

A Sporting Parish

CHAPTER 20



Clontuskert has a long, proud and varied sporting history. While hurling is the sport with which the parish is most commonly associated, there are other sports which have played a significant role in the social life of its people. In the years after the Famine, cricket was arguably one of the most popular sports in Ireland. Clontuskert was no different in this regard. Horseracing holds a very special place in the Irish psyche and Clontuskert has had its

The Old Sportsfield, Somerset

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own connection with this sport. In more recent times, camogie, soccer, golf, rugby, rounders, athletics and coursing have had their respective groups of followers in the parish. There is little doubt that the phrase, 'a sporting parish' is very applicable to Clontuskert.

The Statutes of Kilkenny were passed in 1366 in an attempt to prevent the Anglo-Normans from picking up Irish habits and culture. Hurling was among the sports prohibited. However, the prohibition was largely ignored, particularly by those of Norman extraction. The 1527 Galway Statutes also prohibited hurling, largely because the game was commonly associated with an aftermath of bloody and violent activity. This prohibition had a more deleterious effect on hurling and the game went close to dying out in Ireland. East Galway however was almost unique in that it was one of only three areas in the country where hurling did not become extinct. In fact it flourished in almost every parish in East Galway including Clontuskert. The first newspaper accounts of the game in the final quarter of the nineteenth century, prove that the game was thriving in the parish in the form of organised hurling tournaments with neighbouring parishes.

On August 15th 1887, a hurling tournament on a magnificent scale took place in a field given by Michael De La Hunt of Huntley House, Kiltormer. A crowd of two thousand was present. Teams from Lawrencetown, Mullagh, Killoran, Clonfert, Cappataggle, Kiltormer and Clontuskert took part. The Clontuskert captain was James Curley. Among the attendance was the historic Meelick team which had qualified for the upcoming first All-Ireland final and because of this commitment, they did not take part in the tournament. Clontuskert lost their first game and a second game versus Kiltormer was not played due to what was described in the *Western News* as 'lateness'. The paper also recorded a shortage of drinking water on the day.

A month later in September 1887, Mullagh hosted a tournament. Clontuskert, represented by Patrick Curley, Thomas Kelly, and John Curley drew with Quansboro. A feature of those well-attended games was the number of women present. The *Western News* reported in its quaint fashion that 'grace and female loveliness was not wanting and many a young hurler exerted himself to his utmost in the consciousness that his sweetheart was among the throng!'. On another occasion, reporting on a hurling and football tournament in Kiltormer, the same paper recorded the largest crowd ever witnessed in Kiltormer, noting that 'the fair sex was represented in a manner which could not fail to commend the approval of the most aesthetic, and now and then might be heard expressions of approval at some friend or lover who scored a satisfactory point'.

On a beautiful summer's day in 1888, in P.J. Davy's field in Cappataggle, Clontuskert beat Ahascragh. The match report stated that the Clontuskert team 'have long practice and experience'. Lawrencetown hosted a tournament in July of the same year. Ten teams attended, but due to inclement weather only two games were played. Among the teams invited was a team from Clontuskert and a team from Ganaveen. This was the first occasion on which Ganaveen was referred to as a team in its own right. Its members were drawn mainly from among the workers on the Pollok Estate.

At Lowville, Ahascragh, on the 22nd of July 1888, three thousand people attended the first ever tournament in that parish. Clontuskert and Ganaveen were among the teams competing. Clontuskert, captained by M. Cunniffe, beat Mullagh and were described as having made great progress. Ganaveen drew with Kilconnell.

A most successful tournament was held in Clontuskert on

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August 12th, 1888 in a field given by Michael McKeigue. The ground was laid out by Patrick Moran and some members of the Clontuskert team. Fifteen teams competed: Clontuskert, Kilrickle, Mullagh, Killoran, Kiltormer, Quansboro, Lawrencetown, Clonfert, Tiernascragh, Killimor, Ahascragh, Cappataggle, Eyrecourt, Kilconnell and Ganaveen. Clontuskert was captained by Michael Callaghan. Once again the event was covered by the *Western News* which stated that 'the Clontuskert branch of the G.A.A. is making great progress'. The attendance was good though the day was wet. Despite the inclement weather, 'the number of the fair sex who graced the scene by their presence was unusually large'. Mr. R.F. Walker, who was in charge of proceedings, was ably assisted by Thomas Kelly, Taylorstown, who acted as timekeeper. The umpires were James Kilmartin, Michael Curley, Michael Shiel, and Peter Wright. Pat Callaghan, Pat Madden, Michael Cormican, Michael Kelly, James Kelly, Tom Curley, John Callaghan and John Shiel were the stewards. Clontuskert, captained by James Tobin, was beaten by Lawrencetown, and Ganaveen with Henry Mariner as captain, was defeated by Ahascragh. A dozen policemen were present but 'the best of good humour and good feeling pervaded the day'. The paper concluded its report by stating that 'Clontuskert and Ganaveen are young teams and are improving'. A further indication of the growing commitment to hurling in the parish is to be seen in the decision to send three delegates, Michael Callaghan (Clontuskert), John Goode and Patrick Horan (Ganaveen), to the second Annual Convention of the County Galway G.A.A in Loughrea. Some evidence of success on the playing fields was borne out when, in Kilconnell on September 16th 1888, Clontuskert, captained by Michael Callaghan, beat Kilconnell.

Five weeks later, on October 28th 1889, a hurling

tournament was held on the historic hill of Aughrim. One of the umpires, also known as goalkeepers at that time, was Michael Curley of Clontuskert. Michael Callaghan and Henry Mariner were the respective captains of Clontuskert and Ganaveen. The *Western News*, describing the Ganaveen versus Cappataggle game, stated that 'never before was witnessed a game with such pluck and determination, and nicer striking and pucking, while the catches were a sight, and the 'free hangs' a caution'. The umpire's voice was heard at every moment with admonitions such as, 'Steady boys, be cool, hit the ball and nothing else'. Amongst those taking part were, Pat Callaghan, Michael Callaghan, Michael Curley, John Shiel, Denis Reynolds, and John Kelly - all Clontuskert - Henry Mariner, Patrick Gilligan, Tom Grealish, Darby Goode, and Thomas Kenny - all Ganaveen.

The political and agrarian troubles of the period are reflected in events on the hurling fields. A tournament arranged at Skehanagh in late 1889 ran into trouble when a large force of police took possession of the field. The police were present because they considered the field too close to Mr. Patch Kennedy, who allegedly had abetted the forger Pigott in his efforts to destroy Charles Stuart Parnell. He was believed to have 'grabbed the Widow Dempsey's farm, Kylebeg Estate, and swore against Patrick Larkin, then Chairman of Galway G.A.A.'. Several of the teams had carried out their programme at Ballylean before the police invaded the pitch. The Ganaveen captain on that occasion was Patrick Moran. The Parnell controversy had an adverse effect on the continuation of these tournaments due to the fact that sides were taken in "the split" when the country was divided on the Parnell issue. The first G.A.A. Board in the country to give a vote of confidence to Parnell, was the Galway County Board. Clontuskert, like many other clubs torn by political division, faded from the scene after the death of

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Parnell in 1891. Six years passed before the parish was again mentioned in G.A.A. reports. Emigration was rampant at this time and evictions were commonplace in many areas, resulting in a decline in the number of young men available for the playing panels of the parishes. A sad instance of this development was evidenced when most of the young Ganaveen team emigrated to America, never to return.

The Patrick Larkin mentioned in the previous paragraph, was President of the Galway County Board during this era. A native of Killimor, he lived in Kiltormer for many years. The reason for the very strong position of the G.A.A. in East Galway was due largely to his untiring dedication. Perhaps his greatest claim to fame was that he drew up the original rules of hurling, sometimes referred to as 'the Larkin Rules.'

