

BALLYGARVAN GAA 125th ANNIVERSARY

During 2009, the Gaelic Athletic Association marked the 125th Anniversary of its Founding. At the time, Ballygarvan was to the forefront in promoting the newly founded organisation and staged the inaugural regional fixture of the Gaelic Athletic Association.

On Tuesday, 28th April 1885, THE CORK EXAMINER, carried the following front page announcement-

SPORTS!

“THE CORK SOUTHERN HUNT CLUB and BALLYGARVAN ATHLETIC SPORTS and DRAG HUNT to be held at BALLYGARVAN on MAY SUNDAY, at 1.30 sharp; **to be held under the Gaelic Rules.**

1. - 1.30, Boys under 14 years, Half Mile, open.
2. - 2 o’Clock, Quarter Mile Race, handicap.
3. - 2.30, One Mile Race, handicap.
4. - 3 o’Clock, 220 Yards, handicap.
5. - 3.30, Drag Hunt, to be confined to the hounds of the C.S.H.C. Some valuable prizes will be presented by the Club to the owners of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd hounds.
6. - 4 o’Clock, Two Mile Race, handicap.
7. - 4.30, Half-Mile Race handicap.
8. - 5 o’Clock, High Jump.

Intending Competitors will kindly send in their names, with entrance fee, to,

Mr. Thomas Gillespie, 26, South Main-street, Cork, or, to Mr. Patrick Twomey, Ballygarvan.

Time for entries extended to Friday, 1st May, at 6 p.m.

General entry 5s ; single entry, 1s. No charge for Boys Race.

DANIEL SULLIVAN, Hon. Sec.”

The fixture took place a week later, on Sunday May 10th 1885, reflecting the logistical challenges endured by the emerging national organisation and the local committee with regard to communications, funding, travel and declarations for the newly established Association. Despite these challenges, the Ballygarvan committee, embracing the objectives of the new Association went ahead and ‘flew the flag’. The flag unfurled that afternoon consisted of green ribboned borders on white background with verdant G.A.A. monogram centered in embroidered lettering. The officers on the day wore green rosettes. It was a festive occasion with the Barrack Street Band adding to the colour. Encouraged by Cusack and with the assistance of fellow Founder, John McKay, (Cork Examiner), and Jerome O’Crowley, Jeweller, Oliver Plunket Street, the event was staged.

The following day the Cork Examiner recounted that - *“These annual sports were held yesterday at the old trysting place in the meadow at Ballygarvan, and proved a most decided success - a much greater success in fact than the promoters anticipated, and far in advance of anything witnessed before in the same place. The attendance was something enormous..... The meeting was held under the rules of the Gaelic Athletic Association, and, as a consequence, the entries were numerous and the competition A1. The greatest punctuality was observed in the starting of the events, and the crowd was extremely orderly.....”*

The Ballygarvan fixture proved an overwhelming success, attracting thousands of spectators from city and county and represented a watershed in terms of mobilising the G.A.A. on a nation wide scale. Declarations of support for the new Association continued apace. Bolstered by this success the G.A.A.'s national committee continued with a rota of fixtures in Blarney (West), Kilavullen (North), Knockraha (East), culminating a month later, with a City meeting, at the Mardyke Cricket Grounds. The Gaelic Athletic Association was successfully rolled out in Cork county, much to the satisfaction of its visionary founders and to the acclaim of its enthusiastic supporters. The county administrative structures, as we understand them today, began to emerge a year later in December 1886, when at a meeting convened in Dan Horgans, Billiard Rooms, 23 Maylor Street, the Ballygarvan delegates together with the twenty clubs in attendance formed the Cork County Board to manage affairs on a countywide basis. It was from these humble beginnings the G.A.A. grew to capture the imaginations of the masses. The lighting of the flame in Ballygarvan, May 1885, marked the dawn of a cultural renaissance and as Cusack noted "*the Association swept the country like a prairie fire*".

The organising committee on that historic day in Ballygarvan included –

Tom Sheehan, Michael Callanan, John J. Marshall, J Finn, John P. Sheehan, Jim Sullivan, James Marshall, Denis Cronin, Jim Bowen, John Crowley, James Butler and Tom B. Scannell.

Hon. Treasurer – Tom J. Sheehan.

Hon. Secretary – Dan Sullivan.



Gaelic Athletic Association Championship Medal 1885

A circular silver Medal, engraved with Irish motifs of Harp, Round Tower and Celtic Cross with crossed Hurley & Hammer, the reverse decorated with the Shamrock and each leaf engraved with the names of Croke, Davitt and Parnell. This is an example of the medals presented by the G.A.A. in Ballygarvan.

In the early years, the Gaelic Athletic Association promoted Track and Field events alongside Hurling and Football, hence the image of the crossed Hurley and Hammer. The figurative detail on the engraving is rich in symbolism, a mythical resonance alluding to Gaelic learning, culture and athleticism, favoured in the neo-Celtic revivalist style of the time. © Ballygarvan GAA Club 2009

Tom Gillespie, the Grocer on the South Main Street, and Paddy Twomey, the Village Blacksmith, when accepting those entries, mustered an event that reverberated around the county. From this chrysalis emerged an organisation embedded in community, of community, enriched by community; therein lies the foundation on which it prospers: be it at our peril we underestimate that bedrock.

"*The old trysting place in the meadow at Ballygarvan*", today, is floodlit and plays host to club, school and college competitions, uniquely standing in vibrant testimony to the visionary Founding Fathers.

Edmond Forrest, November 2009.