

Recent G.A.A. Publications 2021

By Seamus J. King

Thurles Sarsfields G.A.A. History

Pride of place must go to Volume 2 of the *Thurles Sarsfields G.A.A. history* by Liam Ó Donnchú, which completes not only the history of the club but an enormous amount of research into the story of the G.A.A. in the town where the G.A.A. was founded.

This research includes the author's biography of Tom Semple, which was published in 2015, Volume 1 of the *Thurles Sarsfields history*, which appeared in 2017 and the *Semple Stadium* book which came out earlier in the year. The total number of pages in the four publications adds up to almost 2100, which makes it a *magnus opus* in the literal sense of the phrase. It's a tremendous tribute to the author, who has left the present generation, as well as posterity, a complete story of the G.A.A. in the town and parish of Thurles, and which touches the lives of a great number of families at all times since the G.A.A. was founded and over many generations. In many ways it is the story of the town not only in text but also in picture with most pictures of note over nearly one hundred and fifty years included.

The work is, first of all, the history of the Thurles Sarsfields club and the account is given year by year, commencing with club conventions and progressing through the different competitions played during the year. It progresses to the part played by club players for Tipperary, Munster and beyond, Thurles CBS gets detailed coverage as do the juveniles and where the club represented the county in Munster and beyond. Each chapter concludes with some snippets on important local events, other than sport, which occurred during the year.

The bare facts of games are given as extensive accounts of matches would have made the book impossibly long, but the dates of matches are included, which allows the reader to consult the local newspapers for more detailed accounts if he/she so wishes. Most chapters have achievements to record as Thurles Sarsfields is, arguably, the most successful club in the county, but the club also had its bad years, which are recognised by such headings as *Depressing Year*, *A Dismal year*, *An Empty Cupboard*.

The inclusion of so many images adds to the enjoyment of the book. It appears that the author made a huge effort to include every possible photograph that would add to the completeness of the book. From this point of view the book will also be of interest to anyone from the town, who may not have much interest in the playing fortunes of the Thurles Sarsfields.

The book was launched at the Sarsfields Social Centre on November 5 and this major publication retails at €25

A Forgotten Dual All-Ireland Winner

Name the player who was born in Australia, reared in Galway and died in Longford and won hurling and football All-Irelands during his lifetime! He was forgotten until now when he was remembered by Portumna native, James Coughlan, and his first cousin, Marian Lyons, in a very impressive production.

The name of this forgotten hero is Leonard McGrath (1897-1948), who was born in Queensland, Australia of parents James McGrath, Banbridge, Co. Down, and Julia Porter from Cloonoon, Woodford, Co. Galway. When the marriage split up Julia McGrath returned to her home place in Cloonoon in 1903 with three of the children, including Leonard who was then five years of age.

Helped by an uncle, who was a priest, Leonard was educated in The Pines, later Garbally College, where he excelled in hurling, football and cricket. In fact he was an all-round athlete, winning his first race at the age of ten years. He became a teacher, did a degree at UCG, where he excelled at rugby. He left Galway in 1925 after his marriage and spent the remainder of his life in Granard, Co. Longford.

He was an outstanding footballer and hurler, playing with St. Grellan's in Ballinasloe during their great period as football kingpins in Galway, and with Mullagh in hurling. He was picked for the county in both codes, winning All-Ireland honours in hurling in 1923, when he scored 4-1 against Kilkenny in the semi-final and 4-0 against Limerick in the final, surely a record, and All-Ireland football honours against Mayo in the 1925 final. He had other victories as well and his medal collection realised €28,500 when it was sold at Fonsie Mealy's online auction in July 2020.

The authors have written a thoroughly researched work and are to be complimented on what they have done. Leonard was much more than a football, hurler, rugby and cricket player, he was also an actor on stage, a singer with a rich baritone voice on Radio Eireann between 1939-1948, a player of the piano, the cornet, a scratch golfer, a bridge player and a fluent Irish speaker! He died at the early age of 51 years.

The book is on sale for €20 hardback and €15 in paperback.

