

Secretary’s Report 2020

So here we are back round to AGM time again in this most unique of years. Now I understand the trouble musicians have with “the difficult second album”. How can I follow up the hit of my first Secretary's report from last year? Maybe by stopping these poor attempts at jokes!!

Personally, I would like to begin this by thanking my wife Aisling and our wonderful kids for the tolerance and support that have shown me in order to try to fulfil this role during the year. It has been intensive timewise trying to balance this on top of family and work commitments and I would not have been able to do this without them.

I empathize greatly with the representatives on both our county board and those in headquarters who were faced with such a difficult decision. I applaud the decisions made, at times when those in power appeared to be dithering, it was GAA and its members who were showing leadership and helping vulnerable people in communities up and down the country. To our own club members who helped out in any way, I salute the selflessness and generosity shown. It’s what makes being a member of this association, club and community so great.

I am not sure if I am unique in feeling simultaneously that it feels like it’s been ages since the last AGM and that it seems like only yesterday. Firstly, I hope you and your loved ones are keeping healthy, safe and well. We are living in unprecedented times and hopefully sometime in the not-too-distant future we will return to normality and can fully participate and spectate in the games and cultural activities we all love.

I suppose best place to start would be towards the end of the last calendar year. With limited involvement on the field of play in depths of winter, our u21 squad retained the title to complete the “threepeat”. Massive congrats to the entire squad and the management team that helped deliver it. Little did we all know at that time of what was to follow later in the season.

Apart from the U21 campaign, the main activity for the club during the winter was the drive for the Health & Well-being centre. The fund-raising efforts of the squads to take it from a plan and idea to what we have today was brilliant. It's going to take another push to get it completed and I would encourage everyone to row in & support in any way you can. This is going to benefit the entire club.

Managers had been appointed and plans laid – some teams had begun training, while others had yet to resume when the news emanated from Wuhan of Covid 19. All plans up in the air. The need for volunteers for new roles – Covid Coordinator and covid supervisor arose. To that end, thank you to all those who volunteered as covid supervisors and helped us get a return to play. Without them we couldn’t have trained or played matches. They kept squads right and we are very thankful for the role they played. For the most part, we as a club adhered to the rules and guidelines, however it was concerning to hear of selective application of and adherence to the rules/guidelines. I especially want to pay tribute to the wonderful Louise McMahon at this point, who assumed the coordinator role on very short notice. Everything was dealt with sensitively, efficiently and professionally in what were very challenging circumstances - never mind the issues with the app!!!

Louise, along with our head of facilities Gerard McKeever were instrumental in resolving some outstanding issues regarding planning and insurance issues on some aspects of the club assets. This was of vital importance and both used their expertise to chase down the relevant documentation to ensure everything was/is in order. It may not have got headlines outside of the Executive Committee meetings but as someone who was loosely involved in the process, I cannot thank both enough for their efforts in resolving.

Gerard has taken to the head of facilities role like a duck to water & ensured the transition from the outgoing facilities committee has been seamless. Whether it was maintaining the pitches, cleaning the dressing rooms, resolving health and safety issues or preparing facilities for the return to play - Everything is done with the minimum of fuss and as cost effectively as possible. Due to the volume of work in maintaining the facilities we have at Pairc Aodh Dhuibh, none of this could be done by just one person. Liam and Jimmy and their efforts & input remain vital to all that we do.

The membership of the club remains consistent with last year despite the problems faced with Covid 19. We thank you all for the continued loyal support – especially during a season which was affected like it was. It's vital for insurance reasons that anyone playing, helping out, or planning to help out in the forthcoming season are paid up members. Thanks for all the diligence, countless hours and hard work from our out-going registrar, Kate Connery to ensure we were compliant to actually be able to take the field for training. Can I please appeal to all for the forthcoming season to get their membership in by the agreed date. The role of the registrar is not to continually police this but to actually help to safe guard the health and safety of our members. To deliver the famous quote, help us to help you.

