



The History of Burrin Celtic Football Club

The start of a journey

Burrin Celtic Football Club is based in Ballon, County Carlow. It was so called after the River Burrin, which flows through the middle of the parish. Also, the founding fathers, Seamus Cummins, Seamus Dowling and Ger Maher, wanted to have a club that was as inclusive to as many players in the surrounding areas as possible, thus not having 'Ballon' in it's name.

The idea was first conceived in November 1986 when Seamus Dowling approached Seamus Cummins, a prominent member of the community, concerning the possibilities of starting a football club in the area. As a former member of Tullow Town, Seamus Dowling was the only member of the original founders to have any playing experience in localised league football and this would prove invaluable in helping along the less experienced players that would form the original first team.

Seamus Cummins, while having no experience or contact with football up until this point, had however many years of experience on local committees and organisations which would prove crucial both in terms of administration and organisation. However, both men agreed that this project would require someone with a real love of the game to be involved - someone who was known locally for his adoration of Johnny Giles' Leeds United Football Club and whose connections in the local football scene would prove to be like gold dust. Enter Ger Maher.

Ger Maher was a local businessman whose shop was widely known to be a good spot for a chat and a laugh. When approached Ger greeted the idea with a boyish enthusiasm and energy that was infectious. Within a week, Ger made the necessary contacts and had assembled all the necessary paperwork and regulations to affiliate to the local Carlow and District Football League.

And on the First Day...

February 14, 1987 is considered the day on which Burrin Celtic was founded at the A.G.M. held that evening in Ballon Community Centre. The committee was Chairman; Seamus Cummins; vice-chairman; Joe Maher, secretary, Ger Maher; treasurer, Des Wray; assistant treasurer, Ger Lawler; PRO, Michael Dawson; team manager, Seamus Dowling. John Smith, David Brennan and Billy Nolan were elected to the committee.

Turning his shop into the club headquarters, Ger used the age-old tactic of simply putting a notice in his shop window. In the mean time, Seamus Cummins conducted research into all matters football with an attention to detail that would epitomise his handling of the Club for over twenty years.. Seamus Dowling acted as player/manager of the now newly formed first team, with eyes firmly on participating in competitive football by September 1987.

However, to rush into a league campaign with no benchmark would have been reckless in the extreme so, with the help of Pat Murphy, formerly of Sandbrook, Ballon, a friendly with Shillelagh Stars was organised for early summer, 1987 in the Pier Park, Ballon, which was to be Burrin Celtic's home for ten years. This is officially Burrin Celtic's first game in its illustrious history. The result was a 1-1 draw, a more than promising start.

Thus, the summer-long pre-season training conducted by Seamus Dowling bore in mind the forthcoming Second Division campaign of the 1987/88 season. This pre-season culminated in the participation in the pre-season 'Parkville Tournament'. This led to a 1-0 defeat to New Oak United, a stalwart in local League Football, who had competed in multiple leagues. This was the first step on a journey that would see 24 trophies and over 80 players pass through the gates.

The Pier Park

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. This was an era when most of the changing out of clothes and into kit was done 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. 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.

The Joe Kenny Years

Joe Kenny, like Seamus Dowling, had previous experience with domestic football. Liking what he saw at the Parkville tournament, Joe came on board as the new permanent First team manager. Having someone with his experience on the sideline meant that Seamus Dowling was now in a position to focus on playing and help to organise the players. Famous for his call of '10 laps of the field', Joe was a huge advocate of fitness. This had the added effect of keeping matters very simple for a group of players who, in the main, had little or no experience of football at any level.

In their first season in Division 2 of the Carlow and District Football league, Burrin won 14 games out of a possible 18 with only 2 defeats all year scoring an amazing 63 goals, an astonishing return for a first season. The lethal Thomas 'Buddy' O'Brien, who went on to win the Divisional Player of the Year, scored 26 goals. It was also during this season that the club won its first trophy, the Divisional Cup. Also, having finished as runners-up to a much-fancied Baltinglass Town, Burrin Celtic was promoted to the top tier of the League at the first attempt.

Joe Kenny went on to coach the First team in Burrin Celtic for three years, consolidating their position as a First division team. They also came close to winning the Williams and Leahy Shield in the 1988/89 season, losing out in the final to New Oak United. By 1990 Burrin Celtic, had gone way beyond expectations and the three founders were now sure that there was a place for football in the locality of Ballon. The club looked at the dawn of the new decade with optimism and pride in what had been accomplished in such a short space of time.