Football appeared to be the favoured game in the early days of the twentieth century. Clontuskert affiliated a senior football team in 1905 and on June 18th of that year, they played Kinvara in the first round of the Senior Football Championship. Unfortunately, no records are available for that game. Evidently Clontuskert were not having much success at Senior level since they are recorded as fielding a Junior football team in 1909.

Disputes and objections were the order of the day. In 1911 there was a split in the County Board and two separate County Conventions were held. In 1912 a special convention was held in an effort to sort out the differences between the two Boards. In elections for the new board, Patrick Larkin became President. Despite the troubles at county level and on the national scene, Clontuskert attempted to make a new beginning in 1917. The *East Galway Democrat* of July 28th ran an item headed 'Clontuskert – formation of a Hurling Club'. The article went on to state that 'A Junior hurling club was formed in Clontuskert on Sunday last and

the following officers elected: President; Fr. Fallon, Secretary; Mr. Parker, Treasurer; Mr. Michael Curley, Captain; Mr. John Kenny. Over fifty members attended and the Secretary was directed to have the club affiliated without delay. Practices will be held on Sundays at 4 pm. Young men of the parish wishing to join the club should do so at once'. However, the First World War was by now taking its toll and the 1916 Easter Rising was diverting people's energies away from the playing fields. The death of Patrick Larkin in 1917 deprived the immediate area of a great organiser. Following his death, there was no G.A.A. activity in the area for a number of years. There is little evidence of success at parish level for the next ten years or so despite the inspiring example of the Galway county teams who won both the hurling and football All-Irelands in this period.

The ten years before World War Two was a time of uneven fortunes for Clontuskert hurling. In 1930, Pakie and Josie Curley, Ballagh, were on the Lawrencetown team, which reached the East Board Semi-final. In 1931, Clontuskert fielded a junior hurling team. At the East Board fixtures meeting in 1932, according to the minutes 'Clontuskert was represented by Mr. Molloy and Mr. Curley'. A junior hurling team was again affiliated and reached the final of their group. Clontuskert made the headlines for the wrong reasons in 1935 when two of its players were suspended for twelve months following incidents involving the referee in a game against Ballinasloe which was played in the Mental Hospital grounds. In 1937, Mr. Kelly and Mr. Callaghan were the Clontuskert delegates at the County Convention. A Clontuskert minor hurling team was affiliated in the parish. However, the junior hurlers were in disarray with some players joining neighbouring clubs. Josie Curley joined Cappataggle, where he impressed the selectors of the Galway Junior team and became the

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Josie Curley,
Ballagh

first player from the parish to represent the county and win an All-Ireland medal. Josie played at left full-back in the final against London in Croke Park. Galway won that game 2-6 to 2-2. Josie also graduated to the Galway Senior panel and was a sub on the Connacht Hurling team beaten by Leinster in 1940.

The fortunes of Clontuskert hurling began to improve in the 1940s. They re-organised in 1941 following an open-air meeting held at Ballagh Cross. Josie Farragher, Paddy Hurney, Christy Kelly, Johnny Lennon and Vincey Furey were to the fore. Chief organisers Paddy Hurney and Jim Barry, cycled to Killimor to affiliate a team. Tony Scott, who had previously played at senior level with Cappataggle, returned. Tony had earlier won a County Junior medal with Ballymacward.



Tony Scott,
Ardranny

The 1941 team beaten by Mullagh was: *Martin Costello, Owney Curley, Mick Callaghan, Paddy Hurney, Brendan Shiel, Mick Farragher, Pakie Curley, Tony Scott, Vincey Furey, Divey Darcy, Christy Kelly, Eugene Nee, Vincey Reilly, Johnny Lennon, Tommy Hurney.*
Subs: Paddy Kelly, John Martin Kenny, Christy Curley.

Josie Curley returned from Cappataggle in 1942 and despite an improved performance, Clontuskert

fell in the second round to Eyrecourt. 1943 proved to be the year when their perseverance bore fruit. They won the East Board Championship beating Lawrencetown, Kiltormer, Tiernascragh and Kilrickle with almost the same team that set out with such enthusiasm in 1941. The only notable change was that All-Ireland medallist Josie Curley had replaced Mick Callaghan at full-back.

Clontuskert was upgraded to Intermediate level in 1944 and despite a great win over Killimor in the first round they fell to what seemed to be their bogey team, Eyrecourt. Despite sterling performances in 1945 and 1946, it was in 1947 that they reached another East Board Final. Once again Kilrickle were the opponents but this time however, Kilrickle were the victors. **The Clontuskert players of 1947 were;** *Martin Scott, Owney Curley, Josie Curley, Brendan Shiel, Mick Farragher, Tony Scott, Malachy Barry, Christy Kelly, Paddy Hurney, Paddy Kenny, Tommy Hurney, Anthony Poland, Johnny Lennon, Mikey Joe McDermott, Vincy Furey, Gabriel McDermott and Mikie Madden.*

During this period, hurling tournaments regained the popularity they had enjoyed in the 1887-1903 period. A tournament at Kilnahown in 1948 attracted ten teams from surrounding parishes, with gold watches for the winners. In 1949, a seven-a-side tournament took place in Jack Hession's field at 'The Lodge', Tristaun. The prize for the winners on this occasion was a set of suit lengths. Laurence Larkin, Paddy Hurney, and Gerry Stephenson were the main organisers. This proved to be a wonderfully festive occasion. There was dancing on an open-air dance floor, with music by the renowned *Aughrim Slopes Céili Band*, the music reverberating around the slopes from which the band had got its name. There were a number of solo items which were thoroughly enjoyed, especially a contribution by Mr. Seamus Leydon N.T., a native of Kilkee, who played the fiddle and danced

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Paddy Hurney,
Tristaun.



at the same time. Doubtless his pupils in Clontuskert National School viewed him in a different light from then onwards.

The hurling team that year showed many changes with Paddy Hurney now at the helm. Paddy included some players from Aughrim who were unable to field a hurling team at that time. **The players of 1948 included** *Jack Quinn, Josie Curley, Tommy Murray, Martin Larkin, Malachy Barry, Paddy Hurney, Tommy Hurney, Mick Farragher, Vincey Furey, Paddy Dolan, Johnny Lennon, Tony Scott, Owney Curley, Brendan Shiel, Pat Joe Minton, Patsy Markham, Martin Scott, Dermot Minton, Billy Farragher, Patsy Lynch, Jimmy Mannion and Mansy Lynch.*

In 1949 the Clontuskert minors reached the East Board



MEMBERS OF CLONTUSKERT PANEL 1949

*The names of many players in this photograph are not available in the correct order.
All the names are listed on the following page.*

Minor hurling final which they lost to Portumna. This team was made up of players from the surrounding areas. One of the best players, Patsy Lynch from Aughrim, could not feature in the final due to the fact that he was an illegal player. However, most of the rest somehow got through the system! **The minors of 1949 included** *Mickey Curley, Owen Kearns, Seamus Harrison, Mansy Lynch, Patsy Hanrahan, Tommy Hanrahan, Hugh Burke, John Lynch, Donal Fingleton, Peter Jennings, Henry Burke, Jack Bleahen, Joe McDevitt, Johnny Fahy, Willie Delaney and Sean Jennings.* This team was managed by John Joe Barry.

