

# Recent G.A.A. Publications

by Seamus J. King

It is only right and fitting to begin this year's article on G.A.A. Publications with an account of a number of Tipperary publications that were recently honoured in the McNamee Awards for 2021 and 2022. The G.A.A. National Communication and Media Awards are named after the late Pádraig MacNamee, former President of the G.A.A.

Pride of place has to go to Liam Ó Donnchú, who was honoured with two awards. He won the 2021 Best G.A.A. Publication award for *Semple Stadium Field of Legends* 'for his thoroughly researched and engaging content charting the history of one of the most famous grounds in the G.A.A.' The citation went on to compliment the author 'for bringing together the colourful story of this wonderful arena with accounts of wonderful matches, notable characters and of course the famous Féile.'

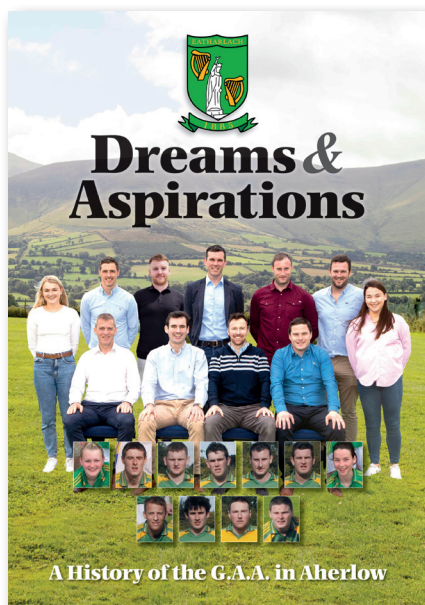
Liam also won the 2021 Best G.A.A. Club Publication with *Thurles Sarsfield G.A.A. Story Volume 2 (1960-2019)*. This publication was praised as 'A superb production that has been meticulously researched: the hardback book has used images throughout to illustrate activities of the club during the period.'

Also recognised as the 2022 Best G.A.A. Publication was *After the Storm* by Damian Lawlor, the story of how the G.A.A. and its members responded to the Covid crisis. Damian showed in this publication 'how the G.A.A. clubs and communities found a way to become closer than ever and the games became a symbol of resistance and a memory of what the world could be like'.

A third award to Tipperary, the 2022 Provincial Media Award, went to Shane Brophy of the *Nenagh Guardian* for Dillon Quirke Remembered in the newspaper's coverage of the young player's tragic death. "Through insightful interviews and articles Quirke's significant contribution to both Clonoulty-Rossmore and Tipperary is fondly remembered.

## Aherlow G.A.A. History

One of the longest established club in the county, the publication of the Aherlow Club history is a welcome development. Launched in the Community Centre, Lisvernane on December 2, it is a major production and a credit to the authors, Terence Coskeren and Lar Ivory. It runs to over 500 pages with over 200 illustrations. The authors were helped in no small way by J. J. Kennedy of Westside fame, and the author of the West Board history. His knowledge and experience in the history of the G.A.A. is reflected in the quality of the production. A quote from him is an appropriate way to conclude this short reference to the publication, which is entitled, *Dreams and Aspirations*: 'There is an old African proverb that says it takes a village to raise a child. Well, it certainly takes an entire community to raise a club to the heights that Aherlow reached. This book is a tribute to all those people in Aherlow who gave so



generously of their time and efforts to make this story happen.'

I understand that work is in progress is the history of the Clonoulty-Rossmore club with Will Ryan in the driving seat. It is one of the very few clubs in the West division still to produce a history. A short version of the club history was produced in 2009

Martin Bourke is writing the update of the Borrissileigh history. The club published their book up to 1986. It was written by Lar Long and Timmy Delaney and is very much in need of updating.

In fact there are quite a number of club histories written in the eighties that require up- dating. It is much easier now to research the history of clubs because during the past forty years or so, the information is much more extensive and accessible. Divisional secretaries produce very comprehensive convention reports, which provide much information for clubs wanting to write their histories. As well printing costs have come down a lot and a club history may not be a major financial burden and a deterrent to clubs taking on the task. Once the club history is written I becomes an important resource for club mentors and a valuable reference work for the members.

