

## Íde Bean Uí Shé, Cork Camogie's Feminist Influencer

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### Abstract

*This study examines the contribution made by Íde Bean Uí Shé to the game of camogie, particularly in her native county of Cork. Camogie is a team game, devised by female members of the Gaelic League in 1904 who wished to participate in fields sports in a manner similar to their male associates. They devised a game which was comparable to the ancient male game of hurling. Íde Bean Uí Shé became an officer of the Cork County Camogie Board in 1940, and chairperson of the Board in 1943. She was frustrated by the number of players who ceased their involvement with camogie when they married. She was also of the opinion that the involvement of males as administrators of camogie affairs, was a barrier to the continued involvement of females after they retired from playing. As chairperson, Íde Bean Uí Shé insisted that the officership of the Cork County Camogie Board should be all female. She withdrew the Cork team from competing in the All-Ireland Camogie Championship on the principle that there should be no male camogie administrators at national level. She held Cork out of the competition for eight years. During that time, she re-organised Cork camogie competitions, helped the Board to develop its finances, encouraged the development of second-level schools' competitions and oversaw a rapid growth in the number of affiliated clubs. She stepped down as chairperson in 1950 and was made Board President for life. Soon after she stepped down as chairperson, Cork inevitably returned to intercounty camogie competition. While some of her more ambitious aims, such as a dedicated venue for playing camogie, were not achieved during her life time, Íde Bean Uí Shé remained a committed supporter of the role of women in camogie and, by extension, society, until her death in 1986. This study draws on the published histories of the National Camogie Association and the Cork County Camogie Board as well as the coverage of camogie affairs in newspapers of the time. A number of interviews were also conducted with individuals who worked in camogie administration with Íde Bean Uí Shé. The study reveals the tale of a woman who believed in, and campaigned for, the rights of women to participate in sport, in this case camogie, on the playing field and in the boardroom.*

*Keywords: Camogie; Íde Bean Uí Shé; Cork County Camogie Board; GAA; UCC Camogie; Old Als*

The Gaelic League was founded in 1893 as an organisation to aid the preservation of the Irish language and culture.<sup>1</sup> In 1881, only 18% of the population could speak Irish. By 1906, there were

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<sup>1</sup> The Gaelic League was the most successful of a number of organisations founded in the late-nineteenth century with the aim of promoting the Irish language. Founded by Eoin MacNeill and Douglas Hyde, who would later be the first President of Ireland, the Gaelic League widened and strengthened the Irish consciousness of the lower and middle classes, and gave Irish a respect and status it had lacked in the previous 50 years (Myrtle Hill, 'Culture and Religion' in

more than 600 branches of the Gaelic League throughout Ireland, catering for men and women.<sup>2</sup> The Gaelic League endorsed the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) because of the GAA's efforts to revive and play the ancient game of hurling and other traditional Irish athletic activities.<sup>3</sup> Some female members of the Gaelic League were not satisfied to be only onlookers and supporters of games and physical activity.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, some members of the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League in Dublin set about modifying the sport of hurling for women. It is likely that they observed the progress of women's field hockey, particularly in the Dublin area.<sup>5</sup> The idea of modifying hurling appealed to them on a cultural and participatory level. They called the game Camoguidheacht, soon to become Camogie. The game had a lighter ball, a smaller field size and fewer players on the team than hurling.<sup>6</sup> The first game of camogie was an exhibition game played as part of the Gaelic Leagues annual Oireachtas in 1904.<sup>7</sup>

The game quickly spread within Gaelic League circles, and by 1905 the game was being played in Cork. In the summer of that year, Tadhg de Barra—a very active member of every possible Irish cultural, political and social movement he could join, including the Gaelic League—founded a team called Fáinne an Lae.<sup>8</sup> De Barra was a member of the Sundays Well Hurling and Football club. Sundays Well, situated on a hill overlooking the River Lee and UCC, was a middle-class suburb of Cork, home to many members of various strands of the Irish Cultural movement. Sean Conlon (or Ó Choindealbháin), secretary of the Lees Football Club and member of the Gaelic League, coached the players in the basics of the game. His sisters Kate and Margaret Conlon and niece, Christina Conlon, also played. Sean's daughter Íde Conlon (or Ní Choindealbháin), later to become Íde Bean Uí Shé, was born about 1916.<sup>9</sup> When Kate and Margaret Conlon welcomed their baby sister Íde into the family, they could not have imagined the profound impact she would have on the development of camogie in Cork.

Íde Bean Uí Shé received her primary education at St Aloysius School, Cork, a school that had embraced camogie since 1916.<sup>10</sup> Her mother died when she was 12 years old, and her father sent her to Dublin to receive her secondary education from the Dominican Nuns at Eccles Street,<sup>11</sup> another bastion of camogie at that time.<sup>12</sup> Íde returned to Cork in the mid 1930s to study Irish at UCC, where she received her BA in 1938, adding a HDip in 1939 and an MA in 1940. There are no records of her

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Donnchadh Ó Corráin and Tomás O'Riordan, eds., *Ireland 1870–1904: Coercion and Conciliation* (Four Courts Press, 2011), 55–67. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Ríona Nic Congáil, “Looking on for Centuries from the Sideline”: Gaelic Feminism and the Rise of Camogie’, *Irish-American Cultural Institute* 48, nos. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2013): 174.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Such links stem from the shared origin during the Irish Revival. R.F. Forster writes the notion that the GAA, the Gaelic League and the Celtic Literacy Society in unison formed a trinity, responsible for the “cultural revolution”.’ B. Ó Conchubhair, ‘The GAA and the Irish Language’ in *The Gaelic Athletic Association 1884–2009* ed. M. Cronin, William Murphy and Paul Rouse (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 137–155. 139.

<sup>4</sup> Congáil, ‘Looking on for Centuries’, 168.

<sup>5</sup> John Lucey, ‘Women's Hockey in Ireland—A Short History’, *History Ireland* 26, no.5 (September/October 2018): 44–47.

<sup>6</sup> Congáil, ‘Looking on for Centuries’, 168.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Tadhg De Barra: the Story of an Irish Revolutionary* (Cork: Donal Ó Drisceoil and the Cork Council of Trade Unions, 2011), 9–10.

<sup>9</sup> It has not been possible to trace the actual birth of Íde Bean Uí Shé.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Moran, *A Game of Our Own, Camogie's Story* (Dublin: Camogie Association, 2011), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Moran, *Cork's Camogie Story 1904 to 2000* (Cork: Cork Camogie Board, 2001), 39.

<sup>12</sup> Dominican Schools of Eccles Street and Sion Hill were leading schools in Dublin during the 1920s. Evidence of this may be seen in the occasional camogie game reports that appeared in the *Irish Independent* during those years (‘College Camogie League’, 27 October 1924, 9; ‘Results’ 17 October 1927, 9). At a gathering to celebrate the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the University College Dublin Camogie Club on 3 May 1932, the *Irish Press* reported Mollie Gill, President of the Camogie Association, praising UCD for persevering through tough years (8). Gill added that the membership of 40 was almost entirely drawn from the Dominican Colleges of Eccles St and Sion Hill.

playing for UCC in the intervarsity camogie competition, the Ashbourne Cup, but she is recorded as playing with UCC in 1938 and 1939 in the Cork County Championships. She would remain a member of the UCC club for the rest of her life. Íde Bean Uí Shé's influence on camogie in Cork was ultimately central to its success as a popular, female-led organisation during the middle years of the twentieth century when there were few outlets available to women, or to feminist thought, in Ireland.

## Camogie in Cork and Nationally in 1930s Ireland

The Camogie Association and the GAA have always been separate organisations, although both bodies have broadly promoted the same ideals and principles with regard to encouraging Irish games, pastimes and traditions, as well as endorsing the use of the Irish language wherever possible.<sup>13</sup> Camogie however, only began to develop as a national entity in the 1920s. Many of the players recruited at that time were from outside of the original nationalist-mind base of the Gaelic League and consequently did not have the same deep-rooted issues with other sports that were originally associated with British Rule.<sup>14</sup>

One of the principle reasons the GAA was founded in 1884 was to provide a platform for Irish male athletes to be able to take part in athletic competitions.<sup>15</sup> The team games of hurling and gaelic football quickly found favour with the new organisation. Within ten years of its foundation, hurling and football had completely eclipsed athletics and become the flagship activities of the GAA.<sup>16</sup> By the mid-1890s, the GAA had introduced a ban on playing soccer, cricket and hockey because they were seen as British games. The objectives of the founders of Camogie in 1904 were as much directed towards allowing women to play games in the same manner as their male counterparts as they were motivated by support for the national and cultural movements of the day. For many female participants, the freedom to play field games, as men had always been able to do, was just as important as any anti-British feelings that the national Camogie organisation may have held.<sup>17</sup>

1932 was a landmark year for the development of camogie. It was the year the All-Ireland intercounty Camogie Championship began.<sup>18</sup> In Cork, 1932 was the year a County Camogie Board was also established. Cork did not play in the first All-Ireland Camogie Championship because the board did not apply to enter on time.<sup>19</sup> The first Chairman of the Cork Camogie Board was Mr D. O'Flynn N.T. of Mallow.<sup>20</sup> While the other officers were women, many of the club delegates were men. It appears that O'Flynn, was the driving force behind both the establishment and the management of the first year of the board.<sup>21</sup> The new board did not have great resources for playing

<sup>13</sup> 'Gaelic Ban. Attitude of Cork Camogie Clubs. Letter to County Board', *Cork Examiner*, 8 March 1933, 13.