A certain amount of disarray again appeared in the 1950s. In 1951, two teams emerged in Clontuskert, one called St. Augustine's and the other Tristaun. Neither team achieved much success. The previous year in the last of the Tristaun tournaments, Clontuskert's seven were beaten by Ballinasloe for the suit lengths. **The team was:** *Patsy Hanrahan, Mick Farragher, Jack Quinn, Tony Scott, Paddy Dolan, Johnny Lennon and Paddy Hurney.*



| John Joe Barry

Incidentally, Tom Moylan from Clontuskert played in goal for Ballinasloe on that occasion.

In 1953, the parish teams reunited and since there were no teams in either Kiltormer or Lawrencetown, some new names came to the fore: Billy Carry, Billy Farragher, Eugene Wiley, Pat Joe Frehill, Charlie Carry, and Paddy Carry. However, some players were poached by neighbouring senior clubs in Ballinasloe, Mullagh and Cappataggle. The most notable of these players was Mick Farragher, who won a senior county title as a sub with Ballinasloe in 1951, and starred with them for some years

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Vincey Furey

afterwards. Emigration had become a major problem for rural clubs and it would have been easier to pick a team from the parish exiles than from those who remained at home. By the mid-fifties, Clontuskert teams were relying on players from outside the parish to make up a team. The reverse was also the case with some players from the parish figuring

with Ballinasloe, Kiltormer, Cappataggle and Eyrecourt.

Clontuskert
Minors
East-Board
Finalists 1959

Due to good work by Billy Farragher, Vincey Furey and P.J. Hession, a useful Minor team reached the 1957 East Board final only to lose to an up and coming Fohenagh team. The majority of this Fohenagh team went on to win two County Senior Hurling titles in 1959 and 1960. **The minor squad of 1957 was:** *John Lyons,*



CLONTUSKERT MINORS 1959

Back Row: P.J. Hession, M. Glynn, J. McKeigue, T. Shiel, John Black, Joe Black, P. Glynn, R. Black, M. Kenny.
Back Row: K. Brennan, B. McKeigue, M. Hoare, B. Quinn, S. Hanlon, F. Curley, J. Lyons, P. McKeigue.

Bernie Quinn, Pat McKeigue, Frank Curley, Billy McKeigue, John Black, Thomas Shiel, Johnny McKeigue, Joe Black, Mikey Kenny, Sean Hanlon, Mickey Hoare, Raymond Black, Mickey Glynn, Kevin Brennan, Jackie Fahy and Paddy Glynn.

Following its absence over several decades, football again made a re-appearance in the parish. Amid great excitement, a challenge match was arranged between 'those above' and 'those below' Madden's Cross. Callow youths, as well as seasoned veterans lured out of retirement, battled for the honour and glory of their native patch. Most of those participating had never kicked a football in their lives. The venue was Mikey McKeigue's roadside field in Loughturk. John Martin Kenny was prevailed upon to act as referee. Because a proper referee's whistle could not be located, a tin whistle borrowed from a musician in the crowd was used instead. Not long after the start of the game, pursuit of the ball became a secondary issue, and when 'rí rá agus ruaile buaile' broke out, it became obvious that the referee needed more than a tin whistle to restore order. The match ended in disarray but still remains a part of the folklore of a more innocent time. Not surprisingly, the referee's report was never made public. 'Real' football however flourished a few years later with the appearance of a promising Junior football team. Clontuskert played some memorable games against Loughrea, St. Gabriel's and Fohenagh. Brian Naughton, holder of an All-Ireland Minor football medal in 1952 and Junior Medal in 1958, was the star player in the parish at this stage.



Brian Naughton,
Abbeypark

Bill Hoare took on the task of preparing the Minor hurlers

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in 1962. A fundraising raffle raised only a paltry sum of money and with Easter Sunday fast approaching, funds were low and transport was not to be located. The team was the strongest for some time and they were due to play Sarsfields/St. Killians in Tynagh. The manager decided that drastic action was needed and his friend Paddy O'Connor was called upon to help. Paddy was the driver of an open-topped lorry on which milk cans were transported to the creamery in Killimor. He agreed to bring the minors to Tynagh on the milk lorry as soon as he had completed his morning round. The players were collected and as time was running late they togged out on the open lorry on their way to Tynagh. However, as they were pulling up outside the pitch, they discovered that the opposition was preparing to go home, having claimed the game owing to Clontuskert's late arrival. To add insult to injury, an alert Garda approached and warned Paddy that he was not insured to carry anything other than milk cans on his truck and told him not to attempt to carry the team home. A very frustrated group of minor hurlers walked the twelve miles from Tynagh, with Mike Cormican carrying the green and gold jerseys in a brown suitcase. Despite his fatigued condition, Mike cycled to a dance in *the Crystal Ballroom* that evening. Meantime, his younger brothers Patsy and Sean, resplendent in their Clontuskert green and gold jerseys, turned the back field at Liskelly into a Croke Park of the imagination, when they assumed the roles of current Kerry football stars, Mick O'Connell and John Dowling. Among those who made that fateful pilgrimage to Tynagh were Frank Shiel, J.B Kelly, Micheál Flaherty, Maurice Larkin, Joe Furey, John Darcy, Tommy McKeigue, Mike Cormican and Vinney McKeigue.

Hurling continued to suffer from the drain of emigration. It was becoming more obvious that Clontuskert could not field a team without inviting players from outside the parish. The same

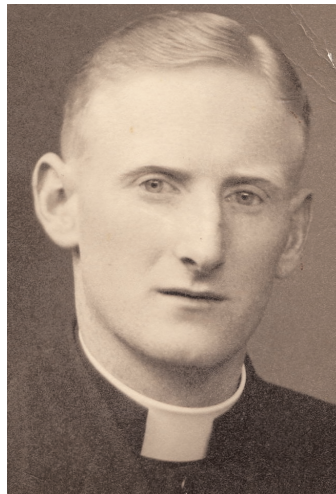
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was true of Lawrencetown and Kiltormer. On his appointment as curate in Kiltormer, Fr. Jack Solan immediately became involved in re-organising hurling in the area. A native of Clare and a former county hurler, he pinpointed the source of the problem and initiated remedial action. A G.A.A. pitch was opened in Kiltormer in 1961. Bishop Kelly, one of Clontuskert's most famous

sons, threw in the ball at the start of the opening match on that day.

Fr. Solan also became involved in the County Board, eventually becoming County Chairman. He spearheaded a campaign to prevent parishes from affiliating more than one team, and also to bring together players from weaker or more thinly populated parishes. He served for some time on the Juvenile board where he was responsible for many innovative schemes which laid the foundation for subsequent All-Ireland victories. He set up a scholarship to help develop promising hurlers and Andy Fenton from Clontuskert was amongst the first group to be chosen in 1965. Andy put his newly acquired skills to good use the following year when he led the Clontuskert U-14 team to a County Final, having won the East Board Final by defeating Ballinakill. Having beaten Gort in the County Semi-final, they fell to Turloughmore at the last hurdle. **The history**



(above left)
Bertie Walshe.
Made hurleys
for Clontuskert
players for over
fifty years.

(left)
Fr. Jack Solon

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making team was: *Tony Murray, Padraig McKeigue, Ollie Callaghy, P.J. Concannon, Colm Tuohy, Michael Concannon, Pat Grady, Andy Fenton, Mattie Kelly, Connie Goode, Joe McKeigue, Brendan Naughton, Tony Furey, Raymond Flaherty and Mattie Curley.*

Clontuskert,
Under-14
County
Finalists 1966

In the early 1960s the County Board introduced the experiment of allowing amalgamated Junior teams to play in the Senior League. During this time Clontuskert and Kiltormer joined with Cappatagle, Meelick/Eyrecourt and Killimor in respective years. Mickey Hoare, Frank Curley and Liam Hoare were Clontuskert's representatives during those years.