## The Grass Ceiling

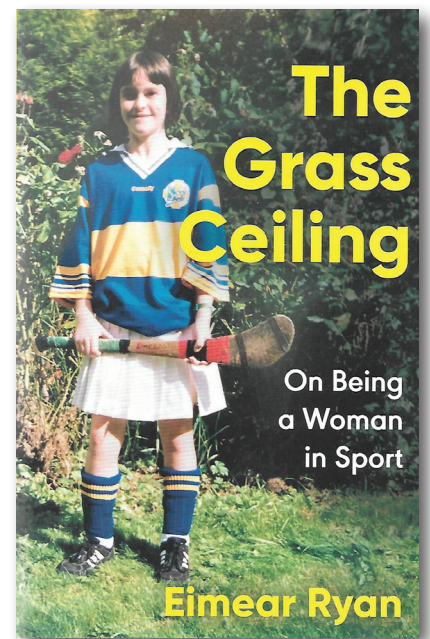
One of the stand-out publications of the past year is *The Grass Ceiling* by Eimear Ryan. Subtitled *On Being a Woman in Sport*, it is just that, an exploration of the role of women in an area of human activity where, in spite of a great rise in female involvement, is a long way from equality of status, attention or appreciation.

Growing up in a hurling household in Moneygall, hurling was Eimear's first love but she found that the game she was led to play was called camogie and she soon discovered that it was treated as a secondary sport in the county. She also realised early on that camogie didn't have the glamour or the social capital that hurling had.

She also made another discovery that good camogie players were rated by how closely they could hurl like a man! The qualities that were desired tended to exclude women as they emphasised the qualities of passion, aggression and courage, as against feminine traits of gentleness, sensitivity and passivity.

She also explores the role of women in a male-dominated sporting world, where the male games get the overwhelming support while the women's game has to do with poorer financial support, lesser facilities, meagre sponsorship and smaller attendances at games. And, at the professional level women are paid less.

However, this is more than a grouse about the plight of women in a male-dominated world. It is an insightful story of the author's progress through the difficulties she had to face as a shy person navigating the world in which the odds were against her around many conners, and her success on the journey. She is very revealing about the bullying she received in her all-female secondary school, where life was hell at times: 'Like so many teenage outcasts before me, I took refuge in pop culture. The



cruel things said to me in school played on a loop in my head, and the only way to quiet them was to disappear into music, TV shows, books and the internet.'

One thing that kept her going was a loving family. And she survived the slings and arrows to become a success in life in which she had a particularly close relationship with her grandfather. This is a great story and deserves all the accolades it has received. Published by Penguin, it retails at €17.99.

### Pat Stakelum – Legend of the Ash

by Noel Dundon was widely anticipated and is an outstanding read. Unusually for a biography it is written in the first person and allows the Ballycahill native, who passed away in 2008, to tell the story in his own words. It will come as surprise to many.

Pat's life stretched back to 1927, and the early part describes a time when life was much simpler, hurling was very different and played a much greater part in people's lives, especially in rural areas. The simplicity and lack of rewards for playing the game in the forties, fifties and even into the sixties is reflected in the story of Pat cycling home from the Railway Station at Thurles, with the MacCarthy Cup on the carrier of the bike, after winning the 1949 All-Ireland!

The famous bike and cup were very prominent at the launch of the book, by Pat's grand-nephew and Limerick captain, Dave Hannon, in Ballycahill Community Hall on October 7. It provided the backdrop for many of the photographs taken. The large crowd that attended revealed Pat's great standing not only in the parish of Holycross-Ballycahill, but in the wider Tipperary community as well.

It's a great story told excellently by Noel Dundon. He had the full co-operation of the Stakelum family and such an extensive family had an awful lot of information to offer and it has enriched the book in a very special way. Also, there's a great selection of photos to illustrate the text, unusual for a period when there were few photographs.

