

Kells Handball Club

The story of handball in the parish is really the story of handball in Kells. Handball was probably played in the "Castles" from the 1840s in the chancel of the priory church, as indeed it was played in many other ruined churches in the country. But little is known of handball in the 19th century. The first references to a Handball Club in Kells is to be found in 1925 (KJ, 21/2/25) and again in 1928 when Kells played Johnstown), 9 June 1928? In 1931 Kells were drawn against City No.2 in the junior soft-ball championship.

On 31 August 1940 Kells Handball Club won the final of the county Kilkenny junior softball championship when they defeated Mothel at Kells court on Sunday. It was a very exciting contest and the handball reached a high standard. Kells were the better team and showed a decided superiority. The reporter added that Kells club are to be congratulated on their well-deserved victory, as the club has only recently been revived after a lapse of some years. A special word of praise is due to Mr. James Phelan, the painstaking and energetic hon. Secretary, who played a big part in helping to revive the club. The Kells team was: J. Hurley and Tony Marnell, P. Fleming and P. Comerford, J. Phelan and E. Barry.

1942, April 6: Handball Victory for Kells. Paddy Fleming and Noel Davis, Kells won the final of the junior handball championship at Kilfane on Sunday by beating a Thomastown pair. Considering that Kells is only a three-wall court and that their players cannot have much experience of four-wall courts their victory is all the more creditable. Fleming won the junior singles last year and partnered P. Comerford in the final of the doubles. Kells handball club intend making theirs a four-wall court in the near future.

The game of Handball has been played in Kells since the mid nineteenth century. Handball courts then were so different from present day courts. They were uncovered and most of them were converted from ruins of churches or high walled buildings. Kells players played handball in the old church ruins in Kells Priory up until the late '60's. Much of the records are rather scarce, however it is fairly well known that Paddy Comerford and Percy Flemming were top class players in their time and won Junior Doubles in 1941. Most of Kells championship victories back then were achieved in team of six competitions.

In 1982 a very enthusiastic group of people formed a committee that went under the name Kells Action Group. They were generally go-ahead types of people who saw the need for some form of recreation facilities for the people of Kells and its surrounds. A Sports Centre that would incorporate a handball alley and squash court was their goal. As there were no grants available at that time for such ventures, all monies had to be raised.

A Fundraising Programme over the next two years that would comprise such gimmicks as "Wellie Races", Barbecues, Dances, Cabarets, Draws etc. were enough to make a start on the building. A site was donated by local publican, Mrs. Sheila Shirley, adjacent to her pub. Most of the work was done voluntarily and with some help from a Government backed work programme the building was completed.

For the first couple of year's it was not up to the standard required for championship games. In 1985 when all specifications were met Kelis Handball Club was formed under the Chairmanship of Seamus Martin. Member-s of the club first competed in the County Championship in team events. The following year all types of competitions were entered. In 1987 Kelis Handball Club had its first victory in the County Championship when Seamus Martin won the Special Novice Singles title. Every year since there has been numerous County Championship medals brought back to the club.

In 1991 a juvenile training programme was started and that very same year brought success for Niall McCormack in UI 2 Singles and Ivan Sheridan and Rory Dunne in UI 2 Doubles. Success at Provincial level came in 1994 when Anthony McCormack won the UI 7 Singles Leinster title. Kells Handball Club won their very first All-Ireland title in 1996 when Brian Manogue partnered Donal Kelly Mothel to win the U14 Doubles. In 1998 the same player combined with Andrew Hosey Clogh to win the U16 Doubles. His father Frank Manogue Snr. became the first man to win an All-Ireland medal for Kelis when he partnered Bernie Mahon Goresbridge to win the Golden Master's Doubles title.

The club has had numerous successes at All-Ireland, Provincial and County level in both adult and juvenile grades. The girls are not forgotten about at Kelis Handball Club either and in 1998 Rachel Dalton brought success to the club when winning the UI 5 Singles County Championship.

Six years ago Kells Handball Club began an inter club tournament 'team of six, aptly named The Shirley Cup and it has become a much sought after trophy and Kells have won it 3 times with Windgap, Goresbridge and St. Johns Kilkenny 1 each.

In all between juvenile and adult members they have clocked up a tally of 142 County Championship medals, 32 Leinster medals, 9 All-Ireland medals, 5 Leinster Colleges, 3 All- Ireland Colleges, 6 Vocational schools medals, 4 Pdmay schools medals, 2 Gael Linn.

Last year The Irish National Handball Council celebrated its 75th Anniversary and each club honored a player from the past. Chris Shidey who is the oldest surviving member received the award. Seamus Martin received the club official award, Seamus was Club Chairman for 13 years and was Vice Chairman for Kilkenny Handball Board for 2 years.

The present committee is President Seamus Martin, Chairman Jim Dalton, Vice Chairman Frank Manogue Snr., Secretary Jim Murphy, Assistant Secretary Joe Sheridan, P.R.O Willie Barron, Juvenile Officer Brigid Burke, Committee Mick Kiely, Mick Dalton, Diarmuid Burke, Ger Martin, Ray Cody, Malachy Butler.

J.D. & S.M.