

Waterford yet to join All-Ireland Club 'club'

■ Thomas Keane

If you were to ask hurling buffs who won the very first Senior All-Ireland Hurling final, a sizeable amount will tell you that it was side from Thurles representing Tipperary that beat Meelick from Galway. The same will apply to other intercounty grades.

You will get people who will tell you that Cork beat Dublin in the first Minor All-Ireland Hurling final in 1928, that Tipperary in 1964 beat Wexford to win the first Under-21 All-Ireland Hurling final, that in 1912 Cork won the first Junior crown beating Westmeath and that in 1961 Wexford beat Tipperary to win the first Intermediate decider.

But if you asked people who won the first All-Ireland Club hurling final in 1971 how many could give you the correct answer? The answer for those that may not know is Roscrea, Tipperary, who beat St Rynaghs from Offaly in Birr on December 19 that year.

Since then the competition has gone from strength to strength. In the early years, the venue for the final rotated, as did the dates. However since 1985 all that has changed and the final has been played by-and-large at GAA Headquarters in Dublin 3 on a set date - St Patrick's Day.

Whilst the finals have been played at Croke Park over the past 24 years, in those finals that required a replay the second game has not been necessarily been played at the Jones Road venue.

The second club final was played on May 14, 1972 at Walsh Park in Waterford between Cork's Blackrock and Rathnure from Wexford, with victory going to the Munster men. The next winners were another Cork side, Glen Rovers, who beat St Rynaghs at Croke Park.

The final of 1974 was once again played at Croke Park and ended in a draw. Blackrock from Cork and Rathnure from Wexford travelled to Dungarvan's Fraher Field for the replay which resulted in a win for the Cork champions. Croke Park was the venue once more in 1975 when St Finbarrs from Cork beat Fenians of Kilkenny.

The 1976 final was another Cork-Kilkenny affair, this time Blackrock taking on James Stephens at Thurles where victory went to the Kilkenny club.

Thurles was again the venue in 1977 when Glen Rovers from Cork beat Camross of Laois, who in the Leinster final had defeated the holders by 3-9 to 1-14.

A Cork side travelled to Thurles for a second year in-a-row in 1978 when St Finbarrs took on Rathnure in the All-Ireland decider. The Wexford outfit were contesting their third final and again had to give second best.

In 1979 the final was again played at Semple Stadium, where not for the first time Cork and Kilkenny opponents met. In a game that saw both sides score five goals, Blackrock emerged victors on a 5-7 to 5-5 scoreline against Ballyhale Shamrocks. The 1980 final played at Navan was a little unusual in the fact that neither a Munster nor Leinster team was involved. Castlegar from Galway, who beat Blackrock in the semi-finals, saw off Ballycastle McQuillans from Antrim who beat Crumlin from Dublin in their semi.

The 1981 final was back to normal at a much more familiar venue. Ballyhale Shamrocks and St Finbarrs travelled to Thurles where victory went to the Kilkenny team. Thurles was also the venue for an all-southeast final in 1982. Mount Sion and James Stephens met at the famous hurling venue where



The Mount Sion panel that reached the 1982 All-Ireland Club Hurling Final after winning the Munster Championship for the first time - they lost to Kilkenny's James Stephens in Thurles, having beaten Cushendall in the semi's. Back from left: Gary Cunningham, Eamon Kehoe (Capt), Denis Connolly, Sean Walsh, Richie Murphy, Pat Kelly, Anthony Cooney, Jim Cuddihy, Terry Butler, Karl Heffernan, Eamon Ryan, Pat Ryan, Liam Slevin; front: Jim Greene, Denis Shefflin, Martin Geary, Paul Kiely, Pat McGrath, Brendan Knox, George O'Grady, Eddie Kelly, Willie Heylin, Tommy Cusack, Stephen Greene, Pat O'Grady (with Dick Roche jnr at front).

victory went to the Kilkenny side on a 3-13 to 3-8 scoreline. To date, this is the only occasion where a Waterford team has run onto the field to contest an All-Ireland Club final.

