

Inniscarra input into the setting up of the Cork County GAA Board

Tim O'Brien takes up the story.....

An Inniscarra man, Timothy O'Sullivan from Ballyshonin, Berrings, was one of the leading lights when the Cork County GAA Board was established on December 20th 1886. He was a member of the first seven man executive – alongside fellow Muskerry club representatives, namely Denny O'Mahony, NT Aghabullogue, and Eugene Cotter, Blarney.



The O'Sullivan family were to make a huge contribution to Gaelic games and camogie through the decades with Timothy's son, Stephen, donning the Inniscarra colours for several years and his granddaughter Sheila Golden being a major contributor to camogie, both as a player and, to this day, a leading administrator in the county and national scene.

Another of Timothy's sons, Denis, in addition to his committee role with Inniscarra GAA, was one of those injured in the War of Independence Dripsey Ambush engagement of 1921.

In the late 1880s, Inniscarra, Aghabullogue and Blarney clubs were active in the playing arena and participated in the inaugural Cork County Championship at Cork Park in 1887, though each was to experience defeat in the first round.

The Celtic Times newspaper of the era tells us that crowds in the region of 10 to 12,000 attended the double bill programme on Sundays in March/April/May 1887 in what was referred to as the 'revival of our Gaelic pastimes'.

In one of these games, Inniscarra faced Ballygarvan in what was described as the best of the interesting championship contests so far. "The teams were composed of able, dashing men, who played in their bare feet, a favourite way with the scientific players of the South of Ireland. Each team seemed conscious of its opponents' prowess, for from the commencement, both teams, though playing fast, evinced a commendable amount of caution, and contested every inch of ground.

"When the ball was thrown in, it was pounced on eagerly and carried backwards and forwards, hither and thither, at lightning speed for the first quarter with Ballygarvan favoured by the wind which blew pretty strong from the west.

"Often during this time, Ballygarvan looked hopeful of scoring as they frequently brought the ball up the very posts of the Inniscarra men. The latter were much more fortunate in their defence now than later on when their fortress was carried again and again by the boys from Ballygarvan. However, perseverance always has its reward and Ballygarvan was repaid with two well-fought points before 20 minutes play.

"Inniscarra then got tired of defending and rushed with the ball towards Ballygarvan

territory. It was carried too swiftly, however, to allow a good force of the attackers to reinforce the forwards, who, on coming near the Ballygarvan goal, were beset on all sides and the ball brought back again. A further point, and three forfeit points, which could have been avoided, were placed to the credit of



Ballygarvan who went on to win by 1 goal and 6 points to nil". The goal was the only score of the second half and was described thus: "Ballygarvan took possession of the ball, flew with it up the centre of the field, in the teeth of the wind, threw aside all opposition and sent it flying past the Inniscarra culbáire between the goal posts.

The Inniscarra team of 20 was listed as follows: Jeremiah Mahony (captain), E Mahony, W Mahony, E Mahony, Eugene Lane, J Hennessy, D Brennan, J Forde, W Regan, D Murphy, T O'Callaghan, W O'Connell, D Burns, Michael Richardson, D Cronin, D Herlihy, D Mullane, D Lane, D Sullivan and J Corcoran.

Referee Mr D M Lane, umpire for Inniscarra James Bowen and for Ballygarvan P O'Callaghan.

Aghabullogue played Cork National – later renamed Blackrock – in another first round tie and both were described in the Celtic Times as 'crack' teams with the two standing at the head of Cork clubs as wielders of the camán.

Soon after the ball was thrown in, the Nationals took possession and rushed with it towards their opponents' goal. They were repulsed; returned to the attack again, with even greater vigour than before, and were again driven back. This time Aghabullogue followed up the ball, and, succeeding in invading the National territory, in the occupation of which they continued for a time, and once very nearly succeeded scoring. But the Nationals defended their position with fine spirit, and when the advance of the enemy had slackened somewhat, they broke their ranks and with a magnificent run carried the ball in triumph up the centre of the field and were rewarded with a point. The brisk manner in which this was achieved elicited salvos of applause from all sides.

"On puck-off by the Aghabullogue cúlbaire, a National man caught the ball with his camán, nursed it into position, and sent it rushing 'tween the goal and point post, thus securing another point. Nationals added one further point in the final 25 minutes and although Aghabullogue came close to securing a goal on a few occasion, Nationals repulsed their efforts and ran out winners by three points to nil.

"On the whole, the match was very even, and though Aghabullogue was beaten the hardy players of that team performed fine work, and lost none of their deservedly high reputation" the newspaper writer added.

Aghabullogue team: J D Lane (captain), S Sweet, J Buckley, J Lane, D Sullivan, T Lehane, C Twomey, T Twomey, John Linehan, P Buckley, J A Twomey, P Murphy, T Kelleher, Jeremiah Linehan, D O'Regan, D Drew, T Burns, James Cronin, T O'Connor, C Dineen and P Riordan.

Blarney was the third Muskerry team involved in 1887 championship action and their clash with Little Island was a replay as, despite winning the first match, they were ordered to play Little Island again following the latter club's appeal over parish rule. Many observers were seeking clarification on parish rule at this stage as a parish was defined as 'a district presided over by a parish priest'.

The Celtic Times commented as follows: "Now, as a rule, in Cork there are two parishes under a parish priest. How will the regulation work in such cases? At all events, the interpretation of the rule by our local authorities has resulted in the victory for Blarney being now converted into a defeat. If I may offer an opinion, I'd say that the rule requires looking after.