**Chairperson**

You will already have seen the nomination form for the incoming executive officers and committee members for the year ahead. I would just like to acknowledge our outgoing chairperson, Paul McConville, who has completed his term of office. I don’t feel I have the vocabulary to adequately describe or convey to you all the effort this man has put in on behalf of the club during our years working together. He has represented our club with a class and dignity

It has been my distinct honour and privilege to work alongside such a gentleman. His knowledge, advice, guidance and patience towards me when I was learning the ropes as secretary was greatly appreciated and will never be forgotten. Paul leaves the role with the club in what I feel is a great place, both on the field of play and the facilities we can offer to the membership. He was instrumental in the engagement with the LCCC around the pitch at Lough Moss. The relations he has fostered with countless community groups can only be beneficial to the club going forward. On behalf of all the membership, I would just like to say that’s for everything Paul.

The incoming chairperson has big shoes to fill as the bar has been set very high.

**On-Field**

It would be remiss of me to begin talking about the on-field action without acknowledging that some teams and age groups which received little or no action. I am thinking here of the nursery and hurling in particular. Due to the volume of numbers involved in the nursery it would have been nigh on impossible to organise and run while adhering to the guidelines.

The attention now has switched to the inter county scene. We wish all club players who are representing the county the very very best of luck. I say that grudgingly after seeing some of the senior Male footballers facing Fermanagh. Seriously though, you all are a credit to yourselves, your families and your club & great to see county teams backboned by Carryduff players. Dare I say it, but there should arguably be more selected but that’s a different debate.

It was disappointing to learn that we won’t be permitted to resume the Ulster U21 campaign we begun pre Covid at the start of the year. I am sure both the players and management were relishing the chance to try to take that final step.

Ok, I guess I have avoided mentioning it for long enough. Wow, what a year. To sit here and actually think about the achievements the Ladies and Male football teams have had this year – it's amazing. I’d say 95% of the clubs up and down the length and breadth of the country would give limbs to have a season like we just had. We had a single weekend where we had senior & intermediate ladies' teams and the men's senior team in championship finals. The ladies' junior team were also in action in the junior semi-final – which given the circumstances surrounding the fixture should according to the rules have also resulted in a final appearance. The reserves and thirds teams also made final appearances.

I understand there may be some disappointment – its natural, but on reflection in a normal year these achievements would be great, but this year its exceptional. Given all the challenges Covid presented and the unfortunate circumstances the senior playing squads faced throughout the year, it is a testament to them as people, the way they coped with it all. I salute them as individuals and as teams for that, but also must acknowledge the guidance received from their respective management teams.

Unfortunately, the hurlers did not get to complete the set by making a final, but that was through no fault of their own. We hope that the competition will go ahead in the new year as planned by the County Board. We wish them well when it does.

I won't lie, but “ticket-gate” was challenging to handle for us all, I am sure the incoming executive committee would love to have these challenges again in the coming season.

To those players who have sustained injuries throughout the year we hope they make a full and speedy recovery and are back playing in the new year, Covid restrictions permitting. This is an exceptional base from which to be able to build from ahead of the 2021 season. To paraphrase Jurgen Klopp, lets attack the new season and try to go the extra inch to get over the line.

At this point I will include the input received from the coaches & management teams involved in the various squads.

**U10 Ladies Football**

The following is a short summary of our season;

* Pre-Lockdown - We held 1 training session and attended 1 Down LGFA U10 Go Games Blitz prior to the lockdown in March.
* Restarted training again 17th July 2020
* 12 training sessions have taken place since return
* We've played challenge games against Teconnaught, Saul, St Patricks Lisburn, St Endas and Rossa GAC.
* We also played our own internal go games matches.
* We've had a panel of 37 girls over the course of the season, although 3 girls didn't return following the lockdown.
* We had intended to take part in the re-arranged Belfast Go Games in October but this has now been cancelled due to GAA/LGFA club games suspension.
* We still intend to have another 2 training sessions over the next 2 weekends to complete our season (weather permitting!)

