sustainable Tourism: Development, Decline and De-Growth. Management Issues from the Isle of Man', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 22, no. 1 (2014): 127–47; Roger Rawcliffe, *No Man is an Island: 50 Years of Finance in the Isle of Man* (Douglas: Manx Heritage Foundation, 2009).

¹⁵Cooper, 'Resorts in Decline', 65.

stimulate tourism demand in the off-season'.¹⁶ (The Student Festival of Sport ended in 2014 with a sole archery tournament.¹⁷) In effect, however, sport was already a niche within the tourist market to which the Isle of Man catered, primarily via the Isle of Man Tourist Trophy (TT) Races and its amateur counterpart, the Manx Grand Prix. The birth of the TT in 1907 was the culmination of efforts to find a venue for a kind of motorcycle race that no community in Great Britain or Ireland would dare hold for fear of it being too dangerous, and residents in most rural communities – unlike those in the Isle of Man, whose Tynwald (Parliament) was then subject to considerable influence by the powerful Lieutenant Governor, George Henry Fitzroy Somerset, third Baron Raglan – had the power to resist through their elected representatives. Despite the imposition of the contest, Simon Vaukins states that the TT has become an important symbol of 'Manx-ness'.¹⁸ The TT's maturity as a tourist event is signalled through fan rituals around the memorialisation of the many riders killed during the races, ones whose geography often has little overlap with Manx residents' geographies of the island, and sometimes exists in opposition to official Manx commemorations of the dead.¹⁹ (The TT is additionally well-covered in academic literature in a 2007 special issue of the *Journal of Motorcycle Studies*.²⁰) So, the idea to build a tourist event around 'sport' (broadly defined) had very clear precedents in the Isle of Man.

1985's Year of Sport, its genesis, and its management, is also reflective of shifting political power within the dependency – away from the UK-appointed Lieutenant Governor, and towards an executive comprised of elected officials. Tynwald consists of a popularly elected lower house, the House of Keys, and a smaller, appointed upper house, the Legislative Council; joint sessions of both houses sit in Tynwald Court, a body which approves legislation to become law and break gridlock in the legislative process.²¹ The existence of the millennium-old Tynwald was seen by Manx nationalists at the turn of the twentieth century as stressing continuity with a Celtic past; these same intellectuals were also rueful at its being used as a tool by British administrators (particularly Lord Raglan).²² It remained for much of the twentieth century a body open to outside manipulation, even after devolution of powers from the UK Government in 1958.²³ Constitutional government had begun its first major shifts in the 1980s towards giving Members of the House of Keys (MHKs) real teeth in terms of power. By 1986 nine

¹⁶Tom Baum and Laura Hagen, 'Responses to Seasonality: The Experiences of Peripheral Destinations', *International Journal of Tourism Research* 1, no. 5 (1999): 299–312 (quote from 306). For a broader discussion of seasonality, see Richard Butler, 'Seasonality in Tourism: Issues and Implications', *The Tourist Review* 3 (1996): 18–24.

¹⁷'MT', 'Final Student Festival of Sport', *IsleOfMan.Com*, April 15, 2014, <http://isleofman.com/News/details/63126/final-student-festival-of-sport> (accessed April 7, 2021).

¹⁸Simon Vaukins, *The Isle of Man TT Races: Motorcycling, Society and Identity* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

¹⁹Claire Corkill and Ray Moore, "'The Island of Blood': Death and Commemoration at the Isle of Man TT Races", *World Archaeology* 44, no. 2 (2012): 248–62; Ray Moore, Matthew Richardson, and Claire Corkill, 'Identity in the "Road Racing Capital of the World": Heritage, Geography, and Contested Spaces', *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 9, no. 3 (2014): 228–45.

²⁰*The Journal of Motorcycle Studies* 3, no. 3 (2007), <https://web.archive.org/web/20180424010233/http://ijms.nova.edu/November2007TT/index.html> (accessed April 7, 2021).

²¹David Kermode, *Offshore Island Politics: The Constitutional and Political Development of the Isle of Man in the Twentieth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001).

²²John Belchem, 'The Little Manx Nation: Antiquarianism, Ethnic Identity, and Home Rule Politics in the Isle of Man, 1880–1918', *Journal of British Studies* 39, no. 2 (2000): 217–40.

²³David Kermode, 'Constitutional Development and Public Policy, 1900–79', in *A New History of the Isle of Man – Volume V: The Modern Period, 1830–1999*, ed. John Belchem (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 94–184.

new cabinet departments were created with Ministers in charge – themselves appointed from Tynwald by a new executive figure, the Chief Minister, who themselves were elected by MHKs.²⁴ Meanwhile, the Isle of Man's Civil Service, which had been freed from the control of the Governor in 1962, had also by 1990 made the shift to being under the full control of the new Council of Ministers.²⁵ This shift towards ministerial government arguably reflected a shift in British dependencies and territories towards far greater autonomy, self-government, and emphasis on 'national' identity within the polity which reached its peak in the 1980s, with this pattern mirroring what was occurring in Gibraltar and the post-1982 Falkland Islands.²⁶

Accordingly during this period, the Isle of Man carved out social policies that did not always resemble 1980s UK social and economic policy. The UK's membership of the European Union allowed for a special relationship for its crown dependencies, effectively keeping the Isle of Man out of some EU trade, regulatory, and legal regimes, particularly as pertained to finance.²⁷ The death penalty remained the official sentence for murder, even though in practice this had not been carried out in decades, and would be abolished by Tynwald for good in 1992.²⁸ The 1990s would see further liberal legislation passed in Tynwald on gay rights, abortion, and the requirement of redundancy payments (and corporal punishment), in these cases, the main pressure did come from outside.²⁹ But if these developments, along with the Isle's status as an offshore centre, seemingly made it reflective of a particular strand of conservative British-ness, the island diverged significantly from other Thatcherite economic staples: during the 1980s, welfare provision was *increased*, and social housing continued to be built (and was not sold on in any 'right to buy' schemes), whilst in the 1980s the Isle of Man Tourist Board even created a state-owned tourism operator, Everymann, which would later be operated by the Department of Tourism and Transport before being sold to Premier Holidays in 2000.³⁰

In that case, the Year of Sport's creation can be seen in the context of an increasingly interventionist Isle of Man Government that was expanding the frontiers of the state, rather than rolling them back: though, in the context of tourism specifically, it was reflective of the kind of 'municipal capitalism' John Walton states was present in twentieth-century English seaside resorts' local governments – whereby the state used its power to help maximise profits for locales' private enterprises.³¹ Aside from very minor

²⁴Idem., *Ministerial Government in the Isle of Man: The First Twenty Years 1986–2006* (Douglas: Manx Heritage Foundation, 2008); Alistair Ramsey, 'Tynwald Transformed, 1980–96', in *A New History of the Isle of Man – Volume V*, ed. Belchem (2000), 185–206.

²⁵Paul Carmichael, 'Maintaining a Distinctive Public Administration: The Isle of Man Civil Service Since 1962', *Public Administration* 80, no. 2 (2002): 257–82.