Semple Stadium: The Field of Legends

The story of *Semple Stadium* is wonderfully told by Liam Ó Donnchú in a magnificently produced book from the O'Brien Press, one of a series the company intend to do on the major stadia in the country. This is not only the story of a sportsfield but of a town which has been 'the beating heart of Gaelic games, particularly hurling.'

The story leads us through the history of the G.A.A. in Thurles and the development of the stadium. It describes the epic sporting moments that have played out on its hallowed turf and left spectators exhausted from excitement. It highlights the exploits of great players like Christy Ring and brings to life great events like the Centenary All-Ireland in 1984 and the Feile concerts in the 1990s

One of the highlights of this exciting story are the anecdotes that highlight the experiences of people over the decades. These add a personal dimension to the story and give us a greater insight into what Gaelic games meant for people and the impact the games had on the town.

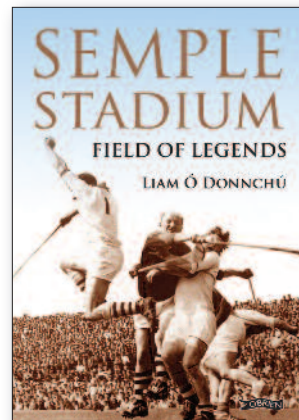
For instance we're told that many who had come the night before the 1946 Munster final on the mail train, hoping to be accommodated in Thurles were disappointed, as every place was booked out. They were compelled to spend the night in the open, in some barn or outhouse. At three o'clock in the morning, a lively impromptu dance, to the music of an accordion, was held at the Westgate corner of Liberty Square, and at all hours people were moving up and down the streets.

There is also the story of the man and his young sons who cycled to Thurles. On their way to the match the chain of the fifteen year old boy's cycle broke. His two companions made sugán ropes in a field, tied his bike to their own and towed him the rest of the way to Thurles/

Many of the stories tell of great excitement and great matches, full of bravery, spirit and supranatural effort. But there was also the tough side of many encounters when tempers frayed and players



Thurles Sarsfields captain, Jimmy Doyle, accepts the Dan Breen Cup from Tipperary GAA chairman, Tom O'Hara, in 1974.



suffered. Tomás O’Cinnéide, nephew of Waterford centreforward, John Keane, recalls Thurles in 1948 at the Waterford–Cork Munster final: ‘I have a vivid memory of that game in Thurles and of walking back to the town from the field after the match with John, who was still in his togs, and the multitudes of people cheering him and clapping him on the back. But the memory that made the most impression on me was the sight of his two hands covered in dried blood and his knuckles torn to shreds. It made me realise that hurling was a man’s game and there was a price to be paid for all that cheering and back slapping.’

A great book, full of interesting stories – read about the Dunne Brothers, *Hurling’s Minstrels* -, sprinkled with wonderful images to be savoured for many a pleasant and informative hour.

Irish Sporting Heroes Who Fell in the Great War

This is a book about 40 sporting heroes from seven different sports, who died on the battlefield in World War 1. Entitled *Ireland’s Call* and written by Stephen Walker, it was published by the Merrion Press in 2015. What interests me is the chapter on G.A.A. players, who died.

Jimmy Rossiter from Castlebridge played with Wexford and won a Leinster football championship in 1913, before losing to Kerry in the All-Ireland. He won a second Leinster title in 1914 only to lose to Kerry again in the All-Ireland. The match ended in a draw the first day but Kerry won the replay. The game marked Rossiter’s last appearance as a county footballer.

In early 1915 he decided to join the British army. No one knows his motivation. He may have followed friends to the front or ‘he may have been attracted by the sense of adventure or the promise of a weekly wage.’ When he left Wexford for the last time, he was given a rousing send-off and members of the Fr. John Murphy War Pipers Band ‘played him to the station.’ On October 21, 1915 he was wounded in action and died shortly afterwards.

John Fox, who played half-back for Clare in the All-Ireland hurling winning team of 1914, joined the Irish Guards in July 1915. When he departed to the war the Clare Journal reported he got ‘a great send-off’. He survived the war and his return to Newmarket-on-Fergus was very different to his departure. In the changed political atmosphere he was accused of taking ‘John Bull’s soup’.