There are some great stories in it, one of the funniest the conversation between Tommy Doyle and the 'Rattler' Byrne high over the Atlantic on their journey to New York for the National League final in 1950. The plane had to turn back on the journey but eventually got off again, and it caused a bit of unease in some of the travellers. Tommy was one of these and asked the Rattler what would happen if the plane failed again and started to go down, 'That would be no bother, Tommy, they would give us one of those parachute things. You'd put it on, pull the cord and you'd be safe and sound.' To a further question the Rattler told him they'd be one for everyone on the plane. Tommy was well relieved but after further thought asked: 'But what would happen if the parachute didn't work?' 'No problem', replied the Rattler, just come back and they'll give you another one!

Pat has an interesting point to make about the importance of these away trips at a time when players didn't meet very often: 'People might not realise how unfamiliar you would be with some of the players – men we would have won All-Ireland medals with and we would hardly know them at all. Those trips gave us a chance to get to know them and when you are with the same lads for two weeks or so, you end up mixing and mingling with lads you might not have a chance to get to know back at home.'

As well as the main text there are reminiscence pieces from members of the family and hurlers, who played with Pat, as well as others. They add significantly to the impact of the book. One of these is a letter penned by the renowned G.A.A. columnist, 'Winter Green' to the Gaels of America ahead of the Tipperary team's visit in 1950. It includes profiles of the players, particularly aimed at Americans:

Sean Kenny: 'Weights 178 lbs solid - seems 178 tons to those

who try to halt him. Height 5 ft-8ins when on the ground. Looks like a roving Statue of Liberty to opposing backs.'

John Doyle: 'A farmer, but there is absolutely no truth in the rumour that he hauled his plough all day when his tractor broke down. . . he's not flesh and blood; he's raw steel and rod iron.'

Pat Stakelum: 'To shift a skyscraper tie a rope to it and Pat Stakelum at the other end. If the rope doesn't break, the skyscraper must. Fair haired and unassuming. A grand chap.'

Jimmy Kennedy: His frees alone have saved Tipperary many a time. Will tell you how he perfected that style. Practised dropping balls into a bucket hanging off an apple tree in the orchard, forty yards from where he stood. Watch him doing it.'

And there's more to be found in the book, which extends to nearly 300 pages and is available at €20.



### G.A.A. People, Objects and Stories:

This is an exhibition currently on show at the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks. Many people will be familiar with the publication in 2022 of A History of the G.A.A. in 100 Objects by G.A.A. historian, Siobhan Doyle. This exhibition shows some of these objects as well as well as other physical material from the history of the G.A.A. One of these items is a medieval mether, which was a drinking vessel that immediately brings to mind the MacCarthy Cup. There is an emphasis on some of the early dress of camogie players, who were forced to put modesty over practicality. This can be seen in the example of an early camogie skirt, on view in Lár na

Páirce, which stretched to the ankles. As far as I know the player was penalised if she used to skirt to stop the sliotar. It always makes me wonder how it was possible not to stop with ball with the skirt! There is much more to be seen at Collins Barracks and the exhibition is well worth a visit.

**A Place to Play** by Humphrey Kelleher (Merriam Press, €26.99). The author produced a wonderful book, G.A.A. Family Silver in 2013, which was about the people and stories behind 101 cups and trophies, and this might be considered a follow-up as it is the story of the 101 G.A.A. grounds, where these trophies were played for down the years.

In order to get proper pictures of the grounds the author bought a drone, learned how to operate it and took all the pictures himself. The book is not so much about the people after whom the grounds were named – Roger Casement didn't tog out for any team – as of the people who down the years put their backs to the wheel, collected scarce money and built a series of grounds in the parishes and counties of Ireland, that are a credit to the individuals and communities involved, and became an example for other sporting bodies in the country.

There are some stories of the difficulties clubs and individuals met. In Kilmallock, Fossett's Circus came to town and one day the elephant escaped and went exploring. He came up to the G.A.A. pitch and decided to scratch his arse against the boundary wall, demolishing the whole thing!

**Great Irish Book of Gaelic Games** by Evanne Úi Chuilinn is available from Eason's at €19.99.

According to the caption this book appears to be geared to younger people. It goes behind the scenes on match days and which county has the zaniest fans, 'This latest book in the Gill Books series of big topics tackled by experts brought to life with amazing illustrations, this engaging history introduces Gaelic Games' most significant people, history and culture to fans of all ages.' The book has 96 pages and is illustrated by Irish illustrator, Donough O'Malley.