²⁶Chris Grocott and Gareth Stockey, *Gibraltar: A Modern History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Chris Grocott, 'British Identity and Constitutional Reform in Gibraltar', *Islands and Britishness: A Global Perspective*, eds. Jodie Matthews and Daniel Travers (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 149–61; Klaus Dodds, *Pink Ice: Britain and the South Atlantic Empire* (London: IB Tauris, 2002); Stephen A. Royle, 'Changes in the Falkland Islands Since the Conflict of 1982', *Geography* 79, no. 2 (1994): 172–6.

²⁷Kermode, *Ministerial Government*, 220–40.

²⁸Peter W Edge, 'Use of Foreign Legislative Models in the Commonwealth: A Case Study of Criminal Legislation in the Isle of Man (1800–1993)', *Commonwealth Law Bulletin* 21, no. 2 (1995): 671–82.

²⁹Ramsey, 'Tynwald Transformed', 199–203.

³⁰Kermode, *Offshore Island Politics*, 309–68; Idem., *Ministerial Government*, 193–251; Cooper, 'Tourism in decline', 67; 'Premier Takes Over Isle of Man Operator', *Travel Weekly*, April 10, 2000, <https://travelweekly.co.uk/articles/7098/premier-takes-over-isle-of-man-operator> (accessed April 7, 2021).

³¹John K Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

successes for political parties on the Isle of Man, including the Manx Labour Party, and (even more minor) rival nationalist parties Mec Vannin and Manx National Party, Manx politics has been routinely dominated by independent, non-partisan MHKs. Manx politics thus often appears non-ideological to outsiders, but in reality has ranged the gamut from consensus to conformity; and indeed (in keeping with long-term patterns in other small-island political cultures) Jacqueline Templeton and Jeff Richards in 1981 argued that the lack of a party-political system produced an absence of organised political opposition to powerful vested interests.³² An over-eager leader in the *Isle of Man Weekly Times* from 28 May 1985 believed that the recent election of three Labour MHKs (to go along with three Labour Members of the Legislative Councils, or MLCs) was beginning to move Manx politics towards overtly partisan politics, eventually forcing independents, whom the paper claimed were ‘little more than a collection of individuals with vaguely Conservative tendencies’, to ‘come out of the closet and found the Manx Conservative and Unionist Party’.³³ This never happened of course, and the kind of managerial, technocratic, *conservative* (with a small ‘c’) – and less movement- and personality-driven – political culture of Manx politics arguably served the emerging fields of sport and tourism management well.

The genesis of the Year of Sport

This political culture was additionally reflected in the Isle of Man’s long-term heritage branding, which tended to emphasise specific elements of Manx history, including the TT, along with the Second World War (the Isle was notable for the presence of large internment camps for captured German soldiers), Tynwald, and – after the 1980s, and the increased migration of British workers into the burgeoning finance industry – an identity which stressed Manx ‘independence’ and ‘Celtic’ identity. Unlike the contested TT, there continues to be very little unofficial heritage apparatus outside of the major public sector entity, Manx National Heritage, and thus the Isle’s public history tends to present a unified story.³⁴ This is despite the birth of a new kind of Manx identity via recent emigres since the 1980s – with the newcomers often referred to on the Isle as ‘comeovers’.³⁵ If sport outside of the TT does not seem immediately relevant to the question of heritage, it is perhaps worth noting that one interview by the author, with a civil servant who formerly worked in tourism in the 1980s, cited the 1985 Year of Sport as part of a continuum with 1979’s Year of Tynwald, or Millennium Year (celebrating one thousand years of the parliament) and 1986’s Year of Heritage towards yearly ‘themes’ which would ‘give people the reason to come to the Isle of Man for whatever,

³²Jacqueline Templeton and Jeff Richards, ‘Elections in a Small Community: The Case of the Isle of Man’, *Parliamentary Affairs* 34, no. 3 (1981): 322–34; Jeffrey Richards, ‘Politics in Small Independent Communities: Conflict or Consensus?’, *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 20, no. 2 (1982): 155–71; Godfrey Baldacchino, ‘Islands and despots’, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 50, no. 1 (2012): 103–20.

³³*IOMWT*, 28 May 1985.

³⁴Moore, Richardson, and Corkill, ‘Identity in the “Road Racing Capital of the World”’, 228–45; Elizabeth Catte, ‘“Manxness”: Uses of Heritage on the Isle of Man’, *Public History Review* 22 (2015): 8–22; Susan Lewis, ‘National Day: Achieving Collective Identity on the Isle of Man’, in *British Subjects: An Anthropology of Britain*, ed. Nigel Rapport (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 49–65; Daniel Travers and Stephen Heathorn, ‘Collective Remembrance, Second World War Mythology and National Heritage on the Isle of Man’, *National Identities* 10, no. 4 (2008): 433–48.

³⁵Cheryl Cheek, Sue Nicol, and Sarah Grainger, ‘Manx Identity and the Comeovers’, in *Islands and Britishness*, eds. Matthews and Travers (2012), 65–77.

to keep the Isle of Man on the map' – in the face of declining traditional tourism.³⁶ Here, the Year of Sport was part of a much wider tourism, *heritage* brand.

Aside from the TT, the Isle of Man had one other strategic platform in its arsenal: here, its place as a nation of its own in the Commonwealth Games (formerly the Empire Games) was equally as important in convincing Manx politicians and civic figures that international, multi-sport events were a means by which the Isle could assert its identity in a variety of contexts. National recognition of British 'stateless nations' has been a significant element of competition in the Commonwealth Games, giving the Isle of Man recognition it did not enjoy from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) or the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA).³⁷ National recognition in the Commonwealth Games did not just extend to Crown dependencies and territories whose sovereignty was disputed, like Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands (the latter of which sent two rifle shooters to the 1982 Commonwealth Games at Brisbane, only weeks after Argentinean occupation of the Islands was forcibly ended in the Falklands War), but also for nations within Britain, including England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.³⁸ So, even here, the Manx national squad was representative of an external sporting identity to build upon.

One major political figure involved in the Year of Sport noted that around 1980 it had been a dream of theirs and former Manx Commonwealth Games athletes to successfully host the Commonwealth Games on the Isle of Man, but that this feat was logistically unfeasible at the time. So, the focus at that stage was to create a series of sporting events for the Isle of Man in a given year 'as a way of generating business, the same as 1979, as the parliamentary history year had generated income for the island'.³⁹ The most visible advocate for the project in Tynwald was Noel Cringle MHK, who was supported by Eddie Lowey MLC; the former also served as the Chair of the Isle of Man Sports Council, whilst the latter served as Chair of the Isle of Man Tourist Board, and both would be on the governing board for the Year of Sport (Cringle would chair).⁴⁰ Initial passage through Tynwald Court occurred in October 1982 after the Legislative Council had first voted down the measure, pending a feasibility study involving costs; the Year of Sport was then rubber-stamped in 1983.⁴¹ In total, £350,000 of grant monies were allocated to the Year of Sport, all of which came from the budget of the Tourist Board: the official report, written by Year of Sport Organiser and Manager Geoffrey Corlett, made clear that the Year of Sport's main focus was to address long-

³⁶Interview with civil servant, 6 October 2015.