CLONTUSKERT U-14 COUNTY FINALISTS 1966

Back Row: Brendan Naughton, Mattie Curley, Mattie Kelly, Colm Tuohy, Michael Concannon, P.J. Concannon, Connie Goode, Pat O'Grady, Ollie Callaghy.

Front Row: Tomás Fenton, Tony Furey, Pádraig McKeigue, Tony Murray, Andrew Fenton (*Captain*), Liam Whyte, Pádraig Kelly, Sean Cormican, Joe McKeigue.

A major fillip to the emerging amalgamation process among rural clubs was the introduction of free school transport in 1968. This meant that the teenagers from Kiltormer, Clontuskert and Lawrencetown travelled together to the second-level schools

in Ballinasloe and quickly became acquainted with each other. They also became team-mates on the various school teams, which eventually helped enormously in the formation of a single club. In 1969, after years of frustration with each of the three individual areas entering teams without success, they at last fielded a unified team. Their first trophy was the East Board Minor Championship in 1969 with Ollie Callaghy, Andy Fenton, Mattie Kelly and Mattie Curley from Clontuskert, distinguishing themselves on numerous occasions.

In the meantime, several people from the parish achieved fame and success outside of Clontuskert. Tom Coleman played hurling with Wicklow for years; Ollie Whyte played Minor football for Galway while he was a member of the Ballinasloe club; Frank Curley and Mike Cormican joined Ballinasloe Hurling Club which was a senior club at that time; Tommy McKeigue became a prominent referee and officiated at many important games during this era; Jackie Gilchrist won a County Dublin Championship with Kilmacud Crokes and Tommy Hurney won a County Championship medal with Enniscorthy.

The seventies was the decade when hurling really progressed in Clontuskert, which by now, together with Lawrencetown and Kiltormer was incorporated into a unified club playing under the name 'Kiltormer'. The first county title won by the club was at Minor level in 1972. **Clontuskert players on that occasion were:** *Frank Larkin, Sean Cormican, Sean Kelly, Joe McKeigue, Tony Furey, Pdraic Kelly, Brendan Naughton.* Cyril Farrell trained the team for the final.

Andy Fenton, Ollie Callaghy, Pdraig McKeigue, Joe McKeigue, Mattie Kelly, Tony Furey and Mattie Curley were on the team which won the U-21 East Board Championship and reached the County Finals in 1970.

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KILTORMER, COUNTY MINOR CHAMPIONS 1972

Back Row: Ollie Kelly, Sean Kelly, Tony Kilkenny, Padraig Kelly, Joe Hayes, Brendan Naughton, Kieran Lynch, Cyril Farrell (Trainer).

Front Row: Padraig Finnerty, Sean Cormican, Frank Larkin, Jackie Dervan, Tony Furey, Joe McKeigue, Joe Cullen, Martin Foley.

Titles followed in the different grades until finally, the greatest title in Galway hurling was achieved in 1976 with the beating of Killimordaly in the senior County Final at Pearse Stadium. In this historic win, Clontuskert had ten players involved; Frank Larkin, Anthony Kelly, Sean Cormican, Andy Fenton, Tony Furey, Mickey Hoare, Sean Kelly, John Goode, Joe McKeigue and Padraig Kelly. The senior final was again won the following year with a great victory over Athenry in Ballinasloe. The panel now included four additional players from the parish; Thomás Fenton, Liam

Tony Furey (Capt.), receiving the County Minor Cup from Dermot McSweeney. Also pictured are (l. to r.) John Goode, Frank Larkin and Michael Coleman.



Larkin, Tony Carr and Pdraig Murphy. They were now the top hurlers in the county and were in contention in all grades.

Another senior title in 1982 saw the emergence of Declan Jennings, a seventeen-year-old who was later to star in Galway's Minor All-Ireland side in 1983 and at U-21 level in 1986. The title-winning team of 1982 also included Gerry Coone, a native of Mullagh



COUNTY SENIOR CHAMPIONS 1976

Back Row: Sean Kelly, Kieran Lynch, Tony Kilkenny, Frank Larkin, John Goode, Joe Hayes, Sean Cormican, Paraic Glynn.

Front Row: Jackie Dervan, Mickey Hoare, Tony Furey, Tom Lynch, Andy Fenton, Anthony Kelly, Tony Frehill.

who had been living in Clontuskert for some years and was by now very much a part of the team.

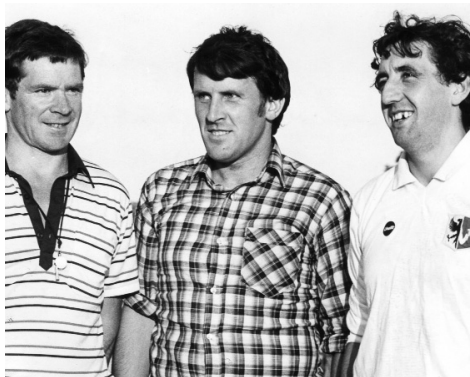
Clontuskert's players throughout the 1980s produced many star performances and achieved notable victories. The all-Clontuskert trio of Frank Gurley, Micheal Callaghy and team captain Sean Cormican who managed the 1982 County Champions. Football also flourished in



Declan Jennings celebrates after All-Ireland Minor victory in 1983.

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Team Management, Frank Curley, Micheál Callaghy and Sean Cormican (Capt)



the early 1980s with a victory over Moycullen in the 1979 Junior Final and over Corofin in the 1980 Intermediate Co. Final in Athenry.

Representing Clontuskert on that day were Tony Carr, Tomás Fenton, Frank Larkin,

Liam Larkin, Tony Furey, John Goode, Sean Kelly, Andy Fenton, Arthur Carr, Pdraig Murphy and Sean Cormican. Laurence Larkin from Kilnahown, who had been a tireless organiser in the 1940s



JUNIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONS 1979 (V MOYCULLEN)

Back Row: Jackie Dervan, Sean Kelly, John Goode, Sean Cormican, Paraic Murphy, Liam Larkin, Joe Hayes, Andy Fenton.

Front Row: Donie Campbell, Conor Hayes, Oliver Kilkenny, Frank Larkin (Captain), Tony Furey, Kieran Lynch, Tomás Fenton.

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was as active and enthusiastic as ever and had become a father figure within the Club. He served as Chairman of the Club for many years and served as team manager and selector with several teams. He was Vice-Chairman of the Galway Hurling Board for a lengthy period and is at present Honorary President of that Board. There are few clubs in the country who have had the good fortune to be blessed with the selfless dedication of a member such as Laurence Larkin.



Laurence and
Delia Larkin

Incidentally, there is another interesting football connection with the parish. Clontuskert is proud to have Cyril Dunne as one of its parishioners for the past eleven years. He was one of the most accomplished members of the famous Galway Three-in-a-Row team of the 1960s.

The events of June 2nd 1986 marked another historic milestone in the sporting history of Clontuskert. A brand new Sports Field was officially opened and blessed by Fr. John Kelly P.P. assisted by Fr. Anthony Kelly, home from the African missions at



Fr. John Kelly P.P.
and Fr. Anthony
Kelly blessing
the new
sportsfield on
June 6th 1986.

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the time. All-Star hurler Conor Hayes, who was also the engineer for the project, cut the tape. Jimmy Halliday, Chairman of the County G.A.A. Board, spoke at the opening ceremony. The field was acquired in a direct swap for the old Sportsfield in Somerset, which was given to the parish in 1946. Although it had been a mecca for the sporting youth of the parish for forty years, it was never properly developed and apart from two shaky goalposts, was indistinguishable from any of the surrounding pastures. A committee was formed in the early eighties under the chairmanship of Frank Curley, to examine what could be done. Fortuitously, two suitable fields known as 'Murray's fields', adjacent to St. Augustine's Church, became available and through the good offices of the Land Commission, they were exchanged for the Somerset field. A dedicated committee performed trojan work over a short time-span. The inhabitants of every townland in the parish played their part. Fundraising was well supported and the level of voluntary help was evidence of a vibrant community spirit.

