

Rise and Fall of the Abbey Shamrocks

ABBEY SHAMROCKS caused a stir in south Donegal football after their foundation in 1951. Formed by friends and relatives in the area's rural townlands, their youthful team repeatedly upset accomplished opposition. Jack Moloney was the driving force, serving simultaneously as chairman, trainer, coach, general manager, and groundsman.

The Shamrocks made their debut in November 1951, against local veterans Loughside. More than 400 local people gathered to witness this spectacle, and they were not disappointed: the Shamrocks stormed home with two late goals and a point to win the match dramatically. It was to be the start of a remarkable story over the next five years.

In their founding year, the Shamrocks were junior league finalists, and the following year they won the South Donegal final of the junior league, defeating Barnesmore at Legaltion, qualifying again for the county final. Paddy Parks, Danny Bannigan, Benny McGloin, and Tom Ward all starred, while the Donegal Democrat singled out Bill McGonigle, whose 'classic display' gave 'promise of greater things'.

Writing in November 1951, a Donegal Democrat columnist reported with excitement on first seeing the Shamrocks play, *'I am glad to be able to record in these columns that they possess most of the elementary standards which will enable them one day to become a really first class team. Youth is the predominant factor in the line out and where it is to the fore, craft and experience follows as a natural consequence'*. The team earned honourable mentions for an impressive performance against a select side spanning Donegal and Fermanagh.

THE SHAMROCKS played their home matches beside the lough in the tranquil rural townland of Legaltion, in the shadow of rolling hills, just two kilometres north of Ballyshannon town. The playing fields became known locally as The Gaelic Grounds, or Bannigan's Field. An advertisement for a match against Cashelard in January 1952



For five years in the early 1950s, a football team founded by friends and relatives in rural south Donegal made headlines for sporting success. But by 1956, beset by key players emigrating to England, the team folded, its demise almost as rapid as its emergence. Jack Hepworth tells the story of the Abbey Shamrocks.

implored spectators to 'come – see – and be satisfied!' Later that year, admission charges were introduced, with spectators charged one shilling. Refreshments were offered, but there were 'no hawkers allowed' on club grounds. There were novelty Grand Challenge matches, too: in May 1952, the Shamrocks hosted the Galway county champions, the First Irish Speaking Battalion of the Infantry Corps.

The team soon established a legendary rivalry with their Ballyshannon neighbours Aodh Ruadh. A famous victory over Ballyshannon by 2-4 to 1-4 drew a sizeable crowd at Legaltion Park in October 1953. The club relied heavily upon donation drives at St Patrick's Church and local fundraising ceili. These events doubled as social occasions for players, families, and supporters.

The fate of the Abbey Shamrocks connected this rural south Donegal community with labour emigration which beset the island. The Shamrocks' demise was just one part of a wider crisis. At a meeting of the South Donegal GAA board in November 1956, secretary Eamon O Muineachain presented a 10,000-word report lamenting emigration's detrimental impact on Gaelic games and 'Irish-Ireland activities' in the area. Noting

the collapse of the Abbey Shamrocks and their counterparts in Pettigo, O Muineachain found this 'deterioration' and 'decay' especially 'depressing... in this, the Golden Jubilee year of the Association in Thir Chonail'.

For O Muineachain, the emigration of Ireland's young to England connected to broader questions of morality, politics, and national identity. He cited the 'Teddy Boys' of English cities as emblematic of 'the demoralisation of our youth in the cities of England'.

'An alarming number of them have lost all respect for their nationality and human dignity, and we in the GAA have a solemn duty to try and counteract this evil. Millions of foreign newspapers and magazines are flooding this island of ours, sneering at our national pastimes and aimed at the complete cultural conquest of our country'. Emigration was a travesty, a 'festering sore'. The cultural and moral decline of Irish-Ireland was, he argued, an indictment of the bloodshed of Pádraig Pearse, James Connolly, and Cathal Brugha.