The 1983 final returned to Croke Park. Loughgiel Shamrocks from Antrim and St Rynaghs ended all-square and both teams travelled to Casement Park in Belfast for the replay, where the Antrim men emerged victorious on a 2-12 to 1-12 scoreline.

Centenary draw

The final in Centenary year also ended in a draw. Played at Birr, Ballyhale Shamrocks and Gort from Galway finished 1-10 a piece and in the replay, played at Thurles, the Kilkenny side ran out winners by 1-10 to 0-7.

As pointed out previously, from 1985 the GAA has played all club finals at Croke Park on St Patrick's Day. Traditionally this was the date for the Railway Cups, but the GAA took the decision to prioritise the club competitions and to schedule them for March 17th - a move that many felt signalled the slow death of the inter-provincial tournaments.

St Martins, Kilkenny and Castlegar from Galway contested the inaugural St Patrick's Day decider which ended in a draw, and in the replay at Thurles the Leinster champions won by three points.

St Patrick's Day in 1986 fell on a Monday and the GAA took the decision to play the club finals the day before. Kilruane McDonaghs from Tipperary beat Wexford's Buffers Alley in Croker, having two points to spare after the hour's hurling.

The final of 1987 was another Tipperary versus Wexford match-up, this time Borrisoleigh and Rathnure providing the opposition. The Premier County representatives emerged winners with two goals to spare.

In 1988 Middleton from Cork and Athenry battled it out, with victory going to the East Cork side with some ease.

Model County club Buffers Alley won the final 20 years ago, beating O'Donovan Rossa from Antrim by a couple of goals. The final of 1990 was a little closer, as Ballyhale Shamrocks saw off Ballybrown from Limerick by a goal.

The 1991 final was another Kilkenny-Limerick one, this time Glenmore pitted against Patrickswell, the former triumphing on a scoreline of 1-13 to 0-2.

The following year's final was played in Thurles between Kiltormer from Galway and Birr of Offaly; the West of Ireland men winning by four points.

The 1993 decider returned to Croke Park where Sarsfields from Galway took on Kilmallock from Limerick. For the second year running the trophy

crossed the River Shannon.

Sarsfields retained their title in 1994 when they beat Toomevara from Tipperary by two points.

The final of 1995 saw Birr from Offaly and Dunloy from Antrim draw nine points apiece at Croke Park. The two sides returned to the same venue on April 2nd for the replay, where the Offaly champions ran out winners by 3-13 to 2-3.

In 1996 those attending the finals were served up a high-scoring game as Sixmilebridge scored 5-10 against Antrim's Dunloy.

Clare were represented in the 1997 final by Wolfe Tones, but they were to return to the Banner empty-handed, going down by 0-14 to 1-8 against Athenry from Galway.

Birr and Sarsfields from Galway contested the 1998 final at Croke Park, where led by the Whelahan brothers amongst others, the Midlanders collected a second title in three years.

St Josephs Doora-Barefield got their name on the trophy 10 years ago when they ran out winners over Wexford's Rathnure. Twelve months on, going into the game we knew that the trophy would be crossing the Shannon as Athenry and St Josephs Doora-

Barefield faced up to each other, with victory going to Galway's way.

Athenry retained the title in 2001 when they beat Grague-Ballycallan from Kilkenny on a scoreline of 3-24 to 2-19 after extra time.

Birr collected a third title in 2002 when they beat Clarinbridge from Galway by double scores.

The Offaly club won a fourth final the following year when they beat Dunloy. Newtownshandrum from North Cork emerged as victors in their first final in 2004 when they recorded a 0-17 to 1-6 win, again to Dunloy's despair.

James Stephen's from Kilkenny won a third final in 2005 when they had five points to spare over Athenry.

De La Salle's opponents in this year's final Portumna from Galway won the Tommy Moore Cup in 2006 and '08, beating Cork's Newtownshandrum and Birr respectively.

In between Ballyhale Shamrocks equalled Birr's record of four All-Ireland titles, beating Loughrea of Galway in the decider two years ago, but Henry Shefflin and co were trumped by Joe Canning's Portumna in last month's semi-final.

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