New
Sportsfield



Legendary tea-parties were organised by the ladies of the parish, tickets were sold and monthly draws took place in the old school. Two fields became one, rolling hills were levelled, stones were picked, grass seed was sown, goalposts were erected, and dressing rooms were built. Finally the pitch was closely mown and lined. Everything looked resplendent on that beautiful June evening in 1986. Two entertaining hurling games were played with a fine sprinkling of All-Stars on display. Meelick/Eyrecourt played Mullagh in the curtain-raiser and in the main event, Kiltormer played Kinnity from County Offaly. The All-Stars who played that day were: Paddy Delaney, Ger Coughlan, Mark Corrigan of Offaly; Conor Hayes, Pete Finnerty, Iggy Clarke, Sean Silke, Brendan Lynskey and Seamus Coen – all from Galway.

Nine Clontuskert players were on the Kiltormer panel on that day. **The team chosen was:** *Sean McKeigue, Pakie Dervan, Conor Hayes, Kieran Lynch, Joe Rogers, Brendan Dervan, Seamus Feury, Damian Curley, Declan Jennings, Tony Feury, John Goode, Aidan Staunton, Pdraig Kelly, Michael Kenny. Subs: Frank Larkin, Martin Staunton, Joe Hayes, Gerry Kelly, Gerry Curley, Peter Staunton, John Clarke, Michael Kilkenny.*

The G.A.A. Club continues to help in the maintenance of this wonderful amenity, which has been a contributing factor to the many successes achieved ever since. A variety of sports are played there, including inter-county Ladies Football and Camogie, as well as some Second Level and Primary School competitions.

The immense contribution of a number of people must be remembered. Pádraig McKeigue and Michael Concannon built the dressingrooms with skill and thorough workmanship. Gerry Frehill, father of rising star, Darren Frehill of the RTÉ Sports Department, spent weeks of painstaking work with his earth-moving machines. The late James Holloway, nephew of Martin

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Colohan, generously gave the car park site free of charge.

Meanwhile, the Club continued to collect titles. **The U-16 title-winning team of 1985 included** *Brian McLoughlin, Jim Stephenson, John Kilgannon, Declan Carr, Patrick Farragher, Kevin Curley, Sean Colohan, Cathal Curley, Tony Larkin, Fionán Curley, Brian McManus, Tomás Hanrahan, James Brennan and Damian Curley.* The



CLONTUSKERT SPORTSFIELD COMMITTEE

Back Row: Seamus Callaghan, Micheál Concannon, Micheál Callaghy (*Treasurer*), Joe Molloy, Mattie Kelly, Laurence Larkin, Pádraig Kelly, Martin Coleman, John Shiel, Christy Gilchrist.

Front Row: Pakie Callaghan, Paddy Burke, Micheál Callaghan, Frank Curley (*Chairman*), Patsy Cormican (*Secretary*), Paddy Murphy.

Absent from photo: Pádraig McKeigue, Noel Finneran and Gerry Coone.

senior team was still performing in the top echelons with Noel Kelly among the many Clontuskert players showing promise. In 1988 the first national title won by the club was the All-Ireland seven-a-side title. Sean Kelly, Tony Furey and Damian Curley represented the parish on that day. Frank Curley and John Goode were the managers. In fact, Kiltormer was the first club in Ireland to win seven-a-side, eleven-a-side and fifteen-a-side national titles. The eleven-a-side was won in 1993.

The late Micheal Callaghan, who manned the entrance gate on the opening day of the new Sportsfield



The 1990s started in spectacular fashion with another All-Ireland seven-a-side title. John Goode, Sean Cormican and Micháel Callaghy were now the team managers and Brian McManus joined Sean Kelly and Damian Curley as Clontuskert's representatives on the team. Better was to follow when they won the County Senior title beating Turloughmore in Athenry. Some new players progressed from under age success and Clontuskert's contributors to this title were Brian McManus, Fionán Curley, Damian Curley, Sean Kelly, Tony Larkin, Tomás Hanrahan, Joe Poland and Niall McKeigue. The Connacht title followed before the year was out. Unfortunately, that was as far as the team progressed because St.Gabriel's of London carved out an unexpected victory in the quarter final.

This successful streak continued into 1991 when the County Senior title was retained in Loughrea with Athenry providing the opposition. The Connacht title was secured in Ballyforan with a victory over Four Roads. This was followed by the most wonderful hurling saga. The All-Ireland semi-final against the Munster champions Cashel King Cormacs of Tipperary was fixed for Cashel in February 1992. The game finished in a draw and the replay was fixed for Duggan Park, Ballinasloe two weeks later. In front of 14,000 people, the game was still tied at full time and incredibly was still a draw after a further period of extra time. The second replay was fixed for Croke Park on St. Patrick's Day. After an epic encounter, victory was achieved by a margin of just three points. Tony Furey's goal in the final minutes will live in the parish memory of the parish for years to come.

The final still had to be played and the venue was Semple Stadium, Thurles, on Easter Sunday, versus a star-studded Birr side. Played before a crowd of 18,000 the dream was realised. The team from the small rural area of Clontuskert, Kiltormer and

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Lawrencetown, was without dispute the best hurling team in Ireland, testament to the very dedicated people who kept the game alive down through the years. Bonfires blazed at every crossroads as the cup was proudly displayed through Lismanny, Lakefield, Gortnahorna, Crossconnell, Ballagh, Gorteenaveela and Loughturk. Clontuskert was represented on this historic panel by Sean Kelly, Tony Larkin, Fionán Curley, Brian McManus, Cathal Curley, Tomás Hanrahan, Damian Curley, Tony Furey and Niall McKeigue. The management team of Sean Cormican, Micheál Callaghy and John Goode was also from Clontuskert.

The club had now become a household name all over Ireland and beyond. The blue jerseys proudly displayed the club crest on which were depicted St. Augustine's Abbey, Clontuskert, Ballymore Castle, Lawrencetown and The New Gate, Kiltormer. The G.A.A. scene is still an integral part of the social life of the parish. The club remains very united and all grades are catered for.



ALL-IRELAND CLUB CHAMPIONS 1992

Back Row: Sean Cormican (*Selector*), Justin Campbell, Sean Kelly, Tony Larkin, Conor Hayes, Sean McKeigue, Peter Staunton, Martin Staunton, Kieran Lynch, Brendan Dervan, Brian McManus, Thomas Hanrahan, Patsy Hough, Ollie Kilkenny, Enda Staunton, John Goode (*Manager*), Tommy Lally (*Trainer*).

Front Row: Cathal Curley, Dermot Cox, Fionan Curley, Damian Curley, Tony Kilkenny, Aidan Staunton (*Captain*), Ger Kelly, Kevin Tierney, Pakie Dervan, Tony Furey, Niall McKeigue, Tommy Kilkenny, Tony Hough, Micheál Callaghy (*Selector*).



All-Ireland Club Champions' Management team, Micheál Callaghy, John Goode and Seán Cormican.

Among this year's crop of under-age players, it is interesting to note that the traditional names of Kelly, Callaghan, Curley, Larkin, Furey, Jennings, Goode and Cormican are all represented.