³⁷Steve Menary, 'When is a National Team not a National Team?', *Sport in Society* 10, no. 2 (2007): 195–204, *Idem.*, *Outcasts! The Lands that FIFA Forgot* (Studley, Warwickshire: Know the Score Books, 2007).

³⁸*Idem.*, 'Post-colonial Outcomes: FIFA, Overseas Territory and National Identity', in *Football and the Boundaries of History: Critical Studies in Soccer*, eds. Brenda Elsey and Stanislaw G. Pugliese (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 119–36; Fiona Skillen and Matthew L. McDowell, 'The Edinburgh 1970 British Commonwealth Games: Representation of Identities, Nationalism, and Politics', *Sport in History* 34, no. 3 (2014): 454–75; Matthew L. McDowell, 'Sport and Social Relationships in the Falkland Islands up to 1982', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48, no. 6 (2020): 1078–1108; Alasdair Pinkerton and Matthew Benwell, 'Heritage, Strategic Narratives, and the Making of Geopolitical Pasts, Presents and Futures at Europa Point', *Political Geography* 64 (2018): 92–4. For more about historical reasons for this recognition within the context of the former British Empire, see Daniel Gorman, 'Amateurism, Imperialism, Internationalism, and the First British Empire Games', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 4 (2010): 611–34.

³⁹Interview with former MHK, 5 October 2015.

⁴⁰Isle of Man Public Record Office (hereafter IOMPRO), Geoffrey Corlett, *Isle of Man '85 Year of Sport: Official Report* (unpublished, 1985).

⁴¹*Ibid.*

term issues involving seasonality on the Isle of Man: 'Mr Cringle's intention was to extend the traditional twelve week period in the summer to promote tourism for 52 weeks of the Year with a wide ranging programme of sporting activities'.⁴²

The shifting framing of the Year of Sport in Tynwald hints at many tensions in the sport-government relationship at the time. At the 16 October 1982 session of Tynwald Court, Cringle made few references to the Year of Sport as a *sporting* event: here, it was framed as a *tourist* programme with other benefits. 'It is very easy indeed in times of depression or recession', he noted:

for this hon. Court to similarly become depressed. I would suggest to hon. Members that now is the time that we should be considering and looking forward for methods to bring us out of depression and out of recession. There is no doubt at all in my mind that as an idea a Year of Sport will certainly be of benefit to tourism, one of our major basic industries in the Isle of Man, and its spin-offs over the remaining part of the 1980s will be immense.⁴³

Initial detractors of the proposal, however, noted the Isle of Man's own unusual sport development context, and the need for facilities to attract athletes – ones acknowledged by Cringle. Dominic Delaney MHK criticised what he saw as use of the tourist budget to improve sporting facilities. 'I have this picture in my mind', Delaney noted derisively, 'of Sebastian Coe running around the gasworks, because that is what you are talking about'.⁴⁴ Before forcing the proposers to come back with more concrete budget proposals, some legislators even hinted at creating a lottery for raising funds for facilities – which, in the end, did not happen.⁴⁵ The Isle of Man already had a lottery system in place which funded grassroots sport – a development that presaged the UK's own 1995 creation of a funding regime for elite and grassroots sport (and heritage) through the National Lottery – and in 1984 an increased rate of 45% of anticipated profits of £200,000 were due to be distributed amongst Manx sport clubs in order to prepare for the Year of Sport.⁴⁶ Facilities for the Year of Sport, however, were specifically excluded from this, and Corlett's report even after the Year noted that not everything promised in terms of facilities materialised in the end anyway. This included an all-weather athletics track – athletics events at the 1985 Inter-Island Games were instead held in Peel, at the Queen Elizabeth II School's grass track – and a proposed new 50-meter rifle range (other sites were used for the latter). On the other hand, the 1985 Isle of Man Special Olympics did make use of the stadium at Onchan, just north of Douglas, for athletics.⁴⁷ The largest swimming pool on the island was the 33½-metre pool at the Douglas Aquadrome, which dashed hopes for synchronised swimming and water polo tournaments; however, the pool's length was fine for the Special Olympics and Inter-Island Games (the latter of which, in subsequent years, would regulate 25-metre pools).⁴⁸

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Hansard (Isle of Man), Report of Proceedings of Tynwald Court (hereafter RPTC), 16 November 1982, 'Year of Sport – Declaratory Resolution Approved', T140-1.

⁴⁴Ibid., T141-3.

⁴⁵Ibid., T143-51; Hansard (IOM), RPTC, 19 October 1982, 'Year of Sport – Declaratory Resolution Defeated', T85-96.

⁴⁶Hansard (IOM), RPTC, 13 December 1983. 'Public Lottery (No 2) Regulations 1983 – Approved', T593-4. For more on sport policy in the UK after the implementation of the National Lottery funding scheme, see Barrie Houlihan and Iain Lindsey, *Sport Policy in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁴⁷Corlett, *Official Report*.

⁴⁸Ibid.

Corlett's report, in contrast to the initial political discourse on the subject, put less of an accent on *tourist* facilities and activities, and more on *sporting* ones.

Corlett himself was appointed in August 1983. Originally from the Isle of Man, he had recently retired, having spent 25 years as a lecturer (and later senior lecturer) in physical education at the College of St Paul and St Mary in Cheltenham (which would later merge into the University of Gloucestershire). He was, then, firmly a representative of the world of sport; although, tellingly, the Year of Sport's office was located at Douglas's ferry terminal. However, the Year of Sport's seven 'aims and objectives' still prioritised tourism and arguably even 'soft power', with the first objective 'to project the image and focus attention on the Isle of Man as an Island of Sport, indeed an International Island of Sport'.⁴⁹ The next two aims involved attracting sportspeople to the Isle of Man for competition, and by 'extending the tourist season' not just through holding sporting events, but also meetings, conferences, etc. The latter four, by contrast, promoted sport development on the Isle of Man and amongst the Manx people.⁵⁰

It was the Isle of Man's tourist calendar, rather than the external, international sporting one, which Corlett stated in his report was the starting point for planning 1985's calendar, and the thread which tied the whole series of sporting events together:

Planning started in November 1983. The starting point was to pencil in on the calendar the annual sporting events and dates for 1985 e.g. the T.T., International Cycling Week, Easter and Whit Festivals, Manx Grand Prix etc., and then build the Year of Sport special events around this framework. It was agreed as a policy that all sporting events to be held on the Island in 1985 should appear in the comprehensive programme including those organised by the Tourist Board, local sports clubs and organisations. This was the first time that this had been done and the Committee felt that such a programme would be beneficial to visitors and local residents alike.⁵¹

The Tourist Board relied on a series of leaflets and publications for distributing information about the often-exhaustive programme of events large and small which took place during the Year of Sport. The Spring Edition of the Programme of Events, for instance, which listed events from April through November, was about twelve sides of 2½ inches by 10 inches, with events written chronologically, and in small print. This did not include the front matter, with the second page featuring an introduction from Cringle which encouraged 'you and your family' to 'come and try it' at open events and demonstrations.⁵²

A civil servant at the time also notes that the Tourist Board and Everymann had targeted pamphlets for specific groups – sport clubs, colleges and universities, etc. – and also for specific geographic markets. As this person's primary market was the Republic of Ireland, the Isle of Man's tourism marketing at the time also involved lectures and showing 8 mm films to different groups, including showing groups in the Republic films about the upcoming Year of Sport.⁵³ Corlett noted in his official reports that an initial leaflet of 50,000 copies was sent out to all parts of the UK, distributed by the English, Northern Irish, Scottish, and Welsh Sports Councils through sport and leisure

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²IOMPRO, *Isle of Man '85 Year of Sport: Programme of Events, Spring Edition*.

