

Castle Miscellany – Our Club, Our People, Our Stories



Inside and Outside the Gates - 1918 to 1938

Our Centenary book '**Our Golfing Demesne – Castle Golf Club 1913-2013**', wonderfully captures our Club's history over our first 100 years. During the twenty-year period 1918 to 1938, the book records that the Club made extraordinary progress, a great testament to our founding fathers, at a time when Ireland was experiencing its most divisive and challenging times. Our founding fathers lived the Club's Motto - "**Improve and Yet Improve.**"

Outside the Gates

The end of the **First World War** in November 1918 did not mean the end of troubled times for Dublin and Ireland. To come were the **Spanish Flu** (1918-19); the **War of Independence** (1919-21), the **Civil War** (1922-23), the **Great Depression** (1930's) and finally the **Anglo-Irish Economic War** (1933-38).

To give one a sense of how harsh life was for the ordinary Dubliners in 1918, war food inflation was 250%; staple foods such as potatoes, bread and milk were in short supply; and milk, so important for babies, was often unsafe. Coal, the primary source of heating and cooking for families, was down to a trickle of pre-war levels. Over 60 acres of corporation lands were being cultivated as Allotments, one eighth of an acre granted per person. Spanish Flu deaths by the end of 1918 were at 250 per month.

During the War of Independence Dublin city became a war zone. At its peak, the IRA mounted 3 to 4 attacks per day, with great peril to passers-by. Law and order had broken down and by mid-1920 the IRA, in areas controlled by them, took over the local policing role. To add to the woes in early 1921 coal would become unavailable due to a UK coal strike. Families resorted to scavenging for wood to burn and cutting down trees. Food kitchens were a feature of the city.

The Rathfarnham area while still a rural area had its share of incidents, as regular raids took place both on the homes of Republicans and IRA training camps frequently set up in the Dublin foothills. One such training camp raid resulted in 40 arrests. One young man arrested in his Rathfarnham home was summarily executed on the Rathmines Road as he was being transported to Portobello Barracks. The outbreak of the Civil War in 1923 inflicted additional destruction in the city centre.

With the end of the Civil War Ireland's economy started to stabilise but struggled terribly during the **Anglo-Irish Trade War**. The British imposed a 20% levy on Irish agricultural products with the Irish Government imposing a similar tariff on UK imports of which coal was the main one. The Government message was '**Burn Everything English except its Coal.**' During those years unemployment rose from 31,000 to 138,000 and farming was devastated.

Thankfully by the end of 1938, the worst years were left behind, as Ireland adopted a new **Constitution** with **Ireland's first President Douglas Hyde**, who had joined the Castle in 1913, taking office.

Inside the Gates – 'Improve and Yet Improve'

Recognising the substantive progress made by the Castle over its first 25 years, the Club was given the honour of hosting the **1938 Irish Close**, which was won by the legendary Irish golfer **Jimmy Bruen**. Jimmy Bruen was an exceptional amateur talent whose accomplishments included being the 'British Open Leading Amateur' in 1939 and the 'British Amateur Champion' in 1946.

An initial membership limit of 400 men and 150 ladies was set in 1918, Many former members of Stillorgan Park Golf Club, which closed in late 1917, sought membership. Sunday golf and the selling of alcoholic drinks was to be permitted – "Cheers" were to be heard across the Parish!

The Club invested heavily over the period 1920 to 1922, upgrading and lengthening the **Course** to be followed by a new **Clubhouse** opened in 1926, which incorporated staff accommodation. **F. W. Sinclair**, then Chair of the Greens Committee, led the drive to improve the course including bringing in Golf Course Architect **Harold Shipman Colt** to re-design the course. On completion the course was lengthened from 5,498 yards to 5,800 yards, a par 76 layout. The new clubhouse was built at a cost of £10,145.

At the commencement of this era grass cutting was by way of a horse drawn mower. In 1931 a first tractor was purchased. The financial management of the Club during this period was exemplary, as the Club invested significantly alongside recording surpluses each year.

Frederick Wilks Sinclair, served as Captain of the Club in both 1916 and 1926. He was born in 1873, in Cambridgeshire, England. By 1901, age 28, with a professional qualification of a Railway Engineer, he was employed by '**The Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction**' to be promoted in 1902 to the senior role of '**Organising Manual Instructor for Ireland**'. He and his wife Florence, also born in England, married in London in 1903. Their 1911 home was on Ashdale Rd, Terenure. Frederick died in 1943 in Dublin, aged 70.

Three legendary members of staff joined the Castle during this period, being **Willie Holley** in 1920, who served as both Head Greenkeeper and Professional until 1952 and Professional until 1965; **Capt. J.J. Carroll** who joined as Secretary in 1927 serving in that role until 1960; and finally, highly respected Caddie Master **George Webster**, appointed in 1934, until retirement in 1979.

Our Culture.

As one reviews the Club history, it is noticeable that the records give no indication of the events unfolding outside the gates, until in 1922, when there is a reference to the Secretary communicating with an IRA Commandant in respect of damage done to a sluice gate and a report of claims being lodged in respect of raids on the Club. Cars were being stolen from the car park, according to newspaper reports.

The membership of the Club in this era had a majority of members of the protestant community, the majority of whom were in favour of retention of the Union with Great Britain. Over time the Castle culture evolved into one sensitive to societal divisions in the aftermath of the 'War of Independence' and the 'Civil War.' Older members will remember that there was an unwritten rule, being that 'conversations' in the club, and in particularly in the bar, concerning religion or politics were to be avoided.

Enjoyment of golf, shared interests and mutual respect became our Club's culture.