CAMOGIE

Camogie has been played in Clontuskert for more years than anyone can remember. Just as there were hurling teams fielded from smaller areas within the parish in the past, so too the camogie players, on occasion, fielded teams from more than one area. The parish camogie team was known as St. Augustine's and included some very fine players, such as Nonie Farragher, Carmel Hurney, Maureen Quinn, Lily Hanney, Maureen Dowd and Noreen Hession.

Nonie Farragher was one of the greatest players ever to represent Clontuskert. She played for Galway in a Senior All-Ireland against Dublin in 1953. Unfortunately, Galway did not succeed on that occasion. Nonie represented Galway for more than three years at Senior level but unfortunately her career was brought to an end as a result of a serious ankle fracture.

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When there were insufficient players from the rest of the parish, Tristaun fielded a team of its own in 1947. In order to bring up the numbers, they signed on players from outside the area. This team included players such as Pidzie Coen, Mary and Chrissie Quinn, Carmel and Bridie Hurney, Freddie and Sis Dolan.

Kathleen Quinn has perhaps been one of the greatest servants of the game of Camogie that Clontuskert has produced. Due to the lack of a Camogie club in Clontuskert, Kathleen joined the Ballinasloe club and for many years was one of the pivotal players on that team.

Kathleen played Camogie with Galway from 1968 to 1973, winning thirteen Connacht medals. In addition, she won an All-



TRISTAUN TEAM 1947

Back Row: Bridie Burns, Mary Quinn, Kitty Kilgannon, Annie May Bellew, Freddie Dolan, Sis Dolan.
Front Row: Nancy Gibbons, Pidzie Coen, Annie Keighery, Carmel Hurney, Bridie Hurney, Chris Manning.

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Ireland Junior medal in 1972. The *Connacht Tribune* reported that 'the hero of the hour was undoubtedly centre-halfback, Kathleen Quinn.' She also won Inter-Provincial medals with Connacht in 1973-74.

One of her outstanding contributions to Camogie was as a referee, a role she undertook in 1975. Kathleen refereed two Junior All-Ireland Finals in 1980 and 1982. In 1983, 1984 and 1989, she had the distinction of officiating at the All-Ireland Senior finals. Incidentally, the 1984 final was the first to be shown on television.



Kathleen Quinn,
All-Ireland
referee 1984

ATHLETICS

Clontuskert has produced quite a number of top class athletes down the years. Many of them were household names in the west of Ireland and a few of them attained national recognition. It is worth recalling the exploits of a small number of these athletes.

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Malachy Barry

Born in Tristaun, Malachy was the second youngest of a family of eight, born to Michael and Mary Barry. As a teenager he took a keen interest in hurling but quickly took up running and joined the great Aughrim Harriers under the stewardship of the late Reddy Harney.

Running came naturally to Malachy, as he often trotted the two miles to work in the late Bertie Cooke's farm. Together with many of his friends in Clontuskert, he trained diligently at night with the Aughrim Harriers and at the weekends competed in sports meetings all over the county and beyond. The annual sports in Aughrim usually started with a road race into and out of Ballinasloe. On several occasions, the Tristaun teenager was the

first to arrive back home to the Aughrim field, often miles ahead of his rivals. Malachy would cycle to sports meetings in Tuam, Loughrea and Galway, tog out by the ditch, run his races, collect his prizes and cycle home.

In the late 'forties, Malachy was forced to retire from athletics because of a serious foot injury and then decided to concentrate on hurling. He was a pivotal member of the Clontuskert senior hurling team, which at that time had players from



Malachy Barry,
Tristaun

Kiltormer and Lawrencetown in their ranks. Hession's field was their training ground, where in the summer evenings, over thirty players could be seen in action, all hoping to be rewarded by wearing the green and gold jersey of Clontuskert.

Malachy emigrated to London in the 'fifties, where he subsequently married Mary McNamara from Tullamore. Almost every Sunday he made the trip to New Eltham and later to Ruislip to follow our national games. On his return home to Kilburn on these evenings, he was quick to tune in to Radio Eireann for the latest G.A.A. results. Indeed he had a weekly standing order for the *Connacht Tribune* so that he could follow the progress of his local team Kiltormer, and was very proud of them when they achieved All-Ireland successes in the club championship.

Billy Byrnes

As well as being a great Clontuskert sportsman, Billy Byrnes was an athlete of such outstanding quality at national level that his name should feature prominently in any history of Irish sport.

Billy's interest in athletics began at an early age. His mother, an enterprising business woman, was the owner of a small shop in Gurteencahill which became a mecca for the young men of the district. Having bought their cigarettes or sweets, they hung around in groups, chatting or going across the road to take part in impromptu games of football. Occasionally, these young men, Goodes, Seales, Farraghers, Colohans, Hessions and others, pitted their athletic skills against each other in running and weight-throwing contests.

It was on evenings such as these that Billy's interest in weight-throwing was enkindled. As a young boy, he joined in the hammer-throwing events in which a home made hammer was used. His interest in this event increased as he developed into a muscular young man standing six feet three inches tall, weighing sixteen and a half stone. He participated in his first major contest, the All-Army Sports in 1949, when he won the 56lb. distance event.

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A few weeks later, he won the 56lb. over-the-bar competition in Dundalk. He was also an accomplished javelin and discus thrower. However, the hammer was the event which best suited his innate ability and he decided to enter for the All-Ireland Championship later that year. Disaster struck when he wrenched his knee while practising at home with his make-shift hammer. Despite the handicap of a damaged knee, he decided to travel to the Phoenix Park where he beat the holder by four feet, in the final. Amazingly, this was his first hammer competition. The accompanying photograph was taken on that occasion by another up-and-coming athlete, the late Brendan O'Reilly.

Among Billy's most notable successes were: Connacht Hammer Champion in 1954, 1955, 1956 and 1957; All-Ireland 16lb. Hammer Champion in 1949, 1950, 1953 and 1954; All-Ireland 56lb. throwing weight in 1949, 1950 and 1954. His achievements caused

quite a stir in athletic circles and he was spoken of as a prospective candidate for the Olympics and a possible successor to the great Dr. Pat O'Callaghan. Lady luck did not smile on Billy when he developed a serious back problem which compelled him to rest for a year. As soon as he resumed training however, the problem returned and he was forced to retire prematurely from weight-throwing, thus bringing to a halt a most promising career.

Billy Byrnes was at all times a thorough gentleman in his private



Billy Byrnes
in the Phoenix
Park 1949

and sporting life. A quiet, unassuming man, his sporting prowess has translated into a very successful career as a dairy farmer. The dairying awards with which he has been honoured stand proudly beside those he accumulated during his illustrious sporting career.

Tommy Hurney

Tommy was interested in athletics from an early age, competing in all the local school meetings.

In the 1940s, he joined the Aghrim Harriers club which at that time was enjoying a very successful few years. He ran at sports meetings almost every Sunday in venues such as Ardrahan, Caltra, Shanaglish, Ahascragh, Moore and Ballinasloe. The 440 yards race was his favourite and in 1948 he was Galway champion. In 1949 he became Connacht champion and finished second in the Irish National Championship in the same year.

During the winter months he kept himself fit by running with a number of Cross Country teams. In 1944, he was a member of a good Clontuskert team which came second in the Galway County Championship. Other members of that team included his brother Paddy, Laurence Larkin, Malachy Barry and Paddy Quinn. He later joined the Castlebar Athletic Club and was one of the key members of that team. Tommy was also a very good hurler, lining out with Clontuskert on numerous occasions.



Tommy Hurney,
Tristane.

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Pakie Callaghan

For a long time now, Pakie Callaghan has been pounding the roads of Clontuskert through winter and summer, year in, year out. When RTE 2 initiated the Dublin City Marathon some years



Pakie Callaghan

ago, Pakie started training even more seriously and participated in ten of these events. Sometimes he ran in the company of Sean Kelly and Paddy Goode and achieved a personal best time of three hours, nine minutes and four seconds. He also ran in the Galway City Marathon on two occasions.

