

The A, B, C of sporting achievement in Peterswell

By Bertie Keely

Athletics

In 1948 – 4 years after the opening of the school, the Olympics came to London – as near to Peterswell as they have ever come. The main track events were seen in England by half a million people on the 80,000 TV's that were there at that time. Nobody in Peterswell saw those Olympics on TV – there were no TV's in Peterswell at that time.

We heard on the Radio that Ronnie Delaney won the 1,500m in Melbourne in 1956 and some time later, when the travelling pictures came to O'Donnells field and we saw the race on Pache news.

The Olympics for school children at that time were the Denary Sports held in Gort each year. Our training and selection procedure was to run from wall to wall and back again in the school pitch during the lunch time of the sports. The first two ran the races – the rest competed in the long and high jump.

We competed against competitors from such far off places as Gort, Kinvara, Beagh, Kilbeacanty etc. When that feast of athletics was over, we went back to hurling at lunchtime.

By 1964 there were a few black and white TV's in Peterswell – the excitement generated by the first of Galway's football team, three in a row tempted people to splash out. In October of that year the Olympics were televised from Tokyo. Because of the time difference they were seen here at night. Space at any neighbour's house, who had a TV, was at a premium. Peter Small, an accountant from New Zealand won the 1500m in 3-38 (3-55 for a mile) from an all white field of athletes (think of the change today). Those of us gathered around the television on that night were not impressed – Nearly 4 minutes is a long time and a mile is not that far. On the following Sunday, we stepped out the mile in Connaire's field beside the school and made an attempt on the Olympic records – it wasn't broken. Such is the influence of TV and the innocence of youth.

Since those far off days the media in general and TV in particular, has greatly enhanced people's knowledge and interest in all sports.

During the early 70's local past pupils used the school shed as a training base. These past pupils won a county championship and were medallists at Connacht level (competing as Peterswell Athletic Club). One of them

went on to win an athletic scholarship to America and had many great successes there.

During the 80's and 90's the establishment of South Galway Athletic Club helped to put a structure on the talent from Peterswell. A full list of County, Connacht and indeed all Ireland medal winners who are past students of the school would be very long and beyond the scope of this article.

The primary school sports day, the parish sports in Brady's, O'Donnells and Lahiffe's fields in different years and the St. Thomas's sports have all helped to ignite young athletes' interest. The joy brought by the bag of Taytos for winning the junior infants 50m sprint can not be measured.

Great credit must go to the primary school teachers, past and present who have organised that first Olympics for any young boy or girl. Keep up the good work.

BADMINTON

By Mary

Kelleher-Hogan

Peterswell Badminton Club was founded in 1968 by Mr. Tom McGarry. First chairperson was Mr Thomas E. Lahiffe and secretary was Mr. Tom McGarry.

With the help of some members of Craughwell's Badminton Club, the hall was lined and play began. For the first season we did not play competitively, only arranged some challenge matches and Christmas competition. The following year we were affiliated to the county board and entered a team in Division 3. For the following five to six years we travelled the length and breadth of the county playing in tournaments and open competitions. The first success came in Loughrea 1974, when Breda McGarry and Mary Kelleher won Division 3 ladies doubles and Tom McGarry and John Kelleher were beaten in the division 3 final. In 1975 we had our biggest success. We won the county league division 3 and then went on to win the Connacht title.

The team was: Men – Tom McGarry, John Kelleher, Brendan Mulcair, M. Carey.

Ladies: Breda McGarry, Mary Kelleher, A Burke, M. Dolan.

Our annual event was to run the senior citizens party every Christmas. It usually took place in the hall the second Sunday in December. The ladies of the club looked after the food and the men arranged the hall and transport. The meal was hot soup for starters, turkey and ham, vegetables

and potatoes and trifle for dessert. Fr. Larkin always came with a bottle of sherry for the ladies and a bottle of whiskey and bottles of Guinness for the men. Probably the most memorable time was in 1973 when Joe Cooley played, just a few days before he died. May he rest in peace.

During the early seventies we formed a junior club and they had great success. Catherine, Agnes and Lar Connaire won county titles.

My Memories

To Paddy Burke, our number one supporter who sourced “The Watering Holes” while we sweated it out. Many more years of health and happiness.

To those members who are gone before us, especially Tom Healy whose witty words inspired us. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dilis.

I have so many memories of our badminton days, some wise, witty, funny and unrepeatable, but all of them are unforgettable.

Basketball

By Bríd

O'Donnell

St. Thomas' National School, Peterswell has not traditionally been a forerunner in basketball. This year, however Peterswell is now on the map as the Winners of the South Galway Play-offs.