**U14 Ladies Football**

Like most teams, 2020 has proved to be a disrupted season for our U14 girls. Preparations began in late January to defend our County Feile title in March. Unfortunately, Feile, along with the U14 league, was cancelled. However, this did not diminish the spirit of the team. On the contrary. During lock-down we had twice weekly, fun online circuit sessions for the players and family members to keep them fit and connected as a group. The girls arrived back to training in July energised and motivated to improve. In the absence of formal league matches we arranged challenge games and were unbeaten against, St Brigids (Antrim), St Galls (Antrim), Geraldines (Co Louth), Edendork (Tyrone), Clan Eireann (Armagh) as well as Teconnaught and Bryansford U16s. In the run up to Championship our section B team played challenge league games against Bosco and Downpatrick, while the Section A team faced Burren and Clonduff. Championship began in mid-September, with our section A team earning a place in the final after hard fought victories against Burren and Saval. Our section B team also enjoyed Championship success and a place in the final is dependent on the result of a fixture between Downpatrick and Saul. At the time of writing, we don’t know if these finals will be played. We certainly hope so, but regardless of whether we retain our Championship title or not, the U14 girls have enjoyed an outstanding season. A season not measured by trophies or medals, but by the excellent team spirit and attitude displayed by the entire group. We are indebted to our Covid Supervisors, Mary, Andrea, Sheila and Johnny, along with everyone in the Club who has worked so hard to ensure that training and matches could proceed. We are also grateful to all referees and County board officials, without whom no matches would not have occurred.

**Minor Ladies Football**

1 Congrats to Down Ladies County Board for the imaginative way they approached this year and they should be commended for the amount of football squeezed into such a short year.

2 However Minors were an obvious exception to this good practice and in a cohort where there is historically high drop out rates, this may well prove to be a mistake.

3 With the continuation of the three adult teams in Carryduff, we have managed to dodge the lack of football issue but anecdotally this has not been the case in other clubs where many girls have not played all year.

4 The three adult team format continues to go from strength to strength with all 3 teams computerised at their respective levels, albeit with some teething problems. Room for a conversation on setting some ground rules re access to players/progress between teams.

5 Nevertheless, success is determined by the senior team and as such getting to a senior championship final can't be looked upon as a successful year.

There is a need for a greater push to close the gap to Bredagh with the accompanying need for investment.

**G4MO**

The Carryduff G4MO got their season kicked off earlier than most when their initial training sessions began in early Feb. The Sunday morning sessions in the ball wall took place in rain, hail and storm force winds for 4 weeks until 2020 was stopped in its tracks by Covid-19. Cut to the beginning of July, post lockdown and the squad were full of enthusiasm to get back at it! By now it was great to see some new faces keen to get involved in the ever-popular G4MO initiative. Training ramped up to twice a week so that everyone was drilled and ready for some upcoming challenge matches. September saw a flurry of games against Loughinisland, Longstone and Bredagh. These were followed swiftly by an invitation to the west of the city to a mini blitz with St John's hosting the Carryduff G4MO along with St Paul's, Holywood. For those that attended the games and saw the girls in training, the development was evident and as the season progressed so was their confidence in their own abilities and in the skills of gaelic football. A great team spirit and sense of enjoyment throughout the year bringing to an end another successful year for G4MO in Carryduff.

**Nursery Hurling**

Following the resumption of training since lockdown, attendance has been good with around 20 participants with some newcomers. We have a team of 5-6 coaches/helpers each week and have had sufficient equipment to run the session.

We kept training going for as long as we could outdoors on the Sunday mornings, weather permitting. But all training has now ceased due to Covid restrictions.

Before lockdown numbers were around 15-20, so it is encouraging to still be getting them. Training has been focused on the basics & fundamental movement skills.

**P3 (U7.5) Hurling**

This is a new age group taking players from P2 and P3 to form an U7.5 hurling team. The team started training in January and played a number of tournaments in Bangor every second Sunday morning. These were competitive and the players enjoyed them a lot. Justin McCormick took the training sessions on alternate Sunday mornings. On 8 March 2020 all training and matches ceased. Some correspondence was made during the lockdown period through skills challenges with limited success.