⁵³Interview with civil servant, 6 October 2015.

centres. A second edition was printed in early 1985, sent out through hospitality locations. Additionally, there were some adverts on UK terrestrial television and radio.⁵⁴

The main events

It would be difficult to count all of the events, including intra-Isle of Man contests, fun days, and meetings, which took place under the Year of Sport banner – some of which existed outside of the banner of ‘tourism’. However, Corlett himself in the official report counted 30 ‘special’ events – some of which were actually tournaments involving more than one sport, but almost all of which featured official international competition. This, of course, included the TT, but it did not include the likes of the Whitsun Hockey Festival (which Corlett claimed featured 2500 hockey players) and the Easter Festival, which featured athletics, football, rugby, and hockey, as well as a large Irish contingent participating in Irish football.⁵⁵

The Opening Ceremonies for the Year of Sport, held at the Villa Marina at Douglas on 5–6 January and convened by Lieutenant Governor Nigel Cecil, and with guest of honour Olympic cyclist Steve Joughin (one of the first of a long-line of elite Manx cyclists), consisted of exhibitions – some of table tennis and volleyball – but mostly of gymnastics, acrobatics, and country dancing performed by Manx schoolchildren.⁵⁶ The *Manx Star’s* approving write-up of the opening ceremony (written by an attendee) featured the words from a head teacher’s letter to Corlett:

Long after the children cease to be interested in gymnastics they will remember the events in the Isle of Man. If those memories result in positive attitudes, then we have made a greater social contribution to their education than could ever be achieved in a school environment.⁵⁷

Indeed, most of the initial events at the Year of Sport, despite the purported purpose of the programme, did not initially cater to tourists, but instead to Manx residents. The first athletic event of the Year of Sport was a Fun Run in Douglas organised by the Rushen chapter of associational group Round Table (whose members were restricted to men 18–45 years of age⁵⁸) the first week of January: it featured both athletes and non-athletes in various races, and raised £5000 for local charities.⁵⁹ More ambitious was the programme for a competition involving teams representing 26 public houses in the Isle of Man competing in different sports each month, with each month having different sponsors (usually breweries and spirit producers) paying for cups.⁶⁰ January started off with Pub Sport 1985’s arm wrestling tournament (men’s and women’s), which received considerable positive coverage and pictures in the *Isle of Man Courier*; though Corlett, when asked about the refereeing, stated: ‘There was total deadlock in some of the matches and the result depended on mutual agreement between the competitors.’⁶¹ By contrast,

⁵⁴Corlett, *Official Report*.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶IOMPRO, *Isle of Man ‘85 Year of Sport – Opening Ceremony, 5th–6th January 1985, Villa Marina, Douglas*.

⁵⁷MS, 18 January 1985.

⁵⁸<https://roundtable.co.uk/>.

⁵⁹*Isle of Man Courier* (hereafter *IOMC*), 11 January 1985.

⁶⁰Corlett, *Official Report*.

⁶¹*IOMC*, 18 January 1985; *IOMC*, 1 February 1985.

Corlett had far more trouble managing the fallout from February/March's pool tournament, featuring mixed teams from each pub: most notably the March final at the Falcon Cliff Hotel in Douglas, where teams from the Waggon and Horses, Marown and the Granville Hotel, Douglas threw punches at each other, forcing the match to be abandoned.⁶²

Many of the events listed by Corlett were one-off sporting contests. April featured an international men's basketball match between Scotland and England. August saw the British light middleweight boxing title fight (held between champion Prince Rodney and challenger Mick Courtney) and a women's football international between England and Wales. One of the last events of the Year of Sport was November's 'the Isle of Man International Badminton Series', an international between England and South Korea – the Isle of Man was the final leg of a tour of England by the Korean team – and here the Tourist Board footed £9000 towards the cost of the tour, with the Manx Badminton Association paying a further £3000.⁶³ But these were much smaller compared to a number of other events which took place on the Isle of Man that year. The inaugural Inter-Island Games, the showcase event for the Year of Sport, will be discussed in the next section. The first major event held during the Year of Sport was the 8th Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships, held at the Palace Lido in Douglas from 17 to 23 March. Manx officials perhaps knew that obtaining and running the tournament was attainable due to it previously being hosted in another Crown dependency, Guernsey, in March 1977. Guernsey's and Jersey's squads, however, had first appeared in the second tournament in 1973, unlike the Isle of Man's team, who made their debut on home soil at the Palace Lido, a venue better known in the hospitality economy as a musical one, having previously hosted concerts by the Rolling Stones, 10cc, Status Quo, and the Drifters. (Later, the Rodney-Courtney match would be held there.)⁶⁴

The next major event was arguably far more relevant in terms of visibility for the Isle of Man. The Isle of Man Special Olympic Games took place 15–22 May, and had the benefit of long-term coverage ahead of time on the UK mainland via the BBC and one of its sport presenters, David Icke – long before Icke's more well-known career as a conspiracy theorist began. Icke played some role in organising the contest, particularly with regard to publicity; the programme for the event contained a foreword by Icke.⁶⁵ Whilst he could not make it for the opening ceremony (he was initially scheduled to come over on the boat from England with competitors, the same boat bringing the Olympic torch), his coverage was part of what was viewed at the time as a largely successful campaign to attract outside interest, particularly from celebrities. Towards the end of March, 734 competitors, primarily from all over the UK, had been confirmed to attend; by the middle of May, that number grew to over a thousand competitors.⁶⁶ Attendees included figures notably associated with the Special Olympics, including UK Conservative MP and former Minister for Sport Eldon Griffiths, integral in the setup of the competition in the UK, and more conspicuously Mark Shriver, the son of Special Olympics founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver. But the organisers managed to secure at least a few more dignitaries,

⁶²IOMC, 8 March 1985.

⁶³Corlett, *Official Report*; IOMC, 17 May 1985.

⁶⁴Ibid., IOMPRO, *8th Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships 1985: Douglas, Isle of Man, 17–23 March*.

⁶⁵IOMPRO, *Special Olympics UK: Isle of Man Special Olympics, Wednesday, 15 May 1985 to Wednesday, 22 May 1985*.