<sup>14</sup> The initial enthusiasm for camogie began to fade after 1906. By 1911, the game was almost dead until a meeting at the Gaelic League Hall, Rutland Square, Dublin, reformed the Association. The game then developed in the universities of Cork, Dublin and Galway between 1913 and 1917. As the graduates from the universities moved into teaching posts, they formed camogie teams in secondary schools in Cork and Dublin. The War of Independence and Civil War greatly reduced the opportunity to organise games until 1923, when the game spread rapidly into new areas of the country. There were 100 delegates at the 1925 Congress. In 1928, Camogie featured in the Tailteann Games and new County Boards were formed throughout the country, including Galway (1928) and Kerry (1929). Moran, *A Game of Our Own*, 11-38.

<sup>15</sup> R. Holt, 'Ireland and the Birth of Modern Sport' in *The Gaelic Athletic Association 1884-2009*, ed. M. Cronin et al., (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 33 - 35

<sup>16</sup> M. De Búrca, *History of the Gaelic Athletic Association* (Dublin: Gaelic Athletic Association, 1980), 70.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Moran, *A Game*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> Ten counties entered the first All-Ireland Inter County Championship. Dublin was the winner. *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Moran, *Cork's Camogie*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> The name D. O'Flynn N.T. appears in many camogie reports of that time, but his Christian name is never given. Prior to 1974, trainee primary school teachers undertook a two-year programme and were awarded an National Teacher (NT) qualification. This qualification was later replaced by the Bachelor of Education Degree (BEd.).

<sup>21</sup> The other officers were: Vice-Chairman Miss E Coughlan; Miss L Foley (UCC), Secretary; Miss Smith, Treasurer; and Miss Hallissey (Youghal) Registrar. 'Camogie, Conference in Cork', *Cork Examiner*, 5 February 1932, 5.

games and consequently were dependent on the GAA for the use of its pitches to enable the playing of games<sup>22</sup>. The Cork County GAA Board welcomed the additional activity, but it appears that they also kept a close eye on the activities of the Camogie Board to ensure that the new board was conforming to the GAA's ideals.<sup>23</sup> In early 1933, the Cork Camogie Board discussed the introduction of a ban on playing foreign games. The record of the debate on the proposed ban shows that Chairman O'Flynn and most of the other men at the meeting were in favour of the ban, while the women who spoke were predominantly against it. Parts of the debate were published verbatim in the *Cork Examiner* on the first of March. The debate highlighted the difference in attitude between those who just wanted to play, and those who felt that Camogie's remit was to promote nationalism and Irish culture as well as the game.<sup>24</sup> From the comments of the women who spoke at the meeting, it is clear that their priority consideration in the playing of camogie and its associated activities, e.g. club dances, was that these activities be enjoyed for their own sake, notwithstanding their links to nationalism and Irish culture. The men who spoke, with the exception of one, clearly saw the participation in non-Irish sports as a statement of nationalism and culture.

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<sup>22</sup> Playing pitches were not plentiful at that time. A survey of related newspaper reports show there were four official venues within Cork City: Turners Cross, the Athletic Grounds (now Páirc Uí Chaoimh), Douglas and the UCC Ground at the Mardyke. There were also venues in the major towns, such as Mallow, Bandon, Middleton and Ballincollig. Many clubs rented fields from farmers. The fields rarely had changing facilities and did not suit women. As a result, camogie games were usually played at the more established GAA venues when the GAA clubs were not playing.

<sup>23</sup> Sean McCarthy, Chairman of the Cork County Board, spoke of the relationship between the GAA and Camogie: 'There was no connection between the GAA and the Camogie organisation beyond the fact that it was promoting games. The GAA had committed itself to the support of national games [...] and to stand for the revival of the Irish language and the promotion of Irish industries. If the outlook of the organisation in question (Camogie) were the pushing forward of Gaelic ideals, the movement would have the assistance of the Board'. 'Gaelic Ban. [etc]', *Cork Examiner*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> 'Camogie Clubs, Cork Teams and Foreign Games. Ban Excluded', *Cork Examiner*, 28 February 1933, 12.

Mr P O'Brien (Lough Rovers) as mover of the motion said... foreign games were of no acquisition for camogie whatsoever. He proposed there be a ban on foreign games.

Mr O'Mahony (Ballinhassig) seconded.

Mr Barry (Rathcormac) said he would propose a direct negative...He believed the ban in the G.A.A. had already led to more friction and bitterness than its original promoters ever intended. He believed .... it would lead to endless trouble and would do no good to the association.

Mr Purcell (Cobh) '...the spirit of camogie is the same as the G.A.A. I am strongly in favour of a ban...'

The chairman pointed out the possibility of the decision affecting the Camogie County Board to the extent of debarring them the use of their meeting place [the G.A.A. Board Rooms] and also the use of certain venues.

Miss Kelleher (Muskerry) '...In the city the ban would affect three important teams to the extent of their being unable to continue to exist at all... We would be very foolish to impose any set of rules that have no real value, and would lead to friction and a long series of objections and espionage and all kinds of unpleasant things. (applause)

Part 1 of an extract from the debate to ban foreign games and dancing at a meeting of the Cork Camogie Board in 1933. 'Camogie Clubs, Cork Teams and Foreign Games. Ban Excluded.' *Cork Examiner*, 28 February 1933, 12.

Mr O'Brien '...if they were going to play an Irish game, they should act up to Irish principles.'

Miss Foley (U.C.C.) said U.C.C. were playing camogie since 1916...she was quite sure her Irish principles would not be affected by whether she played a game with a soft ball or a hard ball. Why should they be knocked out by a stupid ban?

Miss Cotter (Mayfield) asked 'Is badminton a foreign game?'

The Chairman replied 'I could not tell you; I think it is'.

Miss Cotter 'Is tennis, is golf? – they are not Irish, surely and if we play badminton or golf, we cannot play camogie. It is ridiculous.'

Lady delegate 'Why dance a foreign dance? Why not go to the Grianán instead of the Arcadia (a well-known dance hall in Cork) for foreign dancing?'

A discussion followed on what exactly it was proposed to ban.

Mr O'Brien said his motion did include foreign dancing.

Miss O'Leary 'Ban speech so. Ban everything.'

Miss Kelleher 'It has never yet been proved that hockey is detrimental to camogie.'

Mr O'Brien then submitted a written motion proposing a ban on all foreign games and pastimes, on hockey, which in his opinion, was absolutely foreign to camogie in general. Camogie players not to be allowed to attend or support these in any way, or soccer, rugby or cricket matches.

An amendment, as written by Mr Barry, regarded the motion as detrimental to the spirit and development of camogie in county Cork.

A ballot taken on the amendment resulted: - For 15. Against 9. The result was greeted with applause.

The Chairman said 'That settles it. There is to be no ban.'

Miss Cotter, 'So we can dance on'

The rejection of a ban brought the wrath of the Cork GAA County Board down upon the Camogie Board, and caused a split in the ranks of camogie—with pro-ban people setting up a rival board to run their affairs.<sup>25</sup> Both Cork Camogie Boards applied to enter the 1933 All-Ireland Championship. The Camogie Central Council dismissed both applications, and refused to enter a team from Cork until both county boards reunited.<sup>26</sup> As a result, Cork once again failed to compete in the All-Ireland Championship.<sup>27</sup> The breakaway clubs were unable to maintain their impetus, and the split was healed with help of an intervention of the Central Council in September 1933.