Training returned on 2 August 2020 and the team was entered into blitzes however there were not enough teams. Matches were organised against Bredagh and St Bridget’s. Generally, there have been 16-20 players each week before and after lockdown. A strong coaching team have been helping including Andrew Moohan, Joe Marley, Anthony Conway, John McCaffrey and Michael Holland. The team is indebted to Erin Marsh for taking on the role of COVID supervisor.

**P5 (U9.5) Hurling**

The boys started back in January with no major changes to the squad. 30+ boys from last year’s U8s. This is due to the new age groups set out and a few new members to the club joined.

January, February and start of March we had Indoor Hurling training and Indoor Hurling blitz’s in Bangor, which was attended by Carryduff in great numbers with a minimum of two teams entered and one weekend we had entered three. The boys’ capabilities were extremely good and progressed well over the weekends. We also organised a Challenge game in February against a St Paul’s Belfast U10s, in which we showed great skills against the older side.

August, we returned with the same numbers and after a few weeks we could see the boys’ skill level rise and attitude was fantastic. We had Go Games against Ballygalget and Bredagh which was a good starting point for everyone. Then we had Challenge games against Bredagh and St Bridget’s U10s where the boys showed great progression.

Training continued into October and Challenge games had also been arranged but will now need looked at a later date.

**P7 (U11.5) Hurling**

Initially training was on Sunday mornings from January to March and when we returned to play in mid-July on Thursday evenings, training right through to early October.

During the year we played in the North Down League in a group also containing Ballygalget and Bredagh.

The team also played Ballycran, Liatroim, Davitts, St John's and Rossa in challenge games. Those who were U11s also participated in the Ulster Indoor blitz in Magherafelt back at the beginning of March.

**U13 Hurling**

Beginning the league campaign with tight numbers, a 15 a-side game away to Clonduff, fielding 4 u11’s we came away as rightful winners. We quickly followed up with 2 further wins, off to a great start in the league. However, things became a little unstuck and we subsequently lost 3 on the trot. We were particularly unlucky in a couple of those games, but no complaints, the other team simply wanted it more. With Warrenpoint withdrawing and being awarded the points we were left with 3 remaining fixtures which we had to win a and rely on Clonduff beating Kilclief to tie in 2nd place with Kilclief which is how it transpired. That left us with a play-off against Kilclief on 03rd October to decide who would play Clonduff in the Shield final, playing Kilclief for the 2nd time in two weeks we ran out easy winners with a full-strength squad. The final set for Sunday 10th October and after playing 11 games to get there it now looks unlikely that final will take place.

Training was relatively well attended all year and the boys generally put in a good effort, perhaps struggling a little bit with discipline when the numbers were on the low side. It is worth a particular mention to our senior hurlers who engaged with us and came to quite a number of training sessions with the lads. They worked this on a rotational basis and both myself and Declan are very grateful for the commitment they showed and it really did help progress the boys during the year. Our gratitude and thanks to Mark McConville, Gareth Lynch, Michael Conway, Niall McArdle, Ciaran Goodwin, Lorcan McCaughey and Conall Watson.

All in all a very good year for the u13’s and the most pleasing aspect being that the younger, and perhaps perceived not so strong players, learned how to step up to the plate and hold their own in games where we were missing some of the more established members of the squad. We have 16 u13’s and a few u11’s who were delighted to be playing hurling and it is something to build on for next year and look forward to Féile in 2021 with this squad.

**U15 Hurling**

The u15 hurlers had a successful season. All players that started the season were present at the end of the season and we could see significant improvement in all of the players. There is still work to do in relation to first touch and striking but the level of commitment shown throughout the year was excellent.

We started off in division 2 winning all games including a competitive final vs Ballyvarley. We had a small squad of 18 but there were always really good numbers at training and we always had 15 at matches.

At the end of the division 2 campaign, we decided to move to division 1 as they were at the start of the second round of games. We played 5 games in total winning 2 and competitive in all.