⁶⁶MS, 22 March 1985; *Manx Star*, 31 May 1985; IOMWT, 7 May 1985.

including Princess Alexandra, and more significantly a major sporting celebrity: former Manchester United and England footballer Bobby Charlton, the latter of whom appeared on the front cover of the official programme.⁶⁷

During the competition, Icke frequently discussed his positive experiences with the tournament and on the Isle of Man, whilst the manager of the Douglas branch of Marks and Spencer, Brian Barton, who acted as the executive chairman of the Isle of Man Special Olympics, noted in the *Manx Star* that Icke told him that ‘he must come back to the Isle of Man where he found so much of interest – including the steam railway’.⁶⁸ Corlett’s report additionally notes tours which explore the Isle’s historical and natural sites of interest; it also includes press accounts in the *Crewe Chronicle* and Glasgow’s *Daily Record* of local athletes who attended the Isle of Man.⁶⁹ The Manx and UK coverage had a problematic and patronising tone of over-the-top ‘relentless positivity’ that Neil Carter and John Williams have noted in subsequent British iterations of the Special Olympics: for instance, the *Manx Star* noted that Icke on BBC1’s *Breakfast Time* told presenter Frank Bough that ‘with all sincerity he would never be the same again after the experience’, and that (in a direct quote from Icke) ‘they are really special people; that’s why it is called the Special Olympics’.⁷⁰ But regardless of this, the event and Year of Sport organisers were nevertheless likely to have viewed the breadth and tone of the coverage, and how it showcased the Isle of Man, as a major public relations success.⁷¹

Despite a diverse and varied sporting programme featuring some significant sporting events, attracting athletes and spectators as tourists was not the only goal of Year of Sport organisers: they were additionally looking to attract leaders, managers, and coaches in the sport industry, as well as academics involved in sport science and physical education. (The latter was a crowd that the former college lecturer Corlett knew very well: aside from teaching, he was the author of a 1980 textbook on swimming pedagogy.⁷²) Two major academic conferences took place on the Isle of Man in 1985. The first was the 9th International Trim and Fitness Congress, held from 6 to 11 October at the Summerland leisure complex and the Villa Marina, and organised by the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR, now the Sport and Recreation Alliance), on the theme of ‘Sport for All’.⁷³ The second conference was that of the British Sports Association Conference for the Disabled, held at the Cherry Orchard Hotel, in Port Erin. Corlett noted in his official report that the rationale for holding these conferences so late in the Year of Sport made sound sense from a tourism perspective: ‘Both these Conferences were purposely arranged late in the year to attract visitors to the Island in the out of season period. There is no doubt that such Conferences could help to expand the tourist season’.⁷⁴

⁶⁷*Special Olympics UK; IOMC*, 10 May 1985. For more on the role of profile of UK Ministers for Sport, including Griffiths, see: Arthur McMaster and Alan Bairner, ‘Junior Ministers in the UK: The Role of the Minister for Sport’, *Parliamentary Affairs* 65 (2012): 214–37.

⁶⁸*MS*, 31 May 1985.

⁶⁹Corlett, *Official Report*.

⁷⁰*MS*, 31 May 1985.

⁷¹Neil Carter and John Williams, ‘“A Genuinely Emotional Week”: Learning Disability, Sport and Television – Notes on the Special Olympics GB National Summer Games 2009’, *Media, Culture & Society* 34, no. 2 (2012): 211–27.

⁷²Geoffrey Corlett, *Swimming Teaching: Theory and Practice* (London: Kaye and Ward, 1980).

⁷³*Idem.*, *Official Report; IOMC*, 25 January 1985.

⁷⁴Corlett, *Official Report*.

The CCPR's event, however, hinted at additional calculations: namely, a chance for powerful people in the world of sport to interact, for even if the Isle of Man could not get formal recognition as a nation from the IOC, they could still find other ways of being acknowledged by the Olympic movement. In January, the *Isle of Man Courier* noted that Juan Antonio Samaranch, the President of the IOC, would attend the International Trim and Fitness Congress. Samaranch indeed arrived for a 'flying visit' to open the October conference on its first day (taking a private flight to the Isle of Man from Switzerland), but arguably every bit as relevant was the presence of Denis Howell, UK Labour MP and former Minister for Sport, at the conference in his capacity as the Chair of the group lobbying to have the 1992 Summer Olympics held in Birmingham. Corlett noted the conference itself featured an exhibition of photographs and models of potential facilities for the 1992 Olympics in Birmingham.⁷⁵ Here, then, the Year of Sport was both a participant in and a witness to crucial moments in the history of sport/event management: Birmingham did not win the 1992 bid, but Barcelona did, and its Olympics have since been used as a textbook example (usually removed out of context from broader civic and regional history) of how major sporting events can be used to leverage significant 'legacies' within the tourist economies of their hosts.⁷⁶

The first Island Games

If one is to treat the 'Atlantic Rim' as some kind of interconnected geographical, socio-political unit, it is significant that the main sporting contest for small-island polities on the Atlantic Rim began as part of a much larger and explicitly tourist programme, rather than within the context of athletics, physical education, or sport policy or development. The inaugural Inter-Island Games, which became the 'Island Games' two years later in 1987 when hosted in Guernsey, was the main showcase of the Year of Sport. Scholarly historiography has yet to locate the Island Games within it. It tends to exist at the fringes of academic literature in general, with notable exceptions including Henry Johnson's work on the process (and controversies) surrounding Jersey's search for an anthem for Island Games ceremonies and elsewhere, in settings which essentially force participants to negotiate between evolving identities.⁷⁷ The reasoning behind the Island Games' genesis may have been unique, but there were other similar regional precedents involving sport tournaments whose member 'nations' included SNIJs – for example, the (South) Pacific Games, and more pertinently, the Arctic Winter Games (where, with Greenland, there would later be overlap in terms of membership with the Island Games). The Year of Sport organisers did not refer to these very different events as precedents, however, and they were created within very different policy

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Pere Duran, 'The Impact of the Olympic Games on Tourism', in *Barcelona: The legacy of the Games, 1992–2002*, eds. Miquel de Moragas and Miquel Botella (Barcelona: Centre d'Estudis Olímpicos UAB (2002), 275–93; Andrew Smith, 'Conceptualizing City Image Change: The "Re-Imaging" of Barcelona', *Tourism Geographies* 7, no. 4 (2005): 398–423; Luis Garay and Gemma Cánoves, 'Life Cycles, Stages and Tourism History: The Catalonia (Spain) Experience', *Annals of Tourism Research* 38, no. 2 (2011): 651–71. For more on the idea of 'leveraging' social outcomes from sporting events, see Laurence Chalip, 'Towards Social Leverage of Sport Events', *Journal of Sport and Tourism* 11, no. 2 (2006): 109–27.