Pakie also ran Cross-Country for an amazing fourteen years. For a time, he was a member of the Mullagh Athletic Club and later joined Ballinasloe.

On three occasions, he competed for the Galway County Veteran Team, running in places like Mullingar, Navan and Ballybofey. One of his team-mates at these meetings was the great Galway exponent of long distance running, Willie Morris.

Pakie has now retired from competitive running. He was a true sportsman at heart, running for the sheer joy of participating and not solely for the purpose of accumulating silverware.

COMMUNITY GAMES

The Community Games were initiated in Clontuskert in 1985. Mr. Lally, the new principal in Clontuskert N.S., had a great

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interest in the games and in conjunction with Tom Glynn from Kiltormer, a committee was formed. Initially it was registered under the Kiltormer banner and the group took part in the athletics competitions. Unfortunately success was difficult to achieve in this area as it was dominated by the established athletics clubs. Occasional forays were made into ladies' soccer and boy's hurling and football but without any notable success.

Clontuskert,
Community
Games
Champions
1998



Rounders was introduced by Mr. Lally and very soon the first breakthrough came about when the boys' Under 12 team won the county championship in 1985. Representing County Galway in the Connacht finals in Ballina they were crowned Connacht

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champions and so qualified for the national finals in Mosney. It was a marvellous experience but they failed to feature among the medal winners.

After a few years, interest in the games began to wane, so a committee from Clontuskert reorganised the games, this time under the Clontuskert banner. Very soon Clontuskert became the kingpins in rounders in County Galway and during the 'nineties' the county was regularly represented by Clontuskert in the boys' and girls' Under 13 and Under 15 Connacht finals.

Pupils from Clontuskert N.S. were beginning to have success in the community games project competition and having represented Galway on several occasions in the national finals, they finally won gold for Clontuskert when Eamon Óg Lally and Noel Shiel were successful with their project 'Trees on my Farm'.

The greatest triumph was yet to come. In 1998, the hurling team, managed by Eamon Lally and the late Sean Cormican, won the County and Provincial finals and after a decisive victory in the semi-final in Mosney, faced a very strong Kilkenny team in the final. It was a great game and Clontuskert came out on top in the end. A large crowd had travelled to support them and there were



Eamon Óg Lally
and Noel Shiel

great celebrations in the whole area when they returned home.

Unfortunately interest in the games began to diminish in the following years and sadly Clontuskert no longer takes part in the Community Games.

CRICKET

In the years after the Great Famine of 1847, cricket was arguably the most popular sporting activity in the parish. Records show that there were useful cricket teams in Lismanny, Gortnamona Tristaun and Urraghry. Keenly contested cricket matches took place under the shadow of the ruins of Ballagh Castle. As was the case in every country in which the game is played, the English brought cricket to Ireland. The game was introduced to the towns of Kilkenny and Ballinasloe in the early 1800s. At that time, County Kilkenny was as famous in sporting circles for cricket as it later became for hurling. The game became widespread in the 1830s and many clubs, still in existence today, were founded in the following thirty years.

The same situation pertained in the parish of Clontuskert until the early days of the twentieth century. On Sundays, and during the long summer evenings, the sound of cricket ball on cricket bat echoed throughout the townlands. It was a game that was played and enjoyed through the different levels of society, from the poorest tenant to the wealthiest farmer. Cricket retained its popularity until the onset of the Land War when relationships between landlord and tenant became increasingly strained. A further and perhaps more serious blow to the development of cricket, was the G.A.A. ban on the playing of 'foreign' games and the growing antipathy to anything associated with Britain in the wake of the 1916 Rising.

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Many cricket matches in Clontuskert were reported in the local press. One such report appeared in the *Western News* which dealt with a game between the Tristaun and Kilconnell Cricket Clubs in September 1888. In a game which was won by Tristaun, the bowling of M. Whymes and J. Walsh was described as superb. Other names mentioned on the Tristaun team were, M. Goode, M. Harney, J. Burke, T. Kelly, W.J. Hurney and T. Walshe. The *Western News* also reported a match between Moher and



Cricket
equipment,
Urraghry c. 1900

Woodlawn, also played in 1888. The game was played in Moher, but Woodlawn won easily. Moher's best players were Quirke, Small, Gallagher and Holloway.

A cricket match between Clontuskert and 'the Asylum' - a commonly used local name for the Mental Hospital - took place in late August 1888 in the Asylum grounds. Among the Clontuskert players mentioned in the *Western News* report were McLoughlin, Goode, Oliver, Roche, Campbell, Hoary, Broderick and Kenny.

EQUESTRIAN SPORT

Horse racing is a sport that is not often associated with the parish of Clontuskert. Yet, up to the year 1910, very popular race meetings were held on a regular basis in the parish. In the year 1751, the first recorded races under Turf Club rules were held in the townland of Gortnahorna. Meetings were held in 1751, 1761, and from 1776 to 1780. The last meeting held in Gortnahorna occurred in 1840, after which they became more commonly known as the 'Ballinure Races', even though they were run on the same course. Racing continued from 1877 to 1883, from 1885 to 1886 and from 1903 to 1910.

The Gortnahorna/Ballinure racecourse contained few permanent features in the manner of modern racecourses. When the Race Committee decided that a meeting should be held, the course was laid out and marked by a series of coloured flags. The jumps were not permanent structures such as those found in dedicated courses like Ballybrit. Instead, the natural field-divisions of banks and ditches were used, many of which have survived to the present day. The precise layout of the course is not clear but we do have a rough idea of its design. Depending on the length of a particular race, the starting area was close to the large ringfort, Lisahoreed. The horses then moved down a gentle slope towards the Ballinasloe/Lawrencetown road which they crossed close to where Poland's house now stands before commencing a gradual left turn before again crossing the road on the Ballinasloe side of Eamon Lally's house. They then faced a fairly stiff climb as they passed to the rear of Francis Turley's before galloping past the grandstand which was erected in a field across the narrow side road near Oliver Touhy's house. The term 'grandstand' might not be the most appropriate word to describe what in reality was little more

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Gortnahorna
Racecourse with
possible course
layout

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Ireland.
Permit No. 8596.

than a glorified hayshed. It was from the grandstand that the gentry were enabled to watch the proceedings in the comfort to which they were accustomed. John Ryder, who farmed more than one hundred and fifty acres in Gortnahorna, leased the stand to W.C. Patrick, V.S., Secretary of the Race Committee in 1905. Many of the more ordinary punters watched the races from the vantage point of their own 'grandstand' - Lisnahoreed ringfort - where it was reported that liberal supplies of porter were available, which no doubt added to the enjoyment of the occasion. Large crowds attended these meetings, with punters travelling by train to Ballinasloe station from as far afield as Dublin, Limerick and Sligo.

On numerous occasions down the years, less structured races, known as 'hack races' or meetings not under the auspices of the Turf Club, were held in Clontuskert. The first newspaper account of such a meeting is to be found in the *Western News* and

Ballinasloe Advertiser of February 28th, 1848. The newspaper gives an indication of the atmosphere prevailing at such meetings.

A Hack Race took place on Tuesday last at Kelly's Grove over the Latrim course, a distance of a mile and a half. The weather was remarkably fine and thousands thronged the course. Fun was the order of the day, and never have we seen such an assemblage without an accident or a blow.

The report, which is written very much from the perspective of the gentry, goes on to indicate what the paper saw as one of the principal values of such sporting events:

Those innocent sources of amusements for the lower classes, we are always rejoiced to notice, knowing that they endure much toil, and that recreation of this kind is calculated to make them more content with their lot.