It's a new Dawn, it's a new Day,...

Following the initial relative successes of the club, a period of fluctuation occurred. Seamus 'Chum' Whelan took over from Joe Kenny, who decided to take over the second team. At the same time former and current players took over the running of the club with Gary Moore (RIP) taking over the First team and Fiach O'Byrne (RIP), Liam Murphy and Donnacha Murphy getting more heavily involved in the administrative side of the club. Seamus Cummins and Ger Maher returned as chairman and secretary respectively at the 1993/94 AGM. Apart from a Division 1 Cup it was a barren period in terms of trophies won but a bright light shone from the dugout in the shape of team manager Gary Moore's assistant. Enter Johnny Nolan.

The forging of a legend: the Johnny Nolan story

Johnny Nolan had played for Burrin Celtic's second and third teams. An avid Liverpool supporter, Johnny had grown up with the successful Liverpool team of Bob Paisley. Conceding his limited playing ability, Johnny had turned his attention to management, assisting Gary Moore in his solitary season in charge of the first team. Johnny, who's reign has spanned over fifteen years, is the most successful team manager in Carlow League history with over 15 trophies which includes two trebles and three doubles and a love affair with the Williams and Leahy Shield, which he has won three times. However, it is widely acknowledged that Johnny was blessed with some of the most talented, dedicated, versatile players ever to play in the Carlow league. Seven Burrin Celtic players represented the Carlow League at Oscar Traynor level regularly during this period of unprecedented success. Kevin O'Conner, Alan Kelly, Ian Farrell, Colm McDonald, Ross Nolan, Ronan Kelly and J.J. Dowling all featured regularly in starting line-ups with other players featuring intermittently down through the years.

It don't get much better than this!!!!

It is widely acknowledged that the club's finest hour on the field of play occurred on 12 December 1997. This date is etched in the history of the club as, on this night, Burrin Celtic played Monaghan United in Gortakeegan, Co Monaghan for a place in the semi-final of the Leinster Senior Cup. Defeated 4-0, Burrin Celtic punched way above their weight and were applauded both locally and, not for the first time, on the national stage for a fabulous effort. On duty that day were Kevin O'Conner, Tom Butler, Donnacha Murphy, Noel Foley, Mick Kinsella, Alan Kelly, Colm McDonald, Liam Murphy, Ian Farrell, Jim Kealy, Tom Nolan, Brendan Butler and Matty Dowling.

Eamonn Byrne's

The Pier Park served as the home venue for Burrin Celtic for over eleven years, which saw 11 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 was to lead to a desperate search for a new home. Again, a local landowner obliged. Eamonn O'Byrne came to the rescue and provided a playing pitch without charge. 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 Eamon 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 around 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.

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. With only six trophies to show for the seven years that were spent at Eamon 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. The plundering of a promising youth's team was seen as the only means of rebuilding the savaged team-sheet.

An Inspiration

It is at this point that all associated with the club would like to acknowledge the dedication of one Brendan Barry. Brendan made his debut for Burrin Celtic at the age of fifteen against Hacketstown United, capping the substituted appearance with a collector's item, a goal. Since that day, Brendan has been a stalwart in the side and always available for selection. Having emigrated to the United States, Brendan missed out on the two League Championship wins in 1997 and 2001. Upon returning home, though, Brendan returned to the starting eleven, helping the new players along, being both unassuming and leading by example at the same time. His hours of travelling to training each week and fantastic attitude were rewarded in 2008 with a long overdue, and well deserved, League Championship winners medal. He had previously won special recognition from the Carlow League by winning 'Player of the Year' in the First Division on two occasions. Brendan is, and was, an excellent example of a sportsman and club representative.

Rising from the Ashes: The Valley

From as early as January 1990, there are minutes from meetings that pertain to the purchase of a field for the club to call home. So, the first step was to source funding for this ambitious project. The Burrin Celtic Pitch Fund Lotto was formed and the Lotto officially began on February 4, 1998 and continues to this day.

After five years of intensive fund-raising and an amazing level of support from the people of the locality, Burrin Celtic purchased 8.5 acres of land for €85,000 from Eamon O'Byrne. Then 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 in Bunclody with information pertaining to their work in progress; a general idea became a focussed plan.

Laying the foundations

Work got under way by opening an entrance and the drafting in of members of the juvenile and youth panels to pick the excess surface stones. 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 clearing 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 Donohoe.