⁷⁷Henry Johnson, 'Anthem for Jersey: Music, Media and Politics in an Island Setting', *MEDIANZ* 15, no. 1 (2015): 96–118; Idem., 'Island Anthems: Jersey, Identity, and the Island Games', 4th International Small Island Cultures Conference, Turku Archipelago, 17–20 June 2008 (unpublished).

environments.⁷⁸ For the Isle of Man in 1985, creating a new recurring sporting event seemed like an easier prospect than hosting a Commonwealth Games. It was during the Year of Sport that the organisers first put together a programme for an event that would become known as the Inter-Island Games. Corlett himself edited and wrote large parts the 1995 history of the Island Games for its tenth anniversary; it was published by what was then the Island Games Association (IGA, now the International Island Games Association, IIGA).⁷⁹

The Inter-Island Games took place from 8 to 22 July. Over 630 competitors took part in the competition, with the Manx team numbering 110.⁸⁰ The Year of Sport and the Inter-Island Games Executive Committees had considerable overlap in terms of membership: whilst in theory they were separate (and Corlett's organisational chart in his history shows that the Year of Sport committee took care of finance and accommodation only for the Games), Cringle served as the Chair, whilst Corlett served as the Organiser/Manager.⁸¹ When the Year of Sport idea was first mooted, political leadership was initially not sure what kind of games showcase was going to be central to the Year of Sport. One person involved stated in an interview:

[some ideas were floated], and we said: 'Well, you know, we've got Jersey and Guernsey'. People of the Isle of Man always think, 'Well, we have the same sort of relationship with Westminster as Jersey and Guernsey ... we could have a competition with them', and you look at Anglesey and the Isle of Wight, and you start to look around, and you end up with a handful of islands, and away we went.⁸²

The idea must have been alive by 1982; Cringle's 1982 motions to Tynwald Court explicitly called for funding for an 'Island Games' to be held in concert with the Year of Sport.⁸³ The Commonwealth Games connection here is certainly strengthened by the discussion of Jersey and Guernsey, competitor crown dependency offshore centres who, like the Isle of Man, had Commonwealth Games teams of their own. But the inclusion of the Isle of Wight and Anglesey (later referred to in the competition by its Welsh name, Ynys Môn), counties in England and Wales respectively (and later Orkney and Shetland, Scottish council areas), hinted at a slightly different organisational acknowledgement of who was a 'nation' than would have been allowed by the Commonwealth Games.

Nevertheless, the UK and the former British Empire served as a primary starting point for recruiting island competitors; and, aside from a small contingent representing Malta, that was perhaps best summed up by the presence of seven athletes from St Helena. Corlett's history states the presence of the British overseas territory in the South Atlantic at the Inter-Island Games was first the product of a conversation initiated by St Helena's Eric Benjamin at the 1984 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference – held at the Isle of Man – who expressed interest in

⁷⁸Sarah Runzheimer and Jörg Krieger, 'Athletics on the Pacific Islands – A Historical Approach', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 51 (2020): 60–82; Robert C. Thomsen, Carina Ren, and Renuka Mahadevan, "'We Are the Arctic': Identities at the Arctic Winter Games 2016', *Arctic Anthropology* 55, no. 1 (2018): 105–18.

⁷⁹Geoffrey Corlett, *The Island Games, 1985–1995* (Douglas: Island Games Association, 1995).

⁸⁰Idem., *Official Report*.

⁸¹Idem., *The Island Games*.

⁸²Interview with former MHK, 5 October 2015.

⁸³Hansard (IOM), RPTC, 16 November 1982, 'Year of Sport – Declaratory Resolution Approved', T140; Hansard (IOM), RPTC, 19 October 1982, 'Year of Sport – Declaratory Resolution Defeated', T85.

attending.⁸⁴ The Isle of Man Government paid £3000 for the St Helenian team to be able to attend, matching the £12,000 in donations on St Helena itself: transport from St Helena required sailing to Cape Town, and taking a flight or flights to the UK *before* heading to the Isle of Man.⁸⁵ Logistics were also difficult for the other invitees who accepted, and here the Isle of Man looked to then-less-emphasised Nordic elements of its history: Iceland sent a large team (along with Malta, the only two fully independent nations), but so too did Hitra and Frøya – neighbouring small islands off the west coast of Norway – and Gotland, off Sweden’s southeast coast. Island competitors were posted questionnaires discussing preferences for participating in certain sports. In the end, those sports were athletics, badminton, cycling, shooting, swimming, volleyball, and football – the latter of which, in honour of International Youth Year, was kept as a tournament for under-16 boys (the gold medal was won by Frøya).⁸⁶

There were also the Faroe Islands and Åland. And, in the official Inter-Island Games programme, one sees hints of how tourism and the selling of islands was linked to broader constitutional issues. In the programme, all islands were given sections to introduce their teams and information about their sporting cultures, as well as the geographic locations of their nations, their population, and other particulars, often offered by team managers. The Isle of Man’s entry stated that: ‘The Island’s income is earned from the services sector, banking, insurance, business, tourism, light industry, farming and some fishing’.⁸⁷ Guernsey emphasised their successful tourist trade, *along with* the success of the financial industry, as did Jersey. (As stated before, the Manx press certainly compared its tourist infrastructure to that of Jersey.) St Helena’s entry emphasised its history as the location where Napoleon was exiled in 1815, and that its Governor at the time was the Manx Mark Wilks. Iceland’s entry made a far more picturesque account of a ‘large volcanic island’, whose principal industries including fishing, with ‘considerable resources of hydro-electric and geothermal energy’.⁸⁸ Little reference was made here to the fledgling Icelandic tourism industry – it would not be until after the 2008 financial crash that Iceland pivoted heavily towards tourism – but references were made to the model of Icelandic sport governance that would be much praised in the decades to come, one which here was given an historical, primordial link that would have been well understood in Manx tourism circles:

The Icelandic Sport Federation (ISI) has seventeen different sports federation within the ISI. For Sports lovers there is plenty to do in summer and winter up to international levels in soccer, handball, basketball, athletics and skiing. Iceland’s national sport is ‘Glima’ (Icelandic wrestling) practised since settlement times in 874.⁸⁹

Iceland had the benefit of being an independent nation, but the Faroe Islands and Åland, in their entries, positioned themselves in language that Manx attendees and others from

⁸⁴Corlett, *The Island Games*, 3.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 2–4.

⁸⁷IOMPRO, *The First Island Games: Isle of Man, 18–24 July 1985*.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

⁸⁹*Ibid.* For more on the recent history of tourism in Iceland, see Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson and Edward H. Hujibens, ‘Tourism in Times of Crisis: Exploring the Discourse of Development in Iceland’, *Current Issues in Tourism* 13, no. 5 (2010): 419–34. For more on the Icelandic sport model, see Vidar Halldorsson, *Sport in Iceland: How Small Nations Achieve International Success* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

small islands would have recognised. In recent years, Faroese football has been especially noted as having recognition from FIFA, despite not being a sovereign state – and how, as ever, this has been a platform on which to build a recognised external identity.⁹⁰ In the Inter-Island Games programme, the Faroes' entry hints at their unique status:

Eighteen outlying islands of the Kingdom of Denmark, 540 sq. miles in area with a population of 44,000. The capital is Torshavn, the sea of the island government. There is a measure of Home Rules for the Faroes although they are part of the Danish Kingdom.⁹¹

Åland, an archipelago which forms an autonomous region of Finland, and whose residents speak Swedish as their first language, to date has not received similar international official recognition as the Faroe Islands. In the Inter-Island Games programme, its entry additionally made its appeal to autonomy an historic one:

ALAND – a land of 6500 islands, the bridge between Sweden and Finland, encircled by the Aland Sea, the Gulf of Bothnia and the Baltic, called by the Vikings 'Eystrasaltet'. The Constitution of Finland grants the Province of Aland the right of self-government.⁹²