Precise figures on how many G.A.A. players enlisted in the British army are difficult to come by but it appears that World War 1 had an effect on G.A.A. clubs and military recruitment meant that many clubs were unable to field full teams as a result. In fact the extent of the problem may be seen in a motion by Laois County Board (later withdrawn) to the G.A.A. Congress of 1915 that would have allowed G.A.A. members to volunteer for the British army without facing disqualification from playing G.A.A. games.

Patrick Corey, who was born in Derryloran, Co Tyrone, played with Cookstown Brian Óg and made such an impact that he was drafted into the county team for the Ulster championship in 1909. Later he joined up with the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and was posted to Bethune in France, where he was killed in July 1915. He was buried in the town cemetery and after the war his name was placed on the war memorial in Cookstown.

William Manning was a talented hurler and footballer from Belfast, who lined out with Antrim in two football All-Irelands, 1911 and 1912. Both were played in the latter year and Antrim lost both to Cork and Louth respectively. At the age of 23 in 1916 Manning joined the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and saw service in France. In March 1918, he was hit by a machine-gun bullet and died instantly.

In October 2014, the Ulster Council of the G.A.A. took a major step towards remembering the Gaelic players from Ulster, who took part in the 1914-18 conflict.

All-Star Gazer

‘The discovery of a dusty old cardboard box one day in late 2016 led to the writing of this book. Inside the box was a treasure trove of All-Star files that belonged to Mick Dunne, our father, G.A.A., journalist and one of the founders of the long-running scheme.’

So said Moira Dunne at the launch of *All-Star Gazing, the history of the All-Stars*, at Croke Park in November by RTE journalist,

Michael Lyster, in association with G.A.A President, Larry McCarthy.

The book, a joint venture with her sister, RTE newscaster, Eileen Dunne, tells the story of Ireland’s longest running awards scheme, includes contributions from over 100 leading hurlers and footballers, a full listing of every All-Star team since 1971 and, for the first time ever, a record of every players nominated over 50 years. The All-Star scheme was the brainchild of Mick Dunne and was put together with the help of four other journalists, Paddy Downey, John D. Hickey and Pádraig Puirseál

The first All-Star team went to San Francisco in March 1972, accompanied by the Tipperary senior hurling team as winners of the 1971 All-Ireland. The All-Star side had four representatives from Tipperary, Tadgh O’Connor, Mick Roche, Francis Loughnane and Babs Keating. In contrast to later All-Star trips, the players were housed with families in 1972. The books retails at €24.99.

Jimmy Finn: A Tipperary Legend.

This biography of Jimmy Finn by Martin Bourke will be launched in Borrisoleigh by Brendan Maher on December 12. It’s a large book in full colour, with over 350 pages in A4 size and it includes a large number of photographs. It is a fitting tribute to Jimmy on his ninetieth birthday

Jimmy had an illustrious hurling career which commenced in 1948 and which came to a premature end in 1959 after he sustained an eye injury playing with his club against Roscrea in the North Tipperary championship.

His record of achievements include a minor hurling All-Ireland, three senior in 1950, 1951, when he captained the team, and 1958. He also won four Railway Cups and six National Hurling Leagues and was selected on the Team of the Century in 1984. His achievements include three county championships with Borrisoleigh in 1949, 1950 and 1953.

As well as outlining his hurling achievements, the book also focuses on many other aspects of his life, school, farming, cattle dealing, horses/greyhounds, community life in Borrisoleigh, and growing up in the Ireland of the forties and fifties. There are also many articles on Jimmy by journalists and people who witnessed him performing on the field of play.

Normality

Brigid Delaney has been filling the pages of the local newspapers with her photographs for many years. She has made a selection from her 2005-2019 collection in the pre-Covid days and entitled the book:

Normality. The theme is about people living their lives without restrictions. The highlights include the closure of Gough, O’Keeffe & Naughton, the freezing 2010

Youghalara Christmas swim and the frozen lake at Dromineer the same year. The book was launched by Donie Nealon at Reidy’s Bar & Restaurant, Newtown, recently.



Jimmy Finn leading the Tipperary team in the pre-match parade in the 1951 All-Ireland final. The mascot is John Purcell, son of Phil.