Now that the season has ended, we are looking at what the next season will bring and have a number of the team moving up to U17. We need to decide how we cater for them to ensure that they continue to be involved in hurling.

**Minor Hurling**

The minor hurlers this year again had to look for an amalgamation given low numbers. This year our 7 minor hurlers amalgamated with Bredagh. This permitted a squad of 26 to come together for training. Pre Covid-19 we had planned to draw 7 or 8 from this cohort to form a strong panel to play in Antrim as an U18 side with a core 8 or 9 U18’s from Bredagh and 2 from Carryduff. This was to leave a panel of 18 to 19 u17’s to play in division 2 in Down. However, Covid put a stop to the U18 team in Antrim so after some discussion sought approval to play 2 teams in Down, in division 1 and division 2, naming 13 players who could not line out for the division 2 squad.

This arrangement proved to be as equally effective and we enjoyed a clear run in both divisions, providing competitive hurling for the entire squad throughout the summer months. We did manage to train twice a week mostly and with 2 games a week the improvement in the lads hurling from when we first started in February was evident from competing for ball, striking and most pleasing of all the catching.

In division 1 we enjoyed a number of competitive games against the Ards clubs, beating Ballycran on one occasion and probably unlucky to have lost to them in the first fixture by only 2 points. The other games against Ballygalget and Portaferry ultimately proved a step too far but the scoreline at times did not really tell the true competitive nature of these games. From a Carryduff perspective we were well represented at division 1, often with 4 and sometimes 5 players of the 7 starting these games. All Carryduff lads got some chance to sample division 1 hurling at some point which will stand to them as they progress to the next level.

In division 2 we were more than capable of holding our own and it clearly showed the exposure to the intensity of division 1 games that the lads were strong in this division. We had 1 or two blips along the way but ended up finishing in 2nd place in the group stage and reaching a final against O’Rahillys. The final took place between these two amalgamated teams on near perfect conditions down in Kilclief but unfortunately for us O’Rahillys got out of the blocks fast and with 4 goals in the first half we simply were never able to claw the deficit back, going in 4:07 to 1:04 at half time. A spirited performance in the second half was not reflected on the scoreboard unfortunately and we ended up losing the final 5:10 to 1:08.

Thankfully at minor level we did get to see out the season in full and for this small bunch of lads we provided the best season to them that they have had in a number of years. This was certainly reflected in their attitude and commitment and hopefully will encourage the lads to pull through into senior ranks. The realisation that they can hurl at division 1 level should certainly fuel that. Well done lads!

**Senior Hurling**

The 2020 season has been stop/start in nature for the senior hurlers with Covid restrictions interrupting their schedule. The Intermediate Hurling Championship was scheduled to start in mid-October, outside this year’s club season, and at the time of writing (mid-November), it has not been played due to the latest Covid restrictions. It is disappointing that space couldn’t have been found within the club season for the IHC, so that it could have been completed within the season as the football championships were. It is hoped that the IHC can be played in early 2021.

The Antrim leagues were restricted to Antrim teams this year due to Covid, and the Down leagues were played in reduced form with divisions of four teams, Carryduff being grouped with Liatroim, Portaferry II and Ballycran II. Five of our six games were played before the second GAA closure ended the league.

We entered a seconds team into the Betsy Gray Shield, ensuring that all of our panel of 30+ got the opportunity to play in competitive games. The group stage provided five games, including a first visit to Carryduff from our new neighbours, East Belfast. We lost out in the semi-final to eventual winners Ballycran.

Conor Cassidy, Donal Rooney and Conor McLornan are representing Carryduff on the Down Senior hurling panel this year and Eoin Maguire was with the U20s.

We hope that the 2021 season sees a return to some normality without the same restrictions imposed on the 2020 season.

**U7.5 - Male Football**

In this most strange of years, the U7.5 boys football coaches were delighted to provide 10 weeks of training and Go Games and an outlet for the boys physical and mental well-being with their friends. The boys came on leaps and bounds with the regular schedule of games and training. Thanks to all the coaches who gave up their time to provide this opportunity for the boys and the parents for their help and support.