Shetland, one of the Faroes' North Sea neighbours, could only dream of the Danish autonomous territory's relative power, though Shetlanders certainly had their own claim to shared Nordic history which often contradicted many elements of broader Scottish national identity – and this included a relationship in men's football with the Faroes, including semi-regular matches being played since 1929.⁹³ The discovery of oil near Shetland in 1970 and the creation of the Sullom Voe oil terminal shortly afterwards precipitated great changes in Shetland society, most dramatically with the passing of the Zetland County Council Act 1974 by the UK Parliament, creating a charitable trust for very liberally distributing 'disturbance' monies from the oil industry towards sport, recreation, and the arts.⁹⁴ Shetland's entry in the Inter-Island Games programme was glowing about this scheme:

Prior to the mid-sixties, the Shetland economy was such that most young Shetlanders were forced to find work away from home. At that time due to the shortage of numbers, finance and facilities, sporting opportunities were limited, the principal activities being sailing/boating, hockey, football and badminton. During the sixties, Shetland enjoyed a revitalisation of local basic industries i.e. fishing, fish-processing, agriculture and knitwear and more recently a substantial involvement in the exploitation of North Sea Oil. These changes have had the effect of allowing more Shetlanders to remain home-based, with a resultant dramatic expansion in the number pursuing sports interests. Shetland Islands Council, by way of a comprehensive grant-aid scheme, have encouraged local initiatives in such diverse interests

⁹⁰Nicholas Satchwell and Ulrik Wagner, 'The Faroe Islands and the World Society: The Development of Elite Club Football Framed by Commercial and Local Interests and International Regulations', *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 12, no. 2 (2020): 269–85.

⁹¹*The First Island Games*.

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³William C. Wonders, 'Northern Ties: Shetland and Scandinavia over the Years', *Northern Scotland* 15 (first issue), no. 1 (1995): 95–121; James P. Paterson, *The History of Shetland Football 1887–1987* (Lerwick: Shetland Football Association, 1988).

⁹⁴Grydehøj, 'Making the Most of Smallness', 183–96; Atina Nihinen, *Ambivalent Self-Understanding? Change, Language and Boundaries in the Shetland Islands (1970-Present)* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2011); Anthony P. Cohen: *Whalsay: Symbol, Segment, and Boundary in a Shetland Island Community* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987); Thomas Simchak, 'Oil, Culture and Economy: The Reinvention of the Shetland Way of Life' (unpublished MLitt thesis, University of Oxford, 2008); Gavin Morgan, 'Politics: What is the Shetland Charitable Trust?' *Shetland Times*, March 4, 2009.

as boxing, motor scrambling, hand-gliding, golf, sport parachuting, archery, cricket, American football, and squash.⁹⁵

Shetland, of course, ran its own very different annual event featuring invented traditions – Up-Helly-Aa, a fire festival which celebrated Shetland’s Nordic heritage – and thus similarly understood the potential for events to define islands’ external identities within tourist contexts, even for events which essentially promoted an exclusive identity.⁹⁶ What these programme snippets hint at was a dialogue about the place of island polities in a shifting political world. Cecil’s official welcome in the introduction to the Inter-Island Games programme even hinted at educative conversations between athletes on such subjects, stating: ‘we will learn much about the history, traditions, and customs of each others’ Island homes. You will all be able to share that mutual appreciation and understanding of Island life that draws all Islanders together in a bond of very special friendship’.⁹⁷ The entry in subsequent years of Gibraltar (not an island) and the Falkland Islands (invited to come in 1985, but unable to due to the continuing clean-up from the War), British overseas territories whose sovereignty was disputed, would put paid to the idea that the Island Games was apolitical.⁹⁸

The Manx press certainly believed that they were witnessing the birth of a new sporting movement. The 26 July *Isle of Man Courier* believed at the end of the Inter-Island Games that it was: ‘A joyous occasion which brought together 15 islands of varying sizes and abilities. It was clear that competitors enjoyed fresh competition with all the trappings of those other Games – the Olympics and the Commonwealth’.⁹⁹ Initially, there had been no governing association for the Games; but, during the event, as talk surfaced of it becoming a recurring occasion, the beginnings of the IGA were sketched out. By the end of the competition, Guernsey had already agreed to host the 1987 Island Games, with subsequent events planned for 1989 and 1991.¹⁰⁰ Manx authorities, however, were still mindful of that *these* Inter-Island Games were part of a larger series of tourist events. Unlike the Olympics or the Commonwealth Games, there was no centralised, purpose-built accommodation: Corlett’s official Year of Sport report, quoting newspaper sources, accordingly listed the different Douglas hotels which island squads stayed at.¹⁰¹ Aside from individual businesses, the organisers were also keen to project the polity to a media audience reflecting the geographic reach of the competitor nations. The *Isle of Man Weekly Times* noted that:

The Games themselves ... received tremendous media coverage and gave the Isle of Man valuable publicity. Channel Television, TV Aland and eight of the competing Islands national radio stations gave maximum coverage of the event, together with the various newspapers of each islands.¹⁰²

⁹⁵*The First Island Games*.

⁹⁶Callum G Brown, *Up-Helly-Aa: Custom, Culture, and Community in Shetland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Rebecca Finkel, ‘“Dancing Around the Ring of Fire”: Social Capital, Tourism Resistance, and Gender Dichotomies at Up Helly Aa in Lerwick, Shetland’, *Event Management* 14, no. 4 (2010): 275–85.

⁹⁷*The First Island Games*.

⁹⁸The author is currently preparing a manuscript on the Falkland Islands’ participation in international sporting competition.

⁹⁹*OMC*, 26 July 1985.

¹⁰⁰*OMWT*, 30 July 1985.

¹⁰¹Corlett, *Official Report*.

¹⁰²*OMWT*, 30 July 1985.

The *Weekly Times* also reported that the Isle of Man topped the gold medal table with 25, adding (no doubt to some extent facetiously) that ‘the medal tally wasn’t all that mattered’.¹⁰³ If the success of instituting the Island Games was anything to go by, *looking successful* in the eyes of similar island territories was no doubt crucial in the broader public relations battle to redefine the Isle of Man as an attractive tourist destination and economic prospect.

Conclusion

The Isle of Man has hosted many events, sporting and non-sporting, since 1985.¹⁰⁴ It is important to note that a focus on sporting events, in the long term, has helped *manage* the Isle of Man’s long-term issues with tourism, rather than eradicate them altogether. The Isle of Man Department of Economic Development’s 2012–15 Tourism Visitor Economic Strategy stated that ‘medium-sized events [including “flagship” events such as the TT and the 2011 Commonwealth Youth Games] ... consistently deliver[ed] over £3 million in visitor spend and 11,000 visitors annually’ (these numbers were averages), and that events continued to be timed to manage issues around seasonality. The same document, however, noted a long-term decline in the number of visitors: from 319,000 in 1990, to 294,460 in 2012.¹⁰⁵ By 2017 (and before the COVID-19 pandemic), the number of annual visitors had tumbled to 266,850.¹⁰⁶ During the 2010s, contemporary research on the Isle of Man, particularly the considerable body of work by Canavan, emphasised the perceived but consistent decline of the Isle of Man as a tourist destination – culprits, in the minds of residents, included creaking infrastructure, a lack of diverse offerings in terms of shops and even recreational leisure facilities (particularly in towns), and bad external PR surrounding the offshore finance industry – whilst showing that the island’s population and hospitality industry were adjusting (with varying degrees of success and strategic planning) to a more niche tourist economy.¹⁰⁷ Mike Weed and Chris Bull previously had noted that, as ‘niche tourism’ goes, sport tourism (which is usually comprised as a variety of niches, such as with the Year of Sport) can be a potentially rewarding market, but only if other, usually longer term, issues around resources and tourist infrastructure are in place (their example of these challenges being Malta).¹⁰⁸ In terms of policy outcomes, then, the move into hosting

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Brychan Thomas, Lisa Powell, and Simon Thomas, ‘An Investigation into Cultural Events and Tourism on the Isle of Man’, *Land Science* 2, no. 2 (2020): 34–44.