In an effort to improve local relationships, the original Camogie Board sent a letter of clarification to the Cork GAA Board saying the decision ‘of a non-imposition of the ban may give the wrong impression to the GAA by implying a falling away from Gaelic ideals, but that was not the case.’<sup>28</sup> The Chairman of the GAA County Board, Sean McCarthy, soon to be National President of the GAA, told the County Board meeting on 7 March, ‘it seems that the Camogie Association, as at present constituted in Cork, was not conforming to those [a full Irish programme] ideals...it may be a matter for the board to consider whether the room remain open to them for their meetings.’<sup>29</sup>

Ultimately, the 1934 national Camogie Congress introduced a ban on foreign games.<sup>30</sup> This ban overruled the feelings of the Cork clubs, and players who played both games were forced to make a choice, mostly between camogie and hockey. The ban weakened the reigning champions Dublin, who were seeking their third successive title. Like Cork, Dublin had a strong crossover of players between camogie and hockey. Cork finally did get to enter the All-Ireland in 1934, and won the title, defeating Louth in the final.<sup>31</sup> Cork went on to retain the title in 1935 and 1936.

By this time, there was another debate within the camogie association, as the presence of male officers was also causing unrest at national level. In 1935 the Camogie Association introduced a ban on men as delegates to the annual National Congress.<sup>32</sup> This was followed in 1936 by a ban on male referees for camogie games. However, the aim of creating an all-female organisation at officer and referee level was not feasible in the Ireland of the 1930s, when women had more limited leisure time and financial independence, and were perceived to belong within the home as wives and mothers. Transport and communication were also difficult and expensive, and because of this, the burden of running an all-female association proved too much at the time. Many clubs also had bans on married women playing, so marriage often ended a woman’s relationship with the sport as the organisation lost valuable human capital. Within a few years, men were back in officer roles and refereeing games in many counties.<sup>33</sup>

The playing of foreign games continued to be an issue at both a local and a national level. In 1937, a player was suspended from the city-based Cara Cliodhna Club for playing hockey, and in protest, the whole team gave up camogie and took up hockey instead.<sup>34</sup> Cara Cliodhna had been a very active club. It was founded by Cáit O’Donoghue, the first National Organiser of the Camogie Association, upon her return to live in Cork City in 1925.<sup>35</sup> The loss of this club was a significant

<sup>25</sup> ‘A Break-Away, Cork City Clubs Leave Parent Body—The Ban Question’, *Evening Echo*, 1 March 1933, 2. See also S Ní Chrotaith, ‘Letter to the Editor, Camogie’, *Evening Echo*, 11 March 1933, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Moran, *A Game*, 44.

<sup>27</sup> Dublin retained the title in 1933.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Gaelic Ban’, *Cork Examiner*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> This ban remained in place until 1939.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Cork Camogie Team Win First All-Ireland—Southerners Give Impressive Display—Louth Beaten’, *Evening Echo*, 29 October 1934, 8.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Camoguidheacht, No More Men, Unanimous Vote of Cailíní Debars Them From Congress’, *Irish Press*, 25 February 1935, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Moran, *A Game*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Moran, *Cork’s Camogie*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Moran, *A Game*, 31.

blow to the morale of Cork Camogie. The withdrawal fulfilled the prophecy of the Muskerry delegate at the debate of 1933: '[t]his (ban on hockey) ... will lead to all kinds of unpleasant things.'<sup>36</sup> When the ban was removed nationally by the national Camogie Congress in 1939, the Ulster Counties, led by Antrim, along with some other Leinster counties formed a separate association, which retained a ban. The split lasted two years before the General Secretary of the GAA, Pádraig Ó Chaoimh, negotiated an end to the dispute and the reinstatement of the ban. After this, the playing of 'foreign' games was never again a major issue within camogie.<sup>37</sup> The ban was formally lifted again in 1972.<sup>38</sup>

## Old Aloysius founded; women take over the County Board

In 1937, the Old Aloysius Club, known as Old Als, was formed. The club membership was made up of past pupils of the St Aloysius School; a progressive school which attracted girls from middle-class families.<sup>39</sup> The school was very successful in school camogie competitions, and it provided a steady supply of good players for the Old Als Club which won the County Championship fifteen times between 1938 and 1961. Old Als had the benefit of some astute leadership during the club's existence. Lil Kirby was a typical example of the type of player that made Old Als successful. After leaving St Aloysius, she studied for a BComm at UCC, starring on the camogie field with UCC and Cork during her college years. She then transferred to Old Als upon qualifying in 1938, and helped the new club win its first county championship title. Many other players followed a similar path to Old Als over the years.

Old Als, as new county champions in 1938, inspired a coup at the county convention in December 1938.<sup>40</sup> This led to the election of Lil Kirby as the first female chairperson of the Cork County Board. Four other members of the Cork senior camogie team were also elected as officers.<sup>41</sup> The new all-female officer board inherited an organisation which was in a financially vulnerable position. By 1939, the Cork County Board was in a very poor state financially.<sup>42</sup> The board was so broke that, when Cork was due to travel to Louth to play the home county in the All-Ireland semi-final, they considered withdrawing from the game in order to save the expense.<sup>43</sup> The matter was resolved when Louth, obviously desperate to host such an important game, sent funds to Cork to help defray the expense.<sup>44</sup> Cork travelled, and not only defeated Louth, but went on to win the All-Ireland title for the fourth time since 1934.

<sup>36</sup> 'Camogie Clubs, Cork Teams [etc.]', *Cork Examiner*, 12.

[Contribution of Miss Kelleher (Muskerry) a delegate at the Cork County Camogie Board meeting of Saturday 25 February 1933 to the debate on implementing a ban on foreign game including hockey].

<sup>37</sup> From time to time, issues arose which were related to foreign games. For example, an Antrim motion to include indoor football as a banned sport was passed by Congress in 1967. Indoor football became very popular throughout Ireland from the late 1950s until the early 1970s. Moran, *A Game*, 133.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-64.

<sup>39</sup> The St Aloysius School began playing camogie in 1916 when Mollie Riordan joined the teaching staff. She was a member of the UCC Camogie club founded in 1913. St Aloysius dominated Cork Schools Camogie, winning 42 championships in 55 years between 1918 and 1973. *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>40</sup> Past pupils of St Aloysius would hold the office of County Board chairperson for the 38 of the next 40 years. This includes Mary Moran author of *Cork's Camogie Story* and *A Game of Our Own*. She was chairperson from 1968 to 1977. She was National President of camogie from 1979 to 1982. Moran, *Cork's Camogie*, 24-25.

<sup>41</sup> Lil Kirby is credited with being Chairman of the Cork County Board in 1938 in Moran, *Cork's Camogie*, 25. This would appear to contradict the *Evening Echo* of 21 December 1938, where Mr. Purcell is recorded as giving the Chairman's address at the Annual Convention and Lil Kirby is recorded as defeating Miss J Crotty for the position of Chairman (11). The others elected were Lena Delaney, V-Chair, Rene Fitzgerald Secretary, Maura Cronin Treasurer, Kathleen Coughlan Registrar. *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>42</sup> 'The treasurer Mr. T O'Connor submitted his balance sheet which showed the year had not been too good financially. There was a deficit of £39.' 'Camogie - Cork Board's Convention—Decrease in Club Membership', *Evening Echo*, 21 December 1938, 11.

<sup>43</sup> Moran, *Cork's Camogie*, 27.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*



At the beginning of 1940, the accounting acumen of Lil Kirby reduced the deficit from £39 to just £3.<sup>45</sup> The elected Officers were once again all female. Maura Brennan became the new secretary, and Íde Conlon, representing the UCC Club, replaced Kathleen Coughlan as registrar. Up to that time, Íde Conlon rarely appeared in camogie coverage. Most of the coverage given to her in the newspapers concerned her involvement in the promotion of the Irish language and related topics. In January 1939, she spoke as Íde Ní Choindealbháin on 'Bantracht na Eireann' ('Women of Ireland') at a function organised by a UCC group.<sup>46</sup>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>AN CUALLACHT COLAISTE OLLSCOILE CORCAIGHE.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">LEIGHEACTH ON REACHTAIRE IDE NI CHOINDEALBHAIN "Bantracht na hEireann."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Cainteoirí— EAMONN O NEILL, T.D., PROF. AGNES O FARRELLY, AN FEAR MOR.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Arus na Bleachtuiochta, 8 p.m. Failte Roim Chach.</p>	<p>well attended.</p> <p><b>AN CUALLACHT GAODHLACH.</b> The inaugural meeting of An Cuallacht Gaodhlach was held on Saturday night. The auditor, Ide Ni Choinealbhain, read a paper entitled "Bantracht na b-Eireann." Prof. Agnes O Farrelly, University College, Dublin; Mr. Eamonn O Neill, T.D., and An Fear Mor spoke to the paper. Prof. T. O'Donoghue ("Torna") presided. Ide Ni Choindealbhain is the daughter of Sean uas O Choinealbhain. Lecturer in Education.</p>
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Left: notice a meeting of An Cuallacht (an Irish Cultural group) featuring Íde Ní Choindealbháin (Conlon) from the *Cork Examiner*, 21 January 1939. Right: a brief report on the meeting from *Cork Examiner*, 25 January 25, 9.