The tournament was organised in Gort by Pat Bourke (Coach) and took place in February 2004 at Gort Community Centre. The drills and practices since September 2003 finally paid off when St Thomas' took home the gold medals. Firstly the team was challenged by Gort Convent of Mercy – we showed no mercy! Next it was time to meet “Arch Rivals” Tiernievin, and once again we rose to the challenge, defeating them in style. As tensions mounted, it became clearer that the next step on the ladder to success was to play our local neighbours, Ballyturn, whose team included relations and rivals. It became evident, even by half time that it was a very close competition, as at this point the teams were neck in neck.

Following a pep talk at the interval by Peterswell mentors, Peterswell came back hungry for gold! We surged ahead and in the end were the clear winners. Claire Quinn, of Dromore, Peterswell also received the honour of *Player of the Tournament*.

Team members: Ruth Keely, Diana Mahon, Claire Quinn, Úna O'Donnell, Niamh Cooney, Fiona Kelleher, Jessica Dooley and Finola Keely

Boxing

Christopher Rock

By

Peterswell had a flourishing boxing club in the 1940's, managed by Martin Dolan (teacher) and coach Timmy Cleary (Gort Army F.C.A.). Throughout the 1940's, they won many county titles. Training was tough but the men were fit from the hard manual labour they endured everyday. Their arena was the old school in the village, no Caesar's Palace, I might hear you say, but many the exhibitions of strength, stamina and skill were produced from these gladiators of old. Boxing was to 'die its death' in the parish for nearly 30 years until young James Fahy of Knockoura was to show the rest of Ireland the fighting talents of the men from Peterswell during the period from 1980 to 1990.

Boxing out of the Gort club, James' talent was recognised by Jimmy Regan and within a short space of time was in the youths and under 19's All Irelands at the National Stadium in Dublin. James was the first man to represent a South Galway town in the All Irelands. He boxed Stephen Collins, (who went on to be World Middleweight Champion), in 1983 and went onto win 4 Connaught titles and 4 County titles a Light Heavyweight and 2 runners-up at National level. He joined the Gardaí in 1984 and became Irish Garda champion and represented them in 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989. London was the venue for the championships and he won 3 silver and 2 bronze in the process. In March of 1987, he was on the Irish Garda Team when he fought the NYPD's finest in the Downtown Athletic Club. James' success came from hard work and years of training. James went on to box clever and leave the Garda in 1994 and became the only Barrister-at-Law in the history of the parish –and who said boxing was bad for your health!

James hopes to revive the Boxing club in the Parish this year and we all wish him every success.

In the last few years I myself have taken up this gracious sport. In 1999, I approached the world famous trainer Chick Gillen. Chick immediately put me into training in his Olympic Boxing Club where I trained vigorously for 2 months before having my first fight in Ennis against Jimmy Delaney, a boy who was boxing for seven years and had a two-year advantage. He 'bet' me up and down the ring for two and a half rounds. This taught me a valuable lesson, to always look after myself and to be fit before entering the ring. After my defeat I trained harder and I won Heavyweight County Connaught Irish Championships in 2002. Chick and my parents were my inspiration. I have sparred with the Olympian Francis Barret who trains at my club. My boxing at the moment is at a standstill as a cruciate ligament injury forced me to stop in 2003.

Two other parishioners must not be forgotten for their pugilistic prowess, Mal Quinn who having boxed in England boxed out of Gort club on a few occasions and Brendan Mulcair had a bout or two, which were no idle affairs!

So there you have it. Peterswell has got its fair share of fighters from the early 1900's to the new millennium.

1940/49 Peterswell Boxing Club
Old School

Members and Mentors

Manager: Martin Dolan
Coach: Timmy Cleary

Boxers: Jack Cooley

Joe Cooley

Jack Leary

Ned Caulfield

Sean Burke

John Murphy

Michael Kelleher

Eddie Slattery

Paddy Collins

Malachy Carew

Paddy Cunniffe

Paddy Shaughnessy

FOOTBALL

By Peter Caulfield

For the first time in its history, Peterswell N.S has entered a team in this years Schools Football competition (2004) boys & girls, 5-a-side. Due to the interest shown by the pupils, having played football at club level in the U-12 competition, it was decided to begin a school team.

The school was invited to take part in the Gort Garda Tournament in October 2003. Our first match was against Doorus N.S. We were beaten in the semi-final by Tiernievin. We had two very good performances and were very unlucky to lose out to Tierneevin by two points. Due to a club hurling match on the same day and a number of the panel being sick, we had to field a much understrength team. However, we all enjoyed the experience of taking part in the tournament. The nine pupils received medals.

