

## The Kells Pipers Band

The Kells Pipers Band which will always be remembered for having played in Croke Park on All-Ireland days in the early 1930s first made their appearance on the Gaelic fields in 1915. The formation of the band was a direct result of the formation of a corps of the Irish Volunteers in Kells in June 1914. Kells' Volunteers needed a band of their own, and at a meeting held in Kells attended by John Power (Kells' creamery manager), Ned O'Keeffe, Kilree, Dick Gorey of Kells, Harry Meighan, the great marathon runner and Pat Fleming of Kilree, it was decided to form a pipers' band.

Money was raised through subscriptions and concerts, including "a grand concert and variety entertainment" held in Kells in April 1915 "in aid of the newly formed Pipers' Band". A "Band Hall" was given by John Robinson and practice began. The committee consisted of Ned O'Keeffe as chairman, Joe Walsh, Haggard, as vice-chairman, Harry Meighan as secretary, and John Power as treasurer. Two men from Lady Desert's band in Kilkenny were hired to teach them how to play the instruments, Jimmy Phelan, the first bandmaster, who came from Patrick Street in Kilkenny, and "Shovel" Morrissey a drummer. Lady Desart gave them some pipes, drums, kilts, brooches and kilt pins.

Since it was a Volunteer band most of its early appearances were related to the activity of the Kells Volunteers. It led route marches to the neighbouring villages of Stoneyford, Newtown and Seven Houses. It also joined bands from Kilmoganny, Croan and Callan at a great demonstration held in Seven Houses to protest against the actions of Major Handford and his agent against seven of his Burnchurch tenants. They joined the Callan Volunteers in Newtown where they were addressed by Fr Patrick Delahunty, the curate in Callan and the chairman of the county committee of the Volunteers. The strongly nationalist minded cleric made special mention of the Pipers and the proficiency they had attained. That evening they marched from Kells to Seven Houses headed by a torchlight procession in which over a hundred Volunteers took part. There they got a rousing reception from their friends of the 'Houses' whom they entertained to their great delight. On St. Patrick's Day 1916 they led the Kells Volunteers as they joined the Callan Volunteers in a parade in Callan. In April they led them on a route march to Knocktopher.

The band's first appearance on the GAA fields was probably at a tournament held on 8 August 1915 at Knocktopher to raise funds for a memorial to be erected at Carrickshock. The Kilmoganny and Hugginstown fife and drum bands were also present. Teams from Kells and Kilmoganny took part in the tournament. Despite all the Volunteer activity in late 1915, there was time for some games, and the band played at the championship football game played in Kilmoganny between Kells and Hugginstown in October and the following August led the teams on to the field in St. James's Park for the county junior football final won by Kells.

With the advent as bandmaster of Archie McKay, Major McCalmont's Scottish chauffeur and an expert piper, the band's extraordinary success story began. The band competed successfully in all the major Feiseanna, winning first prize in Kilkenny and the All-Ireland championship in Waterford in 1917 and carrying off the Oireachtas in Cork in 1918 from thirty other bands. That year they played at an anti-conscription meeting in Thomastown, at the St Patrick's Day festivities in Kilkenny city, and at Graiguenamanagh Aeridheacht. They featured in the great demonstration held in Kilkenny to protest against Sinn Fein deportations and internments. They played a prominent part in the

National Novena for peace held in Dunnamaggin in May 1918, and in December played at the Sinn Fein rally in Stoneyford in support of the Sinn Fein candidate in the 1918 general election.

The band's popularity was growing all the time and in 1919 they were invited to London by the Gaelic League to play at the St. Patrick's Day music festival held in the Queen's Hall, then one of the biggest in London. The concert was a huge success, with the audience repeatedly calling for encores and voicing their appreciation with much shouting and cheering. The next day the pipers toured London sporting their Sinn Fein colours.

The band went through a difficult period in the twenties, but was reorganized in 1931. Later that year they were invited to lead the Kilkenny team onto the field for the second replay of the 1931 All-Ireland between Kilkenny and Cork. The following year they led Kilkenny and Clare teams in the pre-match parade, and were present again in 1933 for the final between Limerick and Kilkenny, although a Limerick band led the players around the field.

Political developments in the 30s again caused problems for the band with four of its members joining the James' Stephens band and the rest moving lock stock and barrell to a new hall which they themselves built opposite the church in Kells. The practised marching around the roads - the band hall was too small - and travelled throughout the country.

In the 40s the band played at the Easter Sunday commemoration held in Callan. When the memorial to Pat Walsh was erected in 1950 or so it was invited to join the commemoration and for many years afterwards the Kells Pipers, dressed in their kilts and green cloaks, and playing rousing, blood-stirring melodies, led the Easter Sunday parade between the village and the graveyard.

The late sixties saw an influx of new blood, including some from the Kells School Band directed by Mrs Colette Dwyer. The pipers played at the festivals of Bennetsbridge, Callan and Dunnamaggin. But hopes that the band would survive were disappointed, and they are now no more. Sic transit gloria...

In the glorious history of Kells Pipers Band there were great pipers and drummers - Tom Quigley of Goodwinsgarden, Paddy Lanigan of Rathduff, Bill Braithwaite of Kells, John Fleming of Kilree, Tom, John and Frank Lalor of Kilree, Mick O'Brien of Danganbeg, Dinny Ryan of Ballaghtobin, Bill Hanrahan of Kells, Denis Lahart of Goodwinsgarden, Bill and Ned Lanigan of Rathduff, Jimmie Delahunty and Jack Meighan, Jack Prendergast of Kells Anthony Byrne of Kilree, Martin Quigley of Goodwinsgarden, Jack and Tommy Delahunty, Dick Phelan of Kells, and last but, not least Jack Quigley of Goodwinsgarden. (F.ÓF.)