During 1940, a change was forced on the all-woman officership board when Maura Brennan stepped down from the role of secretary during the season. She was replaced by Mr Liam Dynan, who continued in the role for three years.<sup>47</sup> Cork retained the All-Ireland title in 1940 and made it three in-a-row in 1941.

The Annual Reports at the end of the 1941 year reported the continuing improvement of the Board's finances. Based on a belief that there was a surplus in the accounts, the Board decided to purchase and present overdue trophies and medals—none had been presented for three years—at a function held after the Convention. The successful members of the All-Ireland winning teams of 1939, '40 and '41 each received a miniature cup to mark their achievement. The County Champions of 1938 to 1941, and the winners of many other competitions were also presented with their medals.<sup>48</sup> Also in 1941, a Schools Board was set up with the intention of affording more schools the opportunity to play Camogie, thereby attracting more potential players to the sport.<sup>49</sup> It would appear from reports that this did not go very well in its first year.<sup>50</sup> By the end of the 1940s however, the board claimed that 80% of the girls' secondary schools in the city were catered for in school competitions, and that there were 1,000 girls of 18 years or younger playing camogie in Cork.

<sup>45</sup> 'Camogie Notes—Successful Convention', *Evening Echo*, 27 January 1940, 7.

<sup>46</sup> 'An Cuallacht' [advertisement], *Cork Examiner*, 21 January 1939, 8.

<sup>47</sup> 'Camogie—Cork Convention', *Cork Examiner*, 17 January 1944, 4.

<sup>48</sup> 'Camogie Notes by Brighid', *Evening Echo*, Saturday 7 February 1942, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Moran, *Cork's Camogie*, 36.

<sup>50</sup> 'Camogie Notes by Brighid', *Evening Echo*, Saturday 3 January 1942, 2.

## End of one era becomes the beginning of another

Lil Kirby, the chair of the Cork Camogie Board, was elected president of the National Camogie Association in 1942. In the same year, she married and moved to Bandon. Because her Club, Old Als, had a ban on playing married players (a ban which lasted until 1968),<sup>51</sup> her marriage ended her playing days.<sup>52</sup> Travelling from Bandon to Cork for camogie meetings was an arduous task due to petrol rationing in 1942, so she stepped down as chair of the Cork Board at the end of the year. She retained her rôle as President of the Camogie Association until 1944.<sup>53</sup> After that, she drifted out of camogie circles.<sup>54</sup> Íde Conlon also married in 1942. She married Lieut. Michael O'Shea, a lecturer in Dairy Science at UCC. In keeping with her eye for fashion and the social status of the Conlon family in cultural circles, the wedding was a glamorous affair.<sup>55</sup> From then on, Íde Conlon became known as Íde Bean Uí Shé. When Lil Kirby stepped down as chairperson, Íde Bean Uí Shé, who continued to live in Cork city, was elected in her place.<sup>56</sup>



Wedding day picture of Íde Bean Uí Shé. *Cork Examiner*, 9 September 1942.

## 1943

Íde Bean Uí Shé's first year as chairperson was dogged by financial matters. She discovered very quickly that the accounts, as presented to the conventions of 1941 and 1942, did not reflect the true

<sup>51</sup> M. Moran, *A Game of Our Own*, pp. 59.

<sup>52</sup> Many institutions, including the Civil Service and the teaching profession operated a ban on married women working at that time. Many women's sports took a similar view. In the case of Old Aloysius, the fact that the St Aloysius School provided a steady flow of new players each year allowed Old Aloysius to be more accepting of the practice than might otherwise have been the case.

<sup>53</sup> Camogie at National level does not appear to have a large turnover of female officers due to women getting married. This is because, as with most national voluntary organisations people tend to work their way through the lower layers of the organisation to national level. While a study does not exist on the drop out of married women at club level or county level, stepping back from Camogie after marriage is likely to be a major reason for the large turnover of clubs, especially rural clubs, between 1930 and 1970.

<sup>54</sup> Moran, *A Game of Our Own*, pp. 493.

<sup>55</sup> Moran, *Cork's Camogie Story 1904 to 2000*, pp 39.

<sup>56</sup> 'Cork Camogie Convention - L Kirby Resigns as Chairman' *Cork Examiner*, [Monday] 25 January 1943,4.

financial position of the board.<sup>57</sup> Income had been overstated, and not all expenses incurred had been paid. The situation was so critical that Cork once again considered withdrawing from the All-Ireland Championship as a means of reducing costs.<sup>58</sup> Cork did not pursue this option, and went on to reach the All-Ireland final: a loss to Dublin. It was the end of the year before Íde Bean Uí Shé would be able to begin to deal with these financial issues. She was more successful in other aspects of the board's work, and used her old Dublin connections to organise a game between a Cork Schools team and a Dublin Schools team. The match helped to promote the game within the schools.<sup>59</sup> This became an annual affair, and remained in place until the introduction of the All-Ireland Second Level Championship in 1969.<sup>60</sup>

It was at her first convention as chairperson in January 1944 that Bean Uí Shé indicated her intentions for developing camogie in Cork. Liam Dynan, the outgoing male secretary of three and a half years, who was also the National Director of Organisation, was opposed by Alice Quigley. The vote ended in a tie. The Chairperson had a casting vote to decide the matter. Íde Bean Uí Shé used her casting vote to jettison Liam Dynan from the Board in favour of Alice Quigley.<sup>61</sup> The decision to select Alice Quigley may have seemed strange at the time, but as 1944 progressed, it became clear that Íde Bean Uí Shé saw Liam Dynan as an obstacle in the way of her plans for Cork Camogie. Over time, Alice Quigley's work as secretary would show that her selection was an inspired rather than a vindictive choice.

## 1944 - The Year of Revolution

### Financial Crisis

Íde Bean Uí Shé and Alice Quigley were of a similar mind when it came to matters involving the future of camogie. The pair instigated a number of processes directed at moving men out of camogie. The most urgent matter facing the board, however, was the financial situation. A brief look at the stated financial position of the Cork Camogie Board in comparison with the Cork County GAA Board, highlighted the vast gulf that existed between them in terms of finance.

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<sup>57</sup> While there was no public statement about finance, it is clear that Íde Bean Uí Shé was not happy with the financial situation. Only at the end was she in a position to investigate the matter properly.

<sup>58</sup> 'Camogie—Cork Convention', *Cork Examiner*, 17 January 1944, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Moran, *Cork's Camogie*, 39.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> 'Camogie—Cork Convention', *Cork Examiner*, 4.

**The Profit and Loss account balance of Cork Camogie versus Cork G.A.A. 1941 to 1944**

Year	Cork Camogie	Cork G.A.A.
1941	£3 (loss)#	£247 (profit)*
1942	£30 (loss)#	£127 (profit)
1943	£8 (loss)#	£49 (profit)**
1944	£5 (profit)	£1,013 (profit)

#these figures were the figures given to convention each. It would transpire they were understated.

\*Both teams won the All-Ireland title in 1941.

\*\*The G.A.A. profit was much greater than the £49 stated. The unusually small profit was explained in the newspapers as, extra expenses that were paid to clubs as a compensation for the high cost of travel when competing.

It can be clearly seen from the figures above that there was a huge gulf in support between the Cork camogie and GAA operations. It was not just the GAA that was financially outperforming camogie; men's soccer was also very strong in Cork. Cork United was the soccer club representing Cork in the League of Ireland at that time. The club won the League and Cup in 1941, and retained the League in 1942 and 1943. It regularly drew crowds of more than 10,000 spectators for important league and cup games. For example, the 1943 FAI Cup two-leg semi-final against Bridewell drew 26,500 spectators who paid £1,419.<sup>62</sup> Women's sports, camogie included, were simply not supported by the general public, therefore money from gate receipts was, at best, paltry.<sup>63</sup> With no obvious source of ready income, all monies had to be minded and spent wisely.

This level of caution was something that had not been practiced. Íde Bean Uí Shé hired Philip Shanahan, Accountant and Auditor, to investigate the board finances. His report was submitted in August 1944, exposing some very slipshod record keeping between 1941 and 1943. Shanahan's report showed that the accounts reported in 1941, '42 and '43 were understated, and the board owed twice as much money as it originally thought. It highlighted some very careless recording of the Camogie Board's finances. There were many instances of double payments, non-payments and failure to issue proper receipts. The report summary was a damning indictment of the board's practices in general, and secretary Liam Dynan in particular. Many of the entries in the cash book were in his handwriting. It was stated in the report that he admitted to having made up figures from time to time, to balance the books. Two of the key findings of the report were that the 'Treasurer should have sole control of the finances under the direct supervision of the board', and that the 'organiser', referring to Liam Dynan, 'must give an undertaking not to interfere in financial matters'.<sup>64</sup> The report explained one of

<sup>62</sup>P. Carter, *A Century of Cork Soccer Memories* (Cork: Evening Echo), 1995, 45.