We are looking forward to taking part in the Schools Championship this year.

Gun Club

By Joe Cooney

In 1967, a number of people from Peterswell and Kilchreest district came together for the purpose of forming a gun club. The need for this arose because of outside influences using the area for shooting game stocks indiscriminately. It was felt local people should have better control of their own, resulting in a more responsible code of behaviour towards farmers and their land.

After advice from Mr. B. Cronin, Loughrea, maps, list of townlands, boundaries etc. were submitted to the governing body concerned and thus permission was given to form a gun club.

Meetings were arranged and a Committee was formed. Early members included Fr. Martin O'Connor, Tony Kilcommmins, Jack Cooley (RIP), Josie Cooney (RIP), Toddie Lahiffe (RIP), Johnny Keane (RIP), Fr. Liam Power, Christy Deely, Mick Power, Tom Egan (RIP), Martin Flaherty, Paddy Stewart, Jackie Howley (RIP), Tom Callanan (RIP), Michael Conroy, Mattie Tannian (RIP), Paddy Kilcooley, Jack Connors (RIP) and Eamonn Skehill (RIP).

The work of the gun club has continued over the years with the permission and co-operation of the landowners. Improvement of habitat and game conservation has been an important function of the club.

The club has welcomed new members over the years and continues to encourage an interest and respect for the environment.

Fishing has continued to be a leisurely activity for young and old. There was always an adequate supply of wild brown trout in the local rivers.

Hurling

– extract from South Galway Board book
PETERSWELL'S HURLING HISTORY

Hurling history in Peterswell goes back before the foundation of the G.A.A., but the parish's most successful period in hurling came during the first twenty years after the foundation of the Association.

During this time they were regarded as the top team in club hurling in the county with no less than seven Senior Championships and two Junior Championships to their credit.

The Senior success in 1889, 1898, 1899, 1900, 1904, 1905, and 1907 and the Junior triumphs were in 1908 and 1910. Many members of those teams wore the Galway jersey with distinction. The most notable were Jim Sexton and Thomas Keely at the Tom Larkin, Peter Fitzgerald and Pat Burke.

Like most other aspects of Irish life, the “troubles” of the 1916-22 period severely interrupted the hurling life of the parish.

From 1922 onwards, and especially after Galway’s historic win in 1924 of the previous year’s All-Ireland, hurling flourished again. From this time until the last senior team of 1935 the men from Peterswell could hold their own with any team in the county.

The most notable successes to come their way in the 1920’s and 1930’s were the South Intermediate Championship of 1927, the Junior Championship of 1938 and 1939 and several 7-a-side Tournaments.

During that period, Fred Keely and Martin “Kruger” Broderick were the Peterswell representatives in the county team.

Due to emigration after the war years the number of potential hurlers in the parish dwindled and this is evident in the lack of success of parish teams. Some members of the club played junior and minor for Galway during this time, notably Josie Cooney, Fr. Matt O’Connor, the Fahy brothers, Tom Callinan and Fr. Liam Power.

The next hurling landmark in the parish is the South Junior success of 1954 but Abbeyknockmoy proved an obstacle to further glory in that year by beating Peterswell in a replay.

The next fourteen years were, indeed, lean ones for Peterswell with no team success coming its way and this prompted, in 1968, an amalgamation with Kilchreest to form St. Thomas’ Club.

Rugby by Pat Lahiff

On the 9th January 1983 a Connacht Youth/U18’s took the field to play a very strong Munster team. The well-known Mardyke in Cork was the venue. The Munster team consisted of Alan Quinlan who played wing forward for Ireland in the World Cup and also included three other players who were later to wear the famous red jersey for Munster at senior level.

Connacht were not short of talent either. They had to hardy boys from Peterswell, Thomas Brady at prop and Robert Lahiffe at wing forward. The end result was Connacht 3 – Munster 3. Connacht gave as good as they got in a hard fought match. Two weeks later on a windy day in Dublin, Connacht beat a strong Leinster team, 12 –10. A victory against Ulster in the sports ground in Galway on the 6th of February would have given Connacht a share of the Championship with Munster. But it was not to be.

The two Peterswell boys played in all three matches. They both went on to play a big part in helping Gort to win the Connacht U18 cut for the first time. They beat hot favourites Corinthians in the final. Robert, who also got a trial for the Irish Youths that year, captained the Gort team.

Robert went on to win an All-Ireland Colleges medal with Athlone IT and later AIL medal with Buccaneer. A serious knee injury put an end to Robert's career at an early age. Thomas retired from the game due to a neck injury in his early twenties.