¹⁰⁵Department of Economic Development, Isle of Man Government, *Isle of Man Tourism Visitor Economy Strategy, 2012–2015* (revised April 2013), <https://www.gov.im/media/626699/isleofmantourismvisitoreconomy.pdf> (accessed September 6, 2021).

¹⁰⁶‘Isle of Man Tourism Numbers Sink to Lowest in a Decade’, *ITV*, April 3, 2018, <https://www.itv.com/news/granada/2018-04-03/isle-of-man-tourism-numbers-sink-to-lowest-in-a-decade> (accessed September 6, 2021).

¹⁰⁷Canavan, ‘Management Issues from the Isle of Man’, 127–47; Brendan Canavan, ‘The Extent and Role of Domestic Tourism in a Small Island: The Case of the Isle of Man’, *Journal of Travel Research* 52, no. 3 (2013): 340–52; Idem., ‘Send More Tourists! Stakeholder Perceptions of a Tourism Industry in Late Stage Decline: The Case of the Isle of Man’, *International Journal of Tourism Research* 15 (2013): 105–21; Idem., ‘Tourism Culture: Nexus, Characteristics, Context, and Sustainability’ 53 (2016): 229–43; Idem., ‘Tourism Stakeholder Exclusion and Conflict in a Small Island’, *Leisure Studies* 36, no. 3 (2017): 409–22; Idem., ‘Exploring Nuances in the Domestic Tourism Niche: The Case of a Small Island’, *International Conference on Contemporary Marketing Issues*, 30 June–3 July 2015, Kingston-upon-Thames (unpublished).

¹⁰⁸Mike Weed and Chris Bull, *Sports Tourism: Participants, Policy, and Providers*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 153–63; Chris Bull and Mike Weed, ‘Niche Markets and Small Island Tourism: The Development of Sports Tourism in Malta’, *Managing Leisure* 4, no. 3 (1999): 142–55.

sporting events has thus been of benefit to the Isle of Man, but it alone has not single-handedly reinvented the crown dependency – at least not within the eyes of the lay tourist.

Perhaps significantly, in the long run, the more visible legacies claimed by policy-makers from the Year of Sport have revolved around *sporting* and implied *political* outcomes rather than *tourist* ones. In the official report's conclusion, Corlett noted (judging from receipts from accommodation and travel) 9542 athletes who came to the Isle of Man to take part, *not* including supporters, whilst receipts from travel companies and accommodation for these athletes (based on what Corlett claimed could be quantified) signalled a return of £892,981 for the island economy from the £350,000 worth of grants. But his three suggestions for the future had to do with sporting facilities – (1) a multi-purpose indoor sporting complex, (2) an all-weather track, and (3) a new 25 m × 8 m swimming pool – whose primary usage would no doubt have been for residents in the Isle of Man.¹⁰⁹ The requested track would not be built until 1991, and Douglas's National Sports Centre would not arrive until 1998. Andy Varnom, the former Head of Sport and Recreation of the Isle of Man Government (who arrived in the Isle of Man in 1998), in a 2011 interview continually stressed the importance of the Year of Sport in national sport development narratives about kickstarting such initiatives. A member of the IIGA's executive committee, Varnom also stressed that regarding the Island Games, the Isle of Man was 'like Athens to the Olympics ... the spiritual home of the Games'.¹¹⁰ To this day, the IIGA's headquarters are at the National Sports Centre.¹¹¹ A major figure in the political set-up of the Year of Sport, when asked about the legacy of 1985, almost immediately brought up Mark Cavendish and Peter Kennaugh, world-class cyclists and the products of a Manx sport development system deemed to be successful.¹¹²

This article has shown that the calculations around holding 1985's Isle of Man Year of Sport were reflective of broader ideas circulating in policymaking and management circles about the supposed benefits of hosting sporting events, in many cases long before these issues were acknowledged by academics. It is hoped that this will encourage other historians to examine the creation of other similar programmes or events within tourist contexts, and add additional dimensions to how historians can examine the historical politics of sporting events. Beyond that, it also shows how the history of tourism 'legacies' and other rationales are relevant to the world of management and development, and how in many respects these sectors in relation to sport have yet to be historicised in an organisational sense: there are significant gaps in our knowledge, and this should go towards informing the contemporary study of tourism, events, and sport. What appears in management journals in these fields over the past several decades assumes a permanence about concepts like 'legacy' reflective of (1) these disciplines' creation out of the emerging neoliberal order of the 1980s–90s, and (2) an orientation towards *servicing* the industries these disciplines examine, rather than *questioning* them.¹¹³ History thus has a role to play in examining the creation and evolution of these ideas free from what

¹⁰⁹Corlett, *Official Report*.

¹¹⁰Andy Varnom, interview, 2 February 2011, Manx National Heritage Library.

¹¹¹<https://www.iiga.org/>.

¹¹²Interview with former MHK, 5 October 2015.

¹¹³Critiques of this approach and orientation is: Hallgeir Gammelsæter, 'Sport is Not Industry: Bringing Sport Back to Sport Management', *European Sport Management Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (2021): 257–79; and Chris Rojek, 'Global Event Management: A Critique', *Leisure Studies* 33, no. 1 (2014): 32–47.

'the industries' and policymakers believe that they are: does our contemporary usage (and measurement) of these ideas dovetail with the historical reality in which they were formed? What other historical case studies can be utilised towards this end? Finally, one of the main aims of this article has been to bring allegedly peripheral locales and polities to the centre regarding the history of sport tourism: too much coverage of mega-events inevitably distorts our understanding of knowledge, practice, and politics within these fields, and the Isle of Man's case should not necessarily be viewed as any more or less the rule than the likes of Los Angeles and Barcelona.

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Dr Matthew L. McDowell is a lecturer in sport policy, management, and international development at the University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education and Sport. He is a former tutor in Scottish and European history at the University of Glasgow, where he received his PhD in Scottish history in 2010. McDowell is the author of *A Cultural History of Association Football in Scotland, 1865–1902* (Edwin Mellen, 2013). He is additionally in the process of writing a monograph on the history of surfing in the north of Scotland, and in the early stages of researching a history of the Island Games sporting competition. McDowell's work also examines sport and the British Empire/Commonwealth, sport on the 'Atlantic Rim', and historical research methods in sport studies/management. His teaching additionally examines the nexus between sport, tourism, and heritage. He is currently an editor at the *International Journal of the History of Sport* and *Northern Scotland*, and a former Chair of the British Society of Sports History.