<sup>63</sup> Admission prices usually varied between six pence to one shilling depending on the importance of a game. The total gate receipts for the Munster Final of 1942 between Cork and Limerick at the Mardyke were recorded as £28 in the Shanahan report into the finances of Cork Camogie. Prior to the game, the *Cork Examiner* of 4 August reported that the Munster Council had fixed the admission price at 1 shilling (1/-). An advertisement for the Junior County Final at the Mardyke in the *Evening Echo* of 19 Dec 1942 gave admission prices of one shilling or six pence for adults and three pence for schoolchildren.

<sup>64</sup> Liam Dynan was no longer Secretary when the Shanahan Report was published. However, he still held the post of National Organiser within the Camogie Association, hence the reference to a 'the organiser' in the recommendations.

the reasons why Íde Bean Uí Shé used her casting vote, in January 1944, in favour of Alice Quigley.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

SUMMARY OF REPORT ON THE FINANCES OF THE  
CORK CO. BOARD FOR THE YEARS 1941, 1942  
AND 1942.

- (1) I regret very much that it has been my duty to unveil to you what must be termed a scandalous state of affairs and a public disgrace.
- (2) The books were presented in a shocking condition.
- (3) No vouchers were available by which doubtful entries might be checked.
- (4) There were actual cash shortages in each of the years 1941, 1942 and 1943 amounting in all to £24.13.0 which were not disclosed to the Board.
- (5) The accounts presented to the Board were entirely incorrect and misleading.
- (6) According to the figures supplied by the organiser, and allowing for the retention of 10% of the gate receipts or £14 is to be paid to the Central Council, the loss to the Board on the match must be set out as £22.
- (7) It is my considered opinion that the real cause of the terrible mess was the fact that the organiser (or Secretary at that time) thought fit to interfere in matters outside his province. The organiser took upon himself the responsibility of handling the monies and of obtaining the necessary vouchers. He, therefore, took upon himself the responsibility which goes with it.
- (8) The organiser manipulated the accounts of the Board
- (9) The organiser made fictitious entries in the books of the Board.
- (10) It is recommended
  - (a) That a proper system of accounting of the Board's finances to be adopted;
  - (b) That the finances of the board be properly audited in future;
  - (c) That the organiser must give an undertaking that he will not interfere with the financial matters.

(Signed)

Philip L. Shanahan, B.Comm., A.S.S.A  
(Philip L. Shanahan, B.Comm., A.S.S.A.)

Incorporated Accountant & Auditor.

Summary page of auditor's Report on the Finances of the Cork County Camogie Board for the years 1941, 1942 and 1943. The report was commissioned by the Cork County Camogie Board. Philip Shanahan, Incorporated Accountants and Auditors, conducted the investigation in the accounts and produced the report.

The report proposed eight recommendations for the board to adopt. Recommendation 2 of the report warned Liam Dynan not to interfere with financial matters, Recommendation 4 introduced a system of vouched expenses, and Recommendation 8 introduced an annual audit.

In conclusion I have the following recommendations to make to the Board:

1. The Treasurer should have sole handling of the finances under the direct supervision of the Board or a Financial Committee elected by the Board.
2. The Organiser must give an undertaking that he will not interfere with financial matters.
3. When items are to be paid, the matter should be discussed at the weekly meeting of the Board and the Treasurer should obtain the written authority of the Board to pay the items due.
4. In the past it was possible for members to have personal bills charged up to and paid by the Board. This should be stopped. The Board has a duty to the players and to the public to see that only the expense of the Board and not those private expenses of the members are paid out of the funds of the Board.
5. When bills are paid the Treasurer must obtain a receipt. The Board should examine these receipts periodically, to see if they are in order and, to link up the payment with those items which were authorised to be paid.
6. A proper system of book-keeping must be installed and the Treasurer instructed in the manner of keeping them. This should be quite a simple matter.
7. It may be necessary to forward this Report to the Central Council so that the loss may be recovered, and the Board should see that proper steps are taken to prevent a repetition.
8. Provision should be made for an annual audit of the books by a qualified auditor and a resolution to this effect should be passed by the Board.

This concluded my report. I must thank you for the attention you have given me and I must apologise to you for having to deal with this unpleasant matter at such great length.

Philip L. Shanahan B.Comm., A.S.A.A.  
Incorporated Accountant and Auditor  
6 South Mall, Cork  
25. August, 1944

Recommendations of auditor's report.

Liam Shanahan remained on as the auditor of the Camogie Board's accounts. It is reasonable to say that the £5 profit recorded in 1944 was a fair and true reflection of the board's finances. The Cork GAA Board made £1,013 the same year. In the aftermath of the audit, it was clear that Íde Bean Uí Shé would have to be steadfast, financially prudent and determined if she was to fulfil her ambition of developing the game of camogie and its administration.

## Revamp of the Schools Board

Cork camogie could not be developed overnight. Short-term and long-term measures would be called for. The Cork Schools Board became an instrument of long-term planning. At a meeting in September 1944, it was decided to recruit schoolgirls to act as Schools Board Officers. The girls were allowed to organise the championship and affairs of the Board, through Irish, under the guidance of the adult Board.<sup>65</sup>

This was a far-sighted move. Bean Uí Shé, mindful no doubt of the haemorrhage of effective officers, such as Lil Kirby because of marriage, family commitments and the prevailing social expectation that women would stay at home and take care of their families, saw the Schools Board as a vehicle that would not only introduce hundreds of girls to the game, but also provide a steady stream of young, unmarried and trained officer material for the Adult Board and the clubs. The benefits of the move would become apparent in the next decade.

## Munster Council stand-off

Her next move was a mixture of her long-term and short-term strategy. The Central Council organised a meeting that was held in Cappoquin on 17 September 1944. The purpose of the meeting was to re-organise the Munster Council of the Camogie Association. The meeting fell under the remit of former board secretary Liam Dynan, who still held the post of National Organiser. Bean Uí Shé attended as part of a three-person Cork delegation.<sup>66</sup> She queried the authority of the meeting to make changes and submitted a number of demands that, she insisted, would have to be met before Cork would hand over an affiliation cheque. The most significant demand was that there would be no male officers at Munster Council level.<sup>67</sup> Jean McHugh, National Secretary, and chair of the meeting, ruled that Cork could not be included in the Munster Championship if it did not pay the affiliation fee.<sup>68</sup>

There was a standoff, and the upshot saw Íde Bean Uí Shé and Alice Quigley leave the meeting without paying the fees. The third Cork delegate, Shiela Horgan, remained at the meeting and entered Muskerry, a selection of junior clubs from the mid Cork area, as Cork, paying the required fees.<sup>69</sup> By paying the affiliation fees, Muskerry effectively took on the mantle of Cork in the Munster Championship. The move meant that Cork was still recognised as fully affiliated to the Camogie Association, but the Cork team, would not be very competitive. Official Cork—that is the majority of clubs as represented by the County Board—would take no part in the Munster and All-Ireland Championship.<sup>70</sup> After Íde Bean Uí Shé and Alice Quigley departed, the meeting elected a male chairman, Sean Gleeson of Tipperary, a male president, Fr Morrissey P.P., as well as a female secretary, Shiela Horgan of Cork, and a female treasurer, M. Montayne of Waterford.<sup>71</sup> This split of male and female officers was typical of most camogie committees at that time. Íde Bean Uí Shé fervently believed that the sport would be much better if the officers were all female.

This decision not to affiliate did not meet with universal approval at the next County Board meeting. Bean Uí Shé stuck to her guns, disregarded criticism and declared, 'Missing out on a Championship season (to achieve an all-female leadership) was a small price to pay.'<sup>72</sup> As events transpired, it would be eight years before Cork would participate, as a whole county, in the Munster

<sup>65</sup> 'Annual Meeting of County Board—No Official Positions for Men', *Cork Examiner*, 22 January 1945, 4.

<sup>66</sup> The other two were Alice Quigley, Secretary of the Cork Board, and Shiela Horgan, Vice Chairperson.

<sup>67</sup> 'Camogie Dispute—Differences at Cappoquin', *Cork Examiner*, 20 September 1944, 4. See also a follow up letter from A Quigley, 'Camogie Dispute' [Letter to the Editor], *Cork Examiner*, 21 September 1944, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Moran, *Cork's Camogie*, 41.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> It is likely that Íde Bean Uí Shé and Alice Quigley thought the issue might be resolved reasonably quickly, but they were prepared to miss out one year of championship.