A challenge that all pitches in the Carlow and District Football League face annually is the amount of rainfall that make pitches unplayable. Burrin Celtic took measures to ensure that theirs would be playable all year round by employing engineer Donal Sinnott to lay 5,500 meters of drainpipes. Unfortunately, it did nothing to address the extreme cold that supporters had to endure on some occasions.

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 Ltd. 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 so, with a control house built, there was light, and all said that it was good.

A Room of One's Own

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 within 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 complete this project. Kieran installed the toilets, basins and shower facilities, completing the project in principle.

A New Era

Relegated Burrin Celtic regrouped and set their sights on winning immediate promotion in the 2006/07 season. They now could call on the services of League of Ireland player, Alan Kelly, the afore-mentioned Brendan Barry and Armour McFarland who was a four-time league winner with Walkerstown in the early 1990s. They also had a panel of young players, fresh from their success with the youths team, to call on.

A newly appointed Coaching Staff of Johnny Nolan, John Pullin and Jimmy 'Spiky' Nolan, and the emergence of a new generation of supporters who loyally followed the team all season aided this. All these factors resulted in an undefeated league campaign, resulting in Division 1 League victory, coupled with 2 Divisional Cups and, most importantly, promotion back to Carlow football's top tier.

Coming up as Champions of Carlow's second tier, not much was expected of Burrin Celtic. The title had been nestled in the trophy-room of Crettyard United for three years, unassailable to all who strived for it. Burrin Celtic was willing to consolidate their position in the top flight of Carlow League Football before venturing for the Promised Land.

Things were not promising for Burrin in the early part of the 2007/8 season and they gained only five points from their first four games. Then came the turning point; a 3-1 victory over Premier League regulars, Hanover Harps and this win was the start of a great run which eventually saw Burrin win the Premier League title – the club's third time to win the League's top competition.

Since this win, however, Burrin Celtic has again lost its Premier league status. However, with yet another new generation of players emerging having made their way up through the ranks, the future now looks brighter than ever. On behalf of the club, all the members of the committee would like to thank all those who have contributed to the club's progress and development in any way and appeal to you to help us to continue our work and to help us to continue to make a positive contribution to the area.

Roll of Honour

2013/14	Seniors League Winners, Seniors Cup Runners-up, Seniors Leinster Cup Runners-up, U12 League Winners
2012/13	Seniors League Winners, Seniors Cup Winners
2011/12	Seniors Cup Winners, U14 Cup Runners-up, U10 Top Four League Winners
2010/11	
2009/10	
2008/09	
2007/08	Premier Division Winners
2006/07	Div. 1 Winners, Div. 2 Cup Winners, Div. 1 Cup Winners
2005/06	
2004/05	Div. 1 Winners, Div. 1 Cup Runners-up
2003/04	Dooley Cup Winners (2 nd Team)
2002/03	
2001/02	
2000/01	Williams and Leahy Shield Winners, Premier Div. Winners
1999/00	Div. 4 Cup Winners (2 nd Team), Carlow Cup Winners
1998/99	Williams and Leahy Shield Runners-up, F.A.I. Cup (Carlow Area) Winners
1997/98	Carlow Cup Winners, Premier Cup Winners, F.A.I. Cup (Carlow Area) Winners
1996/97	Premier Div. Winners
1995/96	Carlow Cup Winners, Premier Cup Winners, Premier Div. Runners-up
1994/95	Williams and Leahy Shield Winners, Div. 1 Winners
1993/94	Williams and Leahy Shield Winners
1992/93	Carlow Cup Runners-up
1991/92	
1990/91	
1989/90	Div. 2 Runners-up
1988/89	Div. 4 Winners (2 nd Team), Williams and Leahy Shield Runners-up
1987/88	Div. 2 Cup Winners, Div. 2 Runners-up

Other Honours

2011/12	Most Promising Young Player: Liam Brennan
2007/08	Golden Boot, Premier Div. : Alan Kelly, Club of the Year
2004/05	Player of the Year, Div. 1: Brendan Barry
2000/01	Club of the Year
1999/00	Golden Boot, Premier Div. : Steven Curry
1995/96	Young Player of the Year, Premier Div. : Alan Kelly
1994/95	Player of the Year, Div. 1: Brendan Barry
1992/93	Player of the Year, Div. 1: Tom Butler
1989/90	Michael Cooney Sports Merit Award