The story does not end there. Last year another past pupil played in all three matches for Connacht U18's. Padraic O'Donnell, Kibeacanty reared but attended Peterswell National School, wore the number 5 shirt. Ulster just pipped Connacht for the Championship that year, Connacht beat Leinster and Munster but were beaten by Ulster.

Well Done All.

Peterswell Tug of War Club By Eamonn Burke

In the autumn of 1998 a group of local lads, set the idea of a tug-of-war club in motion. The main driving force behind this, was Michael McDonagh who had experience in the sport. He was then the owner of the Village pub. Before long people from neighbouring parishes were attracted into the club and by 1999 the foundation for a men's and women's team were laid. The club competed at novice level in its first full year of existence and it progressed through Division III to Division II status by 2002.

Following is a list of achievements of men's teams;

Year	Weight Division	National Title Winners
2000	680 kg	Peterswell Div. III
2001	640 kg	Peterswell Div. III

600 kg		Peterswell Div. III
720 kg		Peterswell Div. III
680 kg		Peterswell Div. III
2002	680 kg	Peterswell Div. II

Record of Women's team (1999 – 2000)

Division I 2 Connacht Titles
 1st and 2nd in National Finals
 Division II 2 Connacht Titles
 1 National title

C/wt 3 Connacht Titles and silver in national final. In the period covered above several Connacht the men's team also won titles.

While the pullers were competing at various venues around the country, the club itself took on the responsibility of running two Connacht Championships and one National event, the highlight being the latter. It was a glorious day; Sunday June 20th 1999. 32 teams (a record), from all over the country came to Peterswell that day to compete in the different divisions. As in all such events, the main focus of the day was the final of Division 1. - Leitrim (Glenade) against the Wexford team (Boley) with the Connacht team winning the title against the favourites.

Finally, the Peterswell tug-of-war club would like to thank the people of the parish For their support over the past few years and for the huge voluntary effort put in, for the running of the national championships. As a result the success of the day far outshone any event we have been at around the country. Equally we appreciate the great support received from the neighbouring parishes.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Submitted Maurice Brown

He stands on the field his heart beating fast. The whistle has blown; the die has been cast. Mum and Dad cannot help him; he stands all alone. A goal at this moment would send the team home. The ball nears his

hurley; he hits and he misses. There's a groan from the crowd, some boos and some hisses. A thoughtless voice cries "Take off the Bum". Tears fill his eyes; the game is no longer fun. If ever you're tempted to shout or to groan remember, he's a boy who stands all alone. So open your heart and give him a break, for it's moments like this a man you can make. Keep this in mind when you hear someone forget, he's just a little boy, and not a man yet.

What is important?

Anthony Cunningham - interview by Michael Coleman and notes by Tom McGarry

MC: *Welcome back to Peterswell, Anthony and thank you for coming. Have you many memories playing hurling for Peterswell School?*

Indeed, many. One in particular when I played in goals and I appeared so tiny with J.J. O'Leary who appeared a giant playing at full back.

Do you remember the teams you played against?

Labane, Kilbecanty, Ballyturn, Lough Cutra, and I remember in particular losing to Ballymana.

Where did the teams train?

Mostly in the school pitch with stones for goal posts but, we trained sometimes in Connaire's field beside the school

A Long way from Croke Park! Any other memories?

Choosing a hurley from a line of new hurleys placed in a line under the blackboard. Tom wrote the teams on the blackboard before each match and discussed tactics. I'll never forget those blue jerseys we wore.

Any early influences?

Listening to Micheal O'hEithir and the exploits of John Connolly and Bernie Forde and being quizzed after matches by Josie Cooney.

You had a great minor career with the county?

I first played in 1981 when I was 15 years of age. Kilkenny beat us in the final. In 1982 we beat Kilkenny but Tipperary beat us in the final. In 1983 we beat Tipperary in a replay and Niall Quinn's Dublin team in the final. I have a special memory of bringing the All Ireland Minor Cup to Peterswell and the bon fire and the big crowd that greeted us at the cross.

Did you have other wins with the County?

I won under 21 All Ireland in 1986 and that was followed by All-Ireland Senior wins in 1987 and 1988. By now I was forgiven for all the broken windows at home while practising.

Did you ever spend some time abroad?

I was 2 years in Paris and practised with a Carey from Tipperary in parks there. The locals regarded us with suspicion and looked at the hurleys as weapons.

Did you enjoy other sports in Peterswell School?

Yes, especially athletics and badminton.

Well, Anthony thank you for taking time to share those memories.

You're welcome and best wishes for the 60th Celebration.