<sup>71</sup> Camogie Dispute—Differences at Cappoquin', 4.

<sup>72</sup> Moran, *A Game*, 71.

and All-Ireland Championships again. Cork was officially suspended by the Central Council for its action.<sup>73</sup> The Central Council continued to accept Muskerry's affiliation as Cork however, and Muskerry kept the Cork flag flying on the field of play until 1948. In 1949, Muskerry withdrew from competition because they were not competitive.<sup>74</sup>

## 1945 Convention

The decision to withdraw did not cause a major rumpus at the next annual convention. The convention was held in January 1945, and Íde Bean Uí Shé, perhaps choosing to highlight the good news over the bad, reported that the deficit of £70 at the beginning of 1944 had been cleared. Secretary Alice Quigley reported on the re-organisation of the local competitions. The senior championship was now divided into two grades; UCC was congratulated on winning the Ashbourne Cup (intervarsity); and an all-female panel of referees had been set up. The officers were praised for their 'untiring ability and perseverance'. At convention, three motions were agreed and sent forward for debate at the Annual National Congress.

1. That no man hold an official position in the Association.
2. That Central Council's accounts be annually audited by a chartered accountant.
3. That in Central Council positions of Secretary and Treasurer be separate officers.<sup>75</sup>

At the National Congress in March 1945, Secretary Jean McHugh reported that Clare's win in the Munster Championship resulted in a 'financial fiasco' of an All-Ireland semi-final between Clare and Dublin. Clare were not a very strong team. She added that Central Council had double the normal number of meetings during 1944 because of 'the affair in Cork'. '[T]he whole affair cost us around £60', he added.<sup>76</sup> Liam Dynan, as National Organiser with responsibility for developing Camogie in the provinces, announced that he was resigning. He cited 'the very unpleasant experience I have had during the last two years.'<sup>77</sup>

Meanwhile, Íde Bean Uí Shé continued to lead the Cork Board in its defiance of the higher authorities. There were signs, too, that the Board's work was bearing fruit. The number of clubs affiliated to the Board increased from 19 to 45. This increase in clubs resulted in the formation of another divisional board; there was already one in Mid-Cork (Muskerry), the new one covered East Cork.<sup>78</sup> Speaking at the convention on January 1946, Íde Bean Uí Shé took the opportunity to drive home her convictions on the rôle of women in society, the rôle of women in organising camogie and how the Camogie Association should move forward:

In our own generation there has been a big change in the status of women. Women have been admitted to the professions and have proved successful in business. In recognising and approving this change,

<sup>73</sup>'Cork Camogie Suspended', *Irish Independent*, 22 January 1945, 4. It is difficult to gauge what effect this suspension had other than to deny Cork representation at national meetings.

<sup>74</sup>Moran, *Cork's Camogie*, 46.

<sup>75</sup>'Annual Meeting of Cork Board—No Official Positions for Men', *Cork Examiner*, 22 January 1945, 4.

In camogie it was not unusual for the Secretary to act as Treasurer also.

<sup>76</sup>Jean McHugh alludes to fact that Cork were seen as the only county strong enough to defeat Dublin. Clare won the Munster Championship but were no match for Dublin, losing 8-7 to 0-0. The Central Council would have expected a Cork v. Dublin All-Ireland semi-final to attract a much larger attendance. To compound matters, the final between Dublin and Antrim was played in Belfast and the gate receipts were £111, one third of the previous year's gate when Dublin played Cork. Dublin defeated Antrim in 1944 by 5-4 to 0-0. *Cork Examiner*, 17 March 1945, 4. Moran, *A Game*, 72.

<sup>77</sup>'Camogie "The Affair in Cork" Discussion at Annual Congress—Appeal for Unity', *Cork Examiner*, 19 March 1945, 4.

<sup>78</sup>Because of the geographical size of Cork, the GAA divided the county into eight regions, or Divisions. A divisional board is responsible for organising local championships and leagues at junior level. A divisional team is comprised of players from non-senior clubs in each division. The Camogie Board used the same Divisional boundaries as the GAA.



our Holy Father the Pope (Pope Pius XII) has recently made an important address to women. Reminding them of the important place they hold in the world today, he has called on Catholic women to take a greater interest in public affairs and to take a more active part in their administration. In our own small way, we can help to carry out our Holy Father's recommendations and give a good example to the women of Ireland by running Camogie cleanly and efficiently. Camogie is, of course, a sport, but the administration of it, while at times no fun, fosters the administrative capacity and is an excellent training ground for administration in other spheres.<sup>79</sup>

Cork Camogie was a happy camp, and Íde Bean Uí Shé was unanimously elected Chairman for 1946: her fourth successive year.

There were also signs that Íde Bean Uí Shé had support from other counties that also wished to see males removed from the game. The Annual Congress, held in March 1946, appears to have been a lively affair. *The Irish Press* reported that the meeting lasted seven hours, eventually passing a motion which stated, 'That officers of the Central and Provincial Councils be women. Women should be on County Boards where possible.'<sup>80</sup> The Congress also elected Sheila Horgan, who had entered Muskerry to represent Cork on the playing field as the Association President. Horgan's appointment did not soften the opinions held by Íde Bean Uí Shé, who continued to keep Cork from competing in the intercounty competitions.

## 1946: Schools and Financial stability

Schools camogie was now thriving in Cork, so much so that a second competition was introduced to cater for the number of schools wishing to enter the senior grade. The new competition was designed to cater for schools that were knocked out of the early rounds of the main competition. North Presentation Convent defeated Coláiste Laochdha in the final of the new competition.<sup>81</sup> Two players on the North Presentation team acted as officers on the Schools board. Bridie Lucey, who would later be vice-chairman of the County Board in 1952 and Chairperson in 1954 (while still playing for Cork and Glen Rovers), and Peg Lucey, who would be vice-chairperson of the board from 1954 to 1957. These are just two examples of fulfilling Bean Uí Shé's intention for the Schools Board. Interestingly, neither continued as an officer of the County Board after they married.

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<sup>79</sup>'Remarkable Camogie Progress - Cork County Convention', *Cork Examiner*, 21 January 1946, 5. The reference to Pius XII concerns an address he gave to various Catholic women's associations on 21 October 1945: "'Questa grande vostra adunata'" (On Women's Duties on Social and Political Life)'.  
<sup>80</sup> 'Moves to Re-establish Camogie Unity', *Irish Press*, Monday 18 March 1946, 6.

<sup>81</sup> A. O'Callaghan, *The Lord Mayors of Cork 1900 to 2000* (Cork: Inversnaid Publications), 125. Leahy College or Coláiste Laochdha was founded in 1943 by Mr. Thomas Pearse Leahy and situated at Camden Quay. It was subsequently known as St Kieran's College. It was the first co-educational school to be opened in the city. Thomas Pearse Leahy became a Labour Party councilor on the Cork Corporation and served as a Lord Mayor in 1969. He died on 20 June 1986.

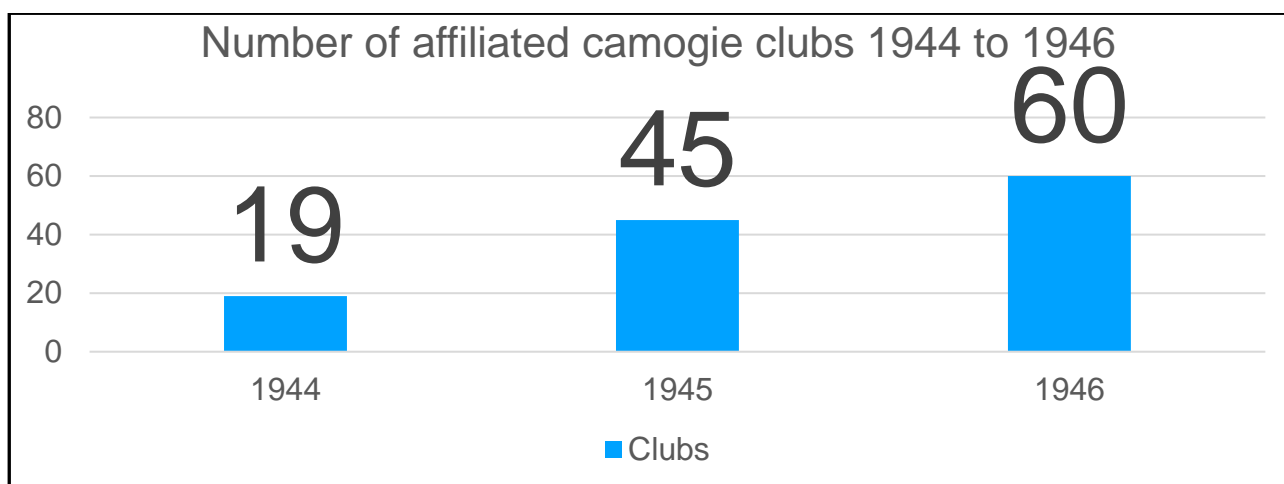


A section of the attendance at the school final of 1946 at the Mardyke.