The Shamrocks story did not end entirely in 1956. Of those players who continued to live in Donegal, several

CONTINUED ON PAGE 93

ALL THE WINNERS & ANSWERS

AUGUST €400 WORD SEARCH

€100x2: Marian White, Lahinch, Co. Clare & Mary Cullen, Crossroads, Wicklow

€50x2: Chris Larkin, Passage East, Co. Waterford & Mrs Mary Eustace, Rathmore, Co. Kildare

€25x4: Bridie Turner, Roundwood, Co. Wicklow; Oliver Garry, Drogheda, Co. Louth; Anthony Finn, Tallaght, Dublin 24 & Anne Moore, Greysteel, Co. Derry

1584 €100 CROSSWORD

€50: Kathleen Kenny, Hacketstown, Co. Carlow

€25x2: Philomena Hegarty, Skibbereen, Co. Cork & Josephine Crehan, Newport, Co. Mayo

ANSWERS: ACROSS: 1 Satire; 4 Tarot; 8 Taming; 9 Even 10 Member; 11 Delete; 13 Ale; 14 Latin; 15 Minor; 17 Tie; 21 Regale; 23 Latter; 24 Mile; 25 Around; 26 Later; 27 Street

DOWN: 2 Thimble; 3 Roger; 4 Trance; 5 Rumbles; 6 Terriers; 7 Stamina; 11 Deemed; 12 Mantle; 16 Corporal; 18 Charade; 19 Against; 20 Outcome; 22 Lumber; 23 Least

DOMINIC KIRWAN CD

Frankie Gregg, Magherafelt, N.I.; Lucy McCarthy, Clonakilty, Co. Cork; Harry Byrne, Finglas East, Dublin; Kitty Lawler, Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow; Dave Buckley, Kilfinane, Co. Limerick

MARY DUFF CD

Tim Joe Hurley, Bandon, Co. Cork; Mr. E. Rodgers, Reading, Berks; Mary Connolly, Gort, Co. Galway; Marie

J. Leane, Listowel, Co. Kerry & Mary Ahern, Shannon, Co. Clare

TELLY TEASERS (PAGE 17)

(Q1) Frank Kelly (Q2) Kitt (Q3) An Anchor (Q4) Henry Garth (Q5) Steptoe and Son (Q6) The Incredible Hulk (Q7) Fozzie Bear (Q8) Brendan O'Connor (Q9) Sam Malone (Q10) Idris Elba

PUZZLE PAGE 85 (WORD BUILDERS)

Aims, aids, lids, lads, lady
Atom, atop, stop, slop, slip

FIND THE CITY

ANSWERS: 1 Melbourne; 2 Urals; 3 Libra; 4 Hawaii; 5 Outback; 6 Utopia; 7 Senegal; 8 Earnest.

1 DOWN: Mulhouse, France, a city near the Belgium border of 110,000 inhabitants.

TRUE OR FALSE

ANSWERS: 1 False – it is in the Cathedral of St John the Baptist, Turin; 2 True; 3 True

WORD MAZE

ANSWERS: Cairo, Nairobi, Cape Town, Tunis, Tripoli, Khartoum
Algiers, Rabat

SOLUTION TO CATCH THE CRIMINAL (PG 42)

The crime must have been committed after the storm, or the pearls (the visual clue) would have rolled off the glass-topped table. And only Renick went to the cabin when the sea was calm.

witness of his life and circumstances of his death. The Franciscan fraternity at St Francis of Assisi Church welcomes tens of thousands of people each year seeking his intercession. Miracles have been attributed to his credit. A mother in Colorado accredited the healing of her

Abbey Shamrocks from page 51

threw in their lot with Aodh Ruadh: former captain Danny Bannigan was an outstanding full-back at the high standard of County senior level, as the Ballyshannon team enjoyed runs to County Senior Finals in 1956 and 1957. Ace marksman Paddy Parks also starred in that successful Ballyshannon side, while Frank McGloin went on to a feature in a strong Bundoran team. McCartney, McGonigle, and McGroarty were selected to represent South Donegal at junior level in April 1955.

Today, more than six decades since the Shamrocks folded, descendants of former players are uncovering this forgotten history. There are plans for a commemorative plaque marking the club's former home at Legalton, and for interviews with surviving ex-players in a community history project. Like so many other local teams in the 1950s, the Abbey Shamrocks provided a pathway for talented, aspiring footballers before navigating the challenges of emigration. Their story highlights ongoing debates about migration and identity, and their past is being rediscovered. ■

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FR. MYCHAL FROM PAGE 79

opened on 11 September 2005. He was inducted into the Irish-American Hall of Fame in 2017.

There have been widespread calls for Fr Mychal to be canonised due to the

baby's sepsis to his intercession.

A father in Rhode Island attributed the correction of his son's severe speech impediment to the friar's intercession. The fire-jacket and helmet which Fr Mychal wore when he died are on display at the NYC Fire Museum.