



History of the Field

The Journey through Pastures New

The Pier Park, Eamonn Byrne's and the Journey to the Valley

The Pier Park

While the possibility of it being more than just a novelty was always privately discussed, for the first three years of the Burrin Celtic's existence and the year running up to it's competitive debut, there was no official ambition for the club beyond it being a social project. Thus, from 1987, all three junior teams trained in an area locally known as the Pier Park, which was leased from local landowner, Billy Nolan, for circa 300 annually. Situated just outside the village on the locally known 'New Road', this 2½-acre facility would become the centre of football in the area for over eleven years. In an era where most of the changing out of clothes and into kit was done while sitting in cars, it was decided that a dressing room would be required. Thus, a container was purchased and placed at the top of the field just inside the entrance to the facility. Floodlights were also purchased to facilitate evening training. There was plenty of parking in the facility behind the goals, a necessity as the people of the locality began going to the matches as a novelty on a Sunday morning or to see their relations do their best Ronnie Whelan impersonations! A noted feature of the Pier Park was that the playing pitch itself had a slight slope into a ditch at the bottom end of the field. This helped with drainage and meant that the surface of the Pier Park was playable more often than not, thus putting it in demand as a neutral venue.

Eamonn Byrne's

The Pier Park served as the home venue for Burrin Celtic for over eleven years, which saw 12 trophies and many players passing through the gates. However, in 1998, the club were forced to vacate the facility as property prices rose and the land was needed for development purposes. This could have spelt the end for the club, as, without a club in the immediate area to share with, there was no possibility of a pitch share. This was to lead to the desperate search for a new home for football in the area in the summer of 1998. Again, a local landowner obliged. Eamonn O'Byrne, and his generosity, was to be one of the biggest factors in the club's history. Rescuing the club from extinction in the summer of 1998, Eamonn donated a playing surface to the club without charge. Ever since, the pitch, situated a little further down the same road, came to be known as "Eamonn Byrne's" (with victims of the local dialect dropping the 'O') as a tribute to this act of kindness on the part of Eamonn and his family. Again, aided by a less severe but more general slope, Eamonn Byrne's was in use all year round with training sessions only having to stop at Christmas for a few weeks. The floodlights and container was transferred to their new home, giving the new field a familiar vibe to the Pier Park, giving the new generation of supporters and players a similar feeling to their illustrious predecessors.

However, this passage in the club's history was to be far from spectacular on the pitch. A spate of retirements of players in quick succession saw the club fall rapidly from the Premier league, with a succession of relegations and promotions to follow. Thus with only 5 trophies to show for the seven years that were spent at Eamonn Byrne's, the club's fortunes on the pitch soured. However, this was not the case off the pitch. Seeing the potential, if not the results, the next step in the club's development was seen to be the purchasing of a facility of its own to avoid the scenario of the previous summer.

After five years of intensive fundraising and an amazing level of support from the people of the locality, Burrin Celtic purchased 8.5 acres of land for €85,000 from Eamonn O'Byrne. Thus began the process of converting the agricultural land to a state-of-the-art football facility. Over the next two years, with the aid of local landowners, farmers and experts, the facility took shape. In keeping with the club's by-now traditional approach of intensive research, a pitch under development was sought as a template. The facility under development in Bunclody, Co. Wexford was settled upon and through enquiries and the generosity of the club of Bunclody with information pertaining to their work in progress; a general idea became a focused plan. The first step that was enacted was the creation of an entrance and drain to drain the bog land. After this, the drafting in of members of the juvenile and youth panels to pick the excess surface stones was decided and acted upon. Then began the reclamation project. Generous and flexible with his machinery, Seamus Quirke of Ballintranee made available a digger for 14 working hours, a hugely important factor in the speed at which the development process occurred. The digger was used for the clearing of stones, ditches and bushes and their transportation for disposal. The donation of tractors by local farmers was also very important to this process. The previously stripped sods were used to raise the level of what was to become the playing pitches, of which there would be two. The planners also allowed for the existence of a separate training area. This was to be sandwiched by new, more modern floodlights. This process was completed under the supervision of Tom Donohue.

A Room of One's Own

From as early as January 1990, there are minutes from meetings that pertain to the purchasing of a field for the club to call home. However, it was deemed unnecessary, as, with very little financial support outside generous sponsorship from local businessmen and memberships from players and with expenses that had to be paid, there were little funds to save to put away towards a pitch fund.

So, the first step was to source funding for this ambitious project. Thus, the Burrin Celtic Pitch Fund Lotto was formed. Thus began the fund-raising effort that is ongoing to this day, a feat that the club is very proud of and very grateful to all those who have donated their time as sellers and those who bought lotto tickets every week. Ratified officially on October 14, 1996, the Lotto officially began on February 4, 1998 after nearly a year and a half of intensive research by the then committee to find out how other club lotto's were being run. That being done, the first lotto was held in McHenry's Bar, Ballon, with all the other local pubs in the area being kind enough to serve as hosts on at regular intervals on a rotary basis. With all sectors of the parish having their own pub, this meant that there was a far-reaching, inclusive effect produced. This is a tradition that has remained to this day.

In the beginning...

A challenge that all pitches in the Carlow and District Football League face annually is the amount of rainfall that occurs, particularly during the winter. Burrin Celtic is no exception. However, this problem was further brought to the fore because, as was widely admitted, one of the major weaknesses in the new facility was its openness to the elements. Thus, under the supervision of engineer Donal Sinnott, 5,500 meters of drainpipes were laid. This proved immensely effective when dealing with the rainfall. Unfortunately, it did nothing to address the extreme cold that supporters have to endure on occasion!!!!

Let there be light!

Sometime after the pitches were deemed playable, the poles for the afore-mentioned floodlights were collected from Co. Tipperary with the aid of Jimmy 'Spiky' Nolan and his lorry. Jack Nolan then dug the foundations for the poles, which were laid in cement with the help of Dan Morrissey. Committee member, Paddy Doran, supervised this process in its entirety, with his daughter Rebecca never far from his side. A former player, Brendan Butler, installed the lights themselves and thus, with a control house built, there was light, and all said that it was good.

With the 100-unit car park deemed adequate, the next project of focus was the clubhouse. Again, with the connections of Paddy Doran coming to the fore, the construction process began. The clubhouse shell was up with a month as was a new storage facility. Within that storage facility was a fully restored Ford 4000 that was kindly donated by local publican Joe Doyle and restored by Seamus Cummins, harking back to his previous profession; a mechanic. The shell served adequately as a changing facility. However, it took the intervention of one Kieran Brennan to finish this project. Kieran finished the toilets and shower facilities, completing the project.

To Infinity...And Beyond!!!

Since it's completion, the Valley, as the new facility was named, has hosted many League finals and has seen great football. It has also hosted League of Ireland football as local side F.C. Carlow uses it as one of their home venues. Probably the greatest evidence of the clubs ambitions going into the future, The Valley is now the home of football for the current and future generations, as Eamonn Byrne's and the Pier Park were to their predecessors.