At the end of the year, Bean Uí Shé focused on the lack of playing pitches in her address to convention. She said the number of clubs had risen to 60 and further claimed ‘there were 2,000 playing Camogie members in Cork—excluding schools’. She was concerned that further progress would be impossible until suitable grounds, to run off the heavy programme of games, could be found.<sup>82</sup>

The Treasurer reported further financial progress, and stated that the board now had £122 in the bank with all expenses paid, a feat that was described as ‘remarkable’ by the Auditor Mr L.P. Shanahan. Bean Uí Shé was once again returned unanimously as chairman for 1947. The increase in revenue also reflected the increase in the number of teams playing camogie. The number of teams competing in all grades of the Cork championships had fallen to 19 by 1944. A combination of wartime shortages and poor administration were chiefly to blame for this. The increase to sixty clubs in the two years to 1946 showed a remarkable rise in participation. While many of these clubs were small rural clubs of junior grade status, they nevertheless led to increased participation and attendance.

<sup>82</sup> This was at a time when GAA activity, particularly at underage level, was increasing. The number of playing fields available was an issue for the GAA (it was not unusual for GAA clubs to rent a different field each year). As GAA clubs paid the rent, and used the fields more, there was less space and time to play camogie. The fact that many playing fields were rentals, usually short-term, meant there were few or no changing facilities. The Camogie Board tried to avoid these venues whenever possible.



The number of affiliated camogie clubs had always fluctuated. Since the County Board was founded in 1932, the rise of 300% between 1944 and 1946 was remarkable, and a testament to the promotional work of Íde Bean Uí Shé and the board. The board tended to report increases in the years they occurred, but not decreases. The number of clubs affiliated however, never dropped as low as the 1944 level, and gradually increased to over 100 clubs by the end of the century.

## Cork Senior Championship benefits from new teams

The increased number of clubs brought about a need for divisional teams, the purpose of which was to afford players from junior clubs the opportunity to play on a team in the County Senior Championship. In 1947 The East Cork division, known as Imokilly, won the County Senior Championship defeating Lee Hosiery in the final. It was a watershed final. With Imokilly becoming the first divisional side to win the championship, and Lee Hosiery becoming the last factory team to reach a final. Factory teams such as Lee Hosiery, Lee Boot, Sunbeam and Dunlops had provided a platform for women to play camogie, particularly in urban areas, at a time in the 1930s and 1940s when there were very few camogie clubs.<sup>83</sup> The origin of the factory camogie team was more akin to the development of factory soccer teams like Fordson,<sup>84</sup> rather than that of the GAA model of parish-based teams. When the Schools Camogie Board was founded, it introduced more players to the game; these players, in turn, joined new clubs, which began to develop under the shadow and patronage of local city hurling clubs like Glen Rovers, Blackrock and St Finbarrs. Despite the increases however, by the end of 1947, the board had made no progress on finding playing grounds of its own.<sup>85</sup>

Blackrock Camogie Club was the first example of the development of a camogie club aligned with the local GAA club. Blackrock Hurling Club had existed since before the GAA was founded in 1884.<sup>86</sup> The camogie club was founded at the beginning of 1948. The players who joined the new club must have been already playing camogie, because the county board deemed that the quality of new club's players was too strong to be entered in the junior grade, so Blackrock were placed in the senior grade.<sup>87</sup> The county board's assessment proved correct as Blackrock won the senior championship in 1948 by defeating the 1947 champions, Imokilly, in the final. The School's organisation continued to develop, with Íde Bean Uí Shé claiming 80% of secondary schools in the county were taking part in schools' competitions.<sup>88</sup> This participation would eventually lead to more

<sup>83</sup> Moran, *A Game*, 41. Factory teams, or 'workplace clubs' were also common in the Dublin area.

<sup>84</sup> David Toms, *Soccer in Munster: A Social History 1877-1937* (Cork University Press, 2015), 3, 16.

<sup>85</sup> 'Growth of Game in Cork', *Cork Examiner*, 17 January 1948, 10.

<sup>86</sup> Declan Hasset, *The Rockies—A GAA Centenary Production* (Cork: Blackrock National Hurling Club), 11.

<sup>87</sup> There is no record of this decision in newspaper reports of that time, but it was highly unusual not to start a new club in the junior grade.

<sup>88</sup> '1,000 Active Players in Cork Camogie—Pitches are Urgent Necessity', 24 January 1949, 6.

clubs being formed. The treasurer reported that finances continued to be good. All medals due to clubs for the 1942 to 1947 period were presented at a function after the convention.

Bean Uí Shé's right-hand woman, Alice Quigley, stepped down as secretary after five years at the end of 1948. She was elected president of the Board. In her last report to the annual convention, she reported that the all-female referee panel was working well but, the extra activity meant there was a demand for more referees. The divisions (there were now four: East Cork, Mid Cork, North Cork and City) came in for a slighting too for not completing their competitions on time, and forcing a delay in playing the Junior County Championship for the respective divisional winners. She also reported that a field for playing games had been secured by the board in Douglas. The rent cost the board £40 for the year. However, gate receipts from games at the venue yielded £48, so the board still managed to turnover an £8 profit on the venue.<sup>89</sup> This was a temporary fix however, as the field was privately owned and ceased to be available. By 1953, the topic of securing a permanent field for the playing of camogie was once again aired.<sup>90</sup> A permanent ground would allow the Board to host attractive fixtures, thereby improving gate receipts and reducing costs such as venue rentals. However, acquiring a ground for the sole purpose of playing camogie would not be solved for another 60 years. Since 2012, the Cork Camogie Board has a permanent ground at Castle Road, Blackrock.



Delegates and officers at the Cork Camogie Convention in January 1949. Íde Bean Uí Shé, third from left, is in the leopard skin coat, front row. Alice Quigley is second from left.

## Íde Bean Uí Shé steps down as Chairperson

The Board remained in profit during 1949. The biggest surprise of the end of year convention, held on February 1950, was the non-appearance of Íde Bean Uí Shé. Alice Quigley presided over the

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> The field in Douglas was a privately owned field, and no longer available to the Camogie Board.

meeting as President. It is clear from her comments that Íde Bean Uí Shé's absence was a last-minute decision.<sup>91</sup> It is also clear that Uí Shé was not going forward as chairperson. A letter from Bean Uí Shé was read to the meeting;

I wish to thank all my fellow officers, particularly Noreen Murphy, for her cooperation<sup>92</sup>...I regret very much I cannot continue to take an active part in camogie, but I would like to assure all my old friends that I will always be interested in Cork Camogie and, that I will give it all the help that I can.

Íde Bean Uí Shé was elected Board President for life.<sup>93</sup> It has not been possible to find any reason why Bean Uí Shé stepped down, but it was possibly for health reasons. She did however, remain in her role as mentor to the Schools Board. The new chairperson was Eileen Keating of the Old Als club. The secretary was Noreen Murphy; she was in her second year having replaced Alice Quigley a year earlier. She would go on to spend nine years as secretary. Alice Quigley, in her address to the convention as President of the Board, reminded delegates why Cork had stayed out of intercounty competition since 1944.

The Cork County Board had always favoured unity in the Association, but the Cork County Board could not agree to unity until the administration of Camogie had reached that point when everything would be clear-cut and the finances of the Association and all other matters pertaining to it would be handled in a business-like manner, and that all the matches would be played in a manner that would be complementary to a girls game. The Cork County Board had 'started' a row to clear up the administration, and I believe that the day is coming when we will achieve success. I wish to congratulate every one of our members and also the clubs who had remained so loyal to the County Board and to the officers of the Board. The day will come when we will get the fruits of that loyalty and work on behalf of Camogie.<sup>94</sup>

It was clear that she believed the main focus of her time in office with Íde Bean Uí Shé, a women's game organised by women, was almost achieved.