**U9.5 – Male Football**

The U.9.5 Boys commenced training mid-July and despite the challenges imposed by Covid restrictions had 50 boys in the group with most training sessions having almost 40 boys in attendance. All players put in a serious effort at training to ready themselves for the challenges of a condensed East Down Go Games schedule during August and September. The mixed ability Carryduff teams playing in the Go Games accounted for themselves superbly and with three Carryduff teams playing ensured that there was plenty of football for the boys to showcase the skills they had been working on during training. While a normal year would have seen this group participate in a number of one day tournaments, they showed that they are well able to compete with the best teams in East Down. The coaches are sure that those moving up to 11.5 next year are well prepared for the challenges of competitive football at that level, while those remaining will help form a strong U9.5 group in 2021.

**U11.5 – Male Football**

This year’s season began with huge promise and optimism. Some of the older boys participated in a very enjoyable and highly competitive U12 winter league organised by Glenavy GFC. Over successive Sundays in February and early March the boys played some great football against tough opponents and were one of the stand-out teams of that league. Everyone was looking forward to the start of the season proper and Wednesday night training at Lough Moss. And then……….lockdown!

Clearly the boys (and their parents) missed football training because when we returned in early July we had 30+ boys at training every week. Fixtures for the East Down U11.5 League were soon published and two teams were entered for the league. The As had a first match away to RGU and the B’s played their first home match against St Paul’s. Throughout those weeks of the League both teams wore their jerseys with great pride. As coaches we were hugely impressed with the development of skills, fitness, maturity and match awareness. Even the taunts from some of the visiting spectators at a few home matches failed to distract or interrupt the boys’ focus and drive. They consistently performed to a very high standard regardless of the final score.

The P7 boys had an opportunity to play up as part of the u13 B team, and they, to a man, rose to that challenge. At times the boys outplayed and out skilled their opponents and entertained with some fantastic open and attacking football. Deservedly a semi-final place was secured after an away win at Dundrum. That night typified the resolve and fight that the boys displayed throughout the league campaign – it is never over until it is over! Sadly, the semi-final was lost to Aughlisnafin who themselves lost out in the final to St Paul’s.

In addition to the East Down league there were a series of friendly matches against Davitts, St Brigid’s, St Gall’s, Drumaness and St Patrick’s, Lisburn. Despite the uncertainty at the start of the summer about the amount of football that would be available this year, every effort was made to afford every boy the opportunity to play as much football as possible. And as coaches we cannot thank enough the Covid Supervisors, Mark Cunningham and Brian Illand for making that happen.

2021 looks very promising for this group of players……!!

**Fundraising**

Thanks to Orla McKeever for the exemplary running of the club lottery. Participation throughout the year has been up and down – with an inevitable tail off after the jackpot was won. It and Club Carryduff are the financial lifeblood of the club and we need it to “keep the lights on”. Like most things, due to Covid for the most part this year it was hard to organise or run any major fundraisers due to social distancing etc.

Thanks to Mark Hollywood who has diligently pursued any and every fundraising opportunity we have been made aware of.

Thank you also to those who have sponsored the club, made donations & contributed to the club financially in any way – it is greatly appreciated.

**Communication**

Philip has continued to ensure that the club has a very large presence on the approved social media platforms and a website regularly updated. The regular updates on social media are very beneficial to club members overseas or unable to attend. Thanks Philip.

**Sympathies**

The Club and community were deeply saddened by the deaths of club members throughout the year. Our club are indebted to many who have gone to their eternal reward and it is only right that we acknowledge their memory.

All those club members who lost family and friends during the year will continue to be remembered in our thoughts and prayers. Our sympathy and condolences are extended to all those families who have been bereaved during the year.

Is mise

Niall Mac Fearghais

Rúnaí

Cumann Lúthcleas Gael Ceathrú Aodha Dhuibh