The article concluded with the information that the event, organised by Mr. Charles Kelly of Kellysgrove House, 'concluded without trouble or indications of drunkenness.' Such gatherings often had a reputation for unruly behaviour.

The race meetings at Gortnahorna came to an end in 1910. The distance from the railway station was a factor militating against their survival. Perhaps the stringent safety requirements imposed by the Turf Club was a more important factor in the demise of these meetings. In 1907, the Turf Club had appointed an Inspector of Courses who demanded a much higher level of safety in the conduct of races. Many of the local race courses throught the country were forced to close when money needed for improvements was not available. When the Gortnahorna course

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closed, the grandstand was sold at a well-attended public auction and was later dismantled by James Cooke in 1916. Some of the timber and galvanised sheeting was purchased by Bertie Cooke for the erection of a storage shed at the rear of the Glebe House in Somerset.



Jimmy Coen
and his
prize-winning
horse, 'Sligo'
at the R.D.S.
August 1938

Clontuskert's connection with equine sport did not end with the closing of the racecourse in Gortnahorna. Bernard Naughton from Abbeypark was a well known bookmaker and racehorse owner, while John Bleahen, now living in the townland of Garyduff, has become a very successful trainer. In showjumping circles, Jimmy Coen from Lakefield trained a succession of fine horses and was widely respected both as a competitor and trainer,

having won a succession of prestigious competitions at venues ranging from the west of Ireland showgrounds to the R.D.S. arena in Dublin.

GOLF

Ballinasloe Golf Club was founded in 1894. For the first thirty years of its existence, the golf course was located in the grounds of the Clancarty estate at Garbally Park. Permission to play golf on the grounds of the estate was granted free of charge by the fifth Earl, the last Clancarty to reside in Garbally. Golf was played there until 1924 when the estate was purchased by the diocese of Clonfert with the intention of moving the diocesan college from The Pines to that location. The officers of the Club had now to begin the search for a new course.

Old Pavillion,
Ballinasloe
Golf Club 1926.
*Painting by
James Holloway.*



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In 1923, William Hession, a native of Annagh, Ballymacward, was President of Ballinasloe Golf Club. His land holdings were extensive, so much so that he was reputed to own land from the sea to the Shannon. He had acquired one hundred and fifty-nine acres fourteen years previously from James Barr, a landowner of Scottish descent who lived in Rossgloss House, now



Mattie Curley,
Men's Golf
Captain 2009

the residence of Paddy Fahy. In 1918, Mary G. Raftery, a relative of William Hession and also a native of Ballymacward, acquired one hundred and one acres from William. Five years later in 1923, she sold forty-eight acres to Ballinasloe Golf Club on which a new, nine-hole course was developed and on which a small pavilion was erected. Due to the pressure of increasing membership, the Club bought an additional forty-

one acres from Jimmy Horan in 1973 and a further twenty-six acres from Paddy Fahy in 1990. The final purchase took place in 2004 when a further twelve acres was obtained from Jimmy Horan. The Golf Club was now the owner of one hundred and twenty-seven acres in Clontuskert. Over the years, an excellent relationship has developed between the Club and the people of the parish. Between full members and pavilion members, sixty-eight parishioners are now members of the Golf Club.

In the past, four parishioners were Presidents of the Club: Fr. John Kelly in 1953; Charles J. Molloy in 1966; Noel Finneran in 1997 and Joe Moore in 2004. Four Clontuskert residents have served as Captains of the Club: Fr. John Kelly in 1959; Cyril Dunne in 1978; Joe Moore in 1987 and Joe Molloy in 1993. Three

parishioners have served as Lady Captain: Mary Molloy in 1992; Angela Lyons in 1996 and Mary Howley in 2005. Mattie Curley, a native of Sheepwalk, is Mens' Captain in 2009.

RUGBY

Clontuskert has often been referred to as 'the parish with two bars and no pub.' The two bars are located in two neighbouring sports clubs in the townland of Graigueawoneen, the Golf Club and the Rugby Club. However, although the clubs are situated in the parish, they are in reality Ballinasloe clubs. While the Golf Club has been in the parish since the 1920s, the Rugby Club is a more recent arrival.

It is generally believed that rugby was introduced to Ballinasloe by the 4th Earl of Clancarty in 1875. Since that date, the Club's games have been played at a number of locations down the years. In the 1960s, the home fixtures were played at the Mental Hospital grounds. In the 1969-70 season however, the club was informed that these grounds would no longer be available to the Club. Almost immediately, the search began for a new headquarters. Led by Fr. Christy Glynn, the Club officers inspected a number of possible locations. Finally, the present site was chosen because the field was reasonably level and could accommodate two pitches as well as a Clubhouse and car park. By the start of the 1970-71 season, the teams played their first competitions on the new grounds.

Even though rugby is a minority sport in the parish, many parishioners have played the game since the club was opened in Clontuskert, particularly at under-age level. Rugby is played by quite a few youngsters from the parish at the moment. The current trainer of the Senior team is John Kelly from Lismanny.

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Clontuskert's Sporting Roll of Honour

*The following Clontuskert players represented Galway
on a variety of teams over the years:*

Gaelic Games

Josie Curley	Junior Hurling All-Ireland 1939
Tony Scott	Senior Hurling
Mikey Farraghar	Senior Hurling
Brian Naughton	All-Ireland Minor Football 1952 and Junior Football 1958
Mickey Hoare	Intermediate Hurling
Andy Fenton	All grades. All-Ireland U-21 1972
Tony Furey	All grades
Frank Larkin	Hurling; all grades. Junior and Intermediate County Football medals
Maurice Larkin	Minor Hurling
John Goode	All grades. All-Ireland U-21 1978
Tony Carr	All-Ireland U-21 1978
Tomás Fenton	All-Ireland U-21 1978
Sean Kelly	All grades
Liam Larkin	Intermediate Football
Sean Cormican	All grades
Liam Whyte	Minor Football. Sigerson Cup. Winning Captain with Maynooth 1976.

Ollie Whyte	Minor Football
Declan Jennings	All-Ireland Minor Hurling 1983 and All-Ireland U-21 Hurling in 1986. All-Ireland Vocational Schools
Damian Curley	All grades. All-Ireland Intermediate 1999. Railway Cup 1991. He also represented Ireland in Shinty.
Brian McManus	Senior Hurling
Tony Larkin	All-Ireland U-21 1992
Fionán Curley	All-Ireland U-21 1992
Niall McKeigue	Minor Hurling
Cathal Curley	Intermediate Hurling
Ciarán Callaghy	Minor Hurling
Eamon Óg Lally	U-14 and U-16 Hurling
Patrick Cormican	All-Ireland U-21 2007

Sadly, three of the young men mentioned above have died, before their time, in recent years.



Sean Cormican



Liam Whyte



Eamon Óg Lally

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Camogie

Kathleen Quinn All-Ireland Junior 1972. She also refereed the All-Ireland Senior Camogie Finals of 1983, 1984 and 1989.

Nonie Farragher Captained the Galway Camogie team in 1952.

Notable Track and Field Athletes.

Billy Byrnes Connacht Hammer Champion 1954, 1955, 1956, and 1957. All-Ireland 16lb. Hammer Champion 1949, 1950, 1953 and 1954. The 56lb. Throwing Weight Champion in 1949, 1950 and 1954.

Malachy Barry Second in the All-Ireland Marathon 1948.

Jack Hession County Galway Junior Cross Country Champion 1945.

Tommy Hurney County Galway 440 Champion 1947-48; Connacht Champion 1949; second in Ireland 1949.