Back to the match itself. Blarney scored an early point which, however, proved to be their only score of the game. Little Island had the best of the play and kept the ball for the most part in Blarney territory, barring a few forays made by that team into the enemy's country. They made great efforts to score but were prevented by the excellent play of Blarney until shortly before half-time when a goal was secured.

"After change of sides, Little Island were rewarded by a point. For about a quarter of an hour, very fast and exciting play was the distinguishing feature. The displays of science with the camán was well up to the standard of previous Sundays and elicited round after round of enthusiastic cheers. Little Island was apparently not yet satisfied and went on to score another goal and leave the score at the end: Little Island 2 goals one point, Blarney one point".

The team names were not listed in the newspaper report and the draw for the second round took place at Maylor Street and resulted as follows: Cork National v Ballinhassig; St Fin Barr's v Carrignavar or Monkstown; Glasheen v Ballygarvan; Little Island v Aghada; St. Mary's v Tower Street; Passage or Charleville v Cloyne.

Before the commencement of official inter-county games, the Aghabullogue club was invited to play Killenaule (Tipperary) in one of three matches in Cork Park on August 29th 1886. Two other games were played the same day – Cork Nationals v Moycarkey and St Finbarrs v Holycross. Aghabullogue were the only Cork winners.

Meanwhile, Aghabullogue emerged victorious in the county championship in 1890, qualifying to represent Cork in the All-Ireland senior hurling series. Their historic victory in same is well documented and it was noted that their toughest outing in their magnificent run of victories was in the Cork championship against Inniscarra.



Confusion reigns as to whether Inniscarra or Blackrock were the actual Cork champions the previous year (1889) as two county boards were in existence. According to Tim Sheehan's 1984 book on Inniscarra GAA activities through the decades, the Inniscarra club was linked to Mr Crean's Board while Blackrock were attached to the rival body, known as Fr. O'Connor's Board. Both ran county championships resulting in two title winners but the Blackrock success is the only entry included in the official

records to this day.

The Inniscarra team was presented with a beautiful set of medals, one of which (pictured here) is in the possession of the Hennessy family in Kilblafer.

The scourge of emigration

Emigration was just as big a problem when the first Cork senior hurling championship was played in 1887 as it is nowadays. I refer to the Celtic Times of May 7th that year when a match day reporter highlighted the situation as follows:

“Where are all the big-hearted fellows who, under different circumstances, would today be adorning their own land and enjoying their own national games? They have departed, most of them, perhaps, forever, to wear out their lives in toil among strangers, and separated from the struggles, and the sorrowing, and the rejoicing of the old land.

“And sad it is, also, to think that many of those who today were the life and soul of the great Gaelic gathering, must soon pack up their humble kits and join the almost ceaseless stream of their countrymen and countrywomen now flying to foreign lands. The hurling field will know them no more; the camán, which figured in many hot battles, will be, perhaps, neglected in some out-of-the-way corner, or treasured as a memento of the departed by fond and longing parents.

“But sorrowings and longings will not restore her exiled sons to Ireland. If it is sad to think or to speak of this terrible drainage of our young men, to see them depart is a sight to make angels weep. Only today, when wishing my humble ‘God-Speed’ to the ‘beloved of Ireland’, William O’Brien, these thoughts, which I have endeavoured to clothe in proper words, passed through my mind.

“On the deck of the UMBRIA there were assembled hundreds of the emigrant peasants from Cork and Kerry and Tipperary. As the great ship started, and the tender moved homewards, a cheer burst from the exiles - a farewell Irish cheer - which, if looks count for anything, went to the hearts of many on board the tender, and excited unfeigned regret for the exiles themselves, and for the poor country which, in them, loses some of her most gallant defenders.

“It may not be appropriate to speak thus in an introduction to the pleasant and enjoyable scenes witnessed in Cork Park today, but Cork is so intimately associated with the exodus that I found the desire to say something on the matter irresistible” the newspaper reporter concluded.

The exodus was to hit clubs hard and, indeed, some of them were unable to function due to the player drain. However, despite the difficulties encountered, the gaelic games movement itself continued to make steady progress and today enjoys tremendous popularity, thanks in the main to the sterling work of top class administrators as well as thousands of volunteers throughout the land.

Parish loyalties were often divided and, of course, this division is nothing new in this part of the county as, for example, in bygone days, there were clubs in Tower and another in the eastern end of the parish was named Shournagh Valley.

The Tower club of the 1914/’15 era did not survive for long and, thanks to informal contacts by individuals in both camps, Inniscarra and Shournagh Valley joined together and a team named Inniscarra Valley participated in Mid-Cork competitions, circa 1940.

The amalgamation plan ran into some difficulty, however, and both were to go their separate ways again. Once more, people keen on building bridges, used their diplomatic skills and, in a case of where there is a will there is a way, a solution was eventually

found.

I gather that, initially, some were unhappy with the arrangement but the inclusion of the Valley’s most consistent players on Inniscarra teams helped ease the situation. I also understand that there was agreement on a share-out of a few committee places as well.

During research, I discovered that back in the late 1890s, a hurling team named The Dripsey Valley Boys existed, its membership being drawn from both sides of the Dripsey River and, in particular, from the Killeen and Clonmoyle areas.

The team make-up was a mix of Donoughmore and Aghabullogue players with names like Barrett, Healy, McDonnell from Killeen and Donovan, Buckley and Kelleher on the Clonmoyle side. A sister football team operated in Clonmoyle and practised at the local racecourse.