## Camogie in Cork after Íde Bean Uí Shé

1950, the first year of Cork camogie without Bean Uí Shé's hand on the tiller since 1942 was uneventful, and all competitions were finished on time. The next chapter only began to unfold at the annual convention of January 1951. Glen Rovers sponsored a motion seeking that Cork re-join the intercounty scene.<sup>95</sup> A long discussion followed; eventually it was decided to form a committee to explore the possibilities of a meeting with the Central Council.<sup>96</sup>

Desire for Cork to return to the intercounty scene was inevitable, given the increase in the number of clubs and players. The competitive nature of sport is such that players want to challenge themselves against the best players and the best teams. It is doubtful however, if interest in Cork Camogie would have been as high, or as ambitious, in 1951 if Íde Bean Uí Shé had not forced a step back in 1944. The step back provided the latitude for re-organisation and development. Even though the hiatus was much longer than was originally expected, the appetite for wanting to challenge the

<sup>91</sup> 'Camogie Flourishing in Cork County', *Cork Examiner*, 6 February 1950, 6. Alice Quigley informed the convention that she had very little prepared as she only found out on Saturday that Íde Bean Uí Shé was not to attend.

<sup>92</sup> Noreen Murphy had taken on the role of Secretary the previous year. Following the efficient Alice Quigley was a difficult task, and this was Bean Uí Shé's way of acknowledging Noreen Murphy's work. It should not be read as a slight on Alice Quigley.

<sup>93</sup> Alice Quigley was moved from the rôle of to that of Vice-President of the Board.

<sup>94</sup> 'Camogie Flourishing in Cork County', 6.

<sup>95</sup> Glen Rovers benefitted greatly from an infusion of players from the North Presentation Convent School. The school began playing Camogie in the early 1940s, and many of the girls continued playing camogie with Glen Rovers. The club won the camogie county championship for the first time in 1950 and it remains one of the stronger clubs in Cork camogie to this day.

<sup>96</sup> 'Camogie—Cork County Board and Unity Question—"Most Successful Year Yet"', *Cork Examiner*, 29 January 1951, 6.

best in Ireland meant that Íde Bean's original defence of withdrawing Cork in 1944—'Missing out on a championship season is a small price to pay'—was proving true.

There were also moves towards unity from the Camogie Association. The Secretary, Jean McHugh, stated in her annual report to Congress that 'the all-important county of Cork remains outside the control of our organisation'.<sup>97</sup> It must have been obvious to the Central Council at that stage that Cork was now a highly organised and profitable camogie unit that was in far better shape than many of the other counties. Cork's participation was needed to help raise competitiveness and organisation.<sup>98</sup>

Cork did not compete in the Munster Championship of 1951, but affiliation fees were paid. The county convention held on 27 January 1952 sanctioned Cork to re-enter the Munster Championship in the coming year. The Munster Council also elected an all-woman officer board for the first time at their convention in March 1952, but it is not known if this was coincidence or design.<sup>99</sup> Cork's decision to re-enter the 1952 competitions provided the Munster Council with an opportunity to hold a Munster final, as only Cork and Tipperary entered the championship. Even then, Munster Council failed to get the game played on time, and Cork was nominated to play Antrim in the All-Ireland semi-final. Not surprisingly, Antrim won. It was 7 December before the Munster final was played. Cork defeated Tipperary and regained the Munster title for the first time in nine years.<sup>100</sup>

## Íde Bean Uí Shé 1953 to 1986.

There was very little coverage of Íde Bean Uí Shé over the early years of the 1950s. She returned to the Cork county convention in February 1953. There she gave a rousing speech on one of her favourite topics, the removal of men from the affairs of camogie. She gloated over the fact that the Association was being run by women, reminded delegates that, in her opinion, the men who had helped organise camogie did not do so for the promotion of the sport alone and finished by praising the sport as Ireland's only female national game.

The Camogie Association of Ireland has evolved from being an organisation run mainly by men to one run almost entirely by women at the present day. This was a very natural development and I am glad to be able to say that Cork played a decisive part in this evolution.

or some years some of the men in key positions showed anything but a fatherly interest in the up-and-coming young women of the Association, and tried to keep them submissive and obedient.<sup>101</sup> It did not work. Even though in the process Cork and other counties<sup>102</sup> were pushed out of the Association. However, in modern Ireland it is evident that women are now able to run their own associations efficiently, and the Camogie Association is now virtually an association for women, run by women, ... It is an excellent sign of the country to see how a comparatively large organisation can be run efficiently by young Irish women.

<sup>97</sup>'Camogie Congress', *Evening Echo*, 7 April 1951, 5.

<sup>98</sup> Very Rev. T Canon Maguire, 'Promoting Camogie', *Derry People and Tir Conaill News*, 17 March 1951, 6. This Letter from Canon Tomás Maguire P.P. Newtownbutler, Fermanagh, to the Ulster Camogie complains of the poor standards of organisation and skill in Ulster camogie. Drawing on his experiences in Cavan, Maguire describes the players as 'potato diggers' and adds, 'the display tended to lower the standard and that injures the entire Association—no matter how you may look at it.' Other counties such as Clare and Waterford were struggling too. Neither entered the 1952 Munster Championship.

<sup>99</sup>'May Bring Revival in Munster', *Cork Examiner*, 27 March 1952, 6.

<sup>100</sup> 'Camogie—Cork Are Worthy Champions—Win Over Tipperary Fully Merited', *Evening Echo*, 12 December 1952, 7.

<sup>101</sup> Íde Bean Uí Shé never strayed from her belief that women had a rôle to play in society outside the home. She returned to the subject time and again. She was not 'anti-men' in general but she felt the male influence in Camogie inhibited the opportunity to develop women's rôle in society.

<sup>102</sup> This is a reference to Antrim and other counties withdrawing when the ban on foreign games was removed in 1939.

Camogie was a game designed in 1904 as a game for patriotic Irish women and is still the only native game for women. We are not intolerant of other games as such, but we do demand, however, that Irish games come first. 'God save the King' or 'God save the Queen' has never been played at a Camogie match in Cork or in Belfast.

Íde Bean Uí Shé, as President of the County Board, continued to speak at the annual conventions for many years. Her topics were always challenging and thoughtful. Her speeches were wide-ranging, but often rested on themes relating to her passions; proper camogie playing fields, feminism and the survival of the Irish language. She rarely pulled her punches when giving her opinion as to what should be done. In 1954 for example, she told the annual convention;

It would be money well spent if some members of the [Cork] Corporation were to visit a city in England which is of a size comparable to Cork. They would find, not one but a dozen parks, all equipped with pitches for every sport.<sup>103</sup>

In 1963 she made two contributions, recommending 'courses in physical education and games such as camogie' before turning her attention to the advent of television and global communications, which she felt could help camogie but feared could destroy the Irish Language.<sup>104</sup>

The influence of TV should be to popularise our only national woman's game. But what of our players? Will they tolerate playing on scanty pitches, togging off behind furze bushes?

Sports are veering towards the provision of 20<sup>th</sup>-century stadia including heating, restaurants, club and cafeterias. We demand pitches and all necessary amenities for all schools and clubs.

She concluded by saying that, for the youth of Ireland,

camogie is but one facet of their nationality. In the face of so-called 'internationalism' let them not lose their individuality as an Irish nation. At the late Cardinal D'Alton so aptly put it: 'if this generation does not save the [Irish] language, it will be lost forever.'

In 1969, when the Glen Rovers and Glanworth clubs proposed the re-admittance of men to the County Board, they were met with a broadside from Bean Uí Shé.

Cork Camogie was always strong and, surely, after 25 years of training, the girls were capable of running their own affairs. The advice and help of men is always welcome, but this is a women's association and should be run by women.

Since 1922, women have been allocated a certain role in Irish life. The day is gone when Ireland's destiny can be decided by men alone, and in this year [1969] of the celebrating of the jubilee of the first Dáil sitting, surely is a retrograde step to suggest that men should once again be accepted in the running of camogie affairs.

She also spoke on the other hot topic of the day in camogie; the dress code for players. Players wanted to change from the traditional gym frock worn by Camogie teams. Ever the keen fashionista, Bean Uí Shé said,

...a motion to this effect was dismissed by Central Council some years ago, but now, perhaps with the advent of the mini-skirt, Central Council may think differently. Central Council should consider holding a fashion competition among players to pick a young designer to fashion a new uniform.<sup>105</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, after the weekly meetings of the County Board, Íde Bean Uí Shé and her husband would join the other officers and some delegates at the Savoy Cinema Restaurant for tea and cakes.<sup>106</sup> She also kept her interest in the UCC Camogie Club<sup>107</sup> as well as her interest in the Irish

<sup>103</sup> 'Lack of Pitches Handicap to Camogie', *Cork Examiner*, 22 February 1954, 9.

<sup>104</sup> 'Cork Camogie Board's "Referee Problem"' 4 February 1963,9.

<sup>105</sup> 'Camogie Convention—Delegates Say No To Men', *Cork Examiner*, 18 January 1969, 38. The playing uniform was eventually changed from the gym frock to a top, skirt and bobby socks at the 1972 Congress.

<sup>106</sup> Interview by the author with Carmel Desmond (Chairperson of the Schools Board in the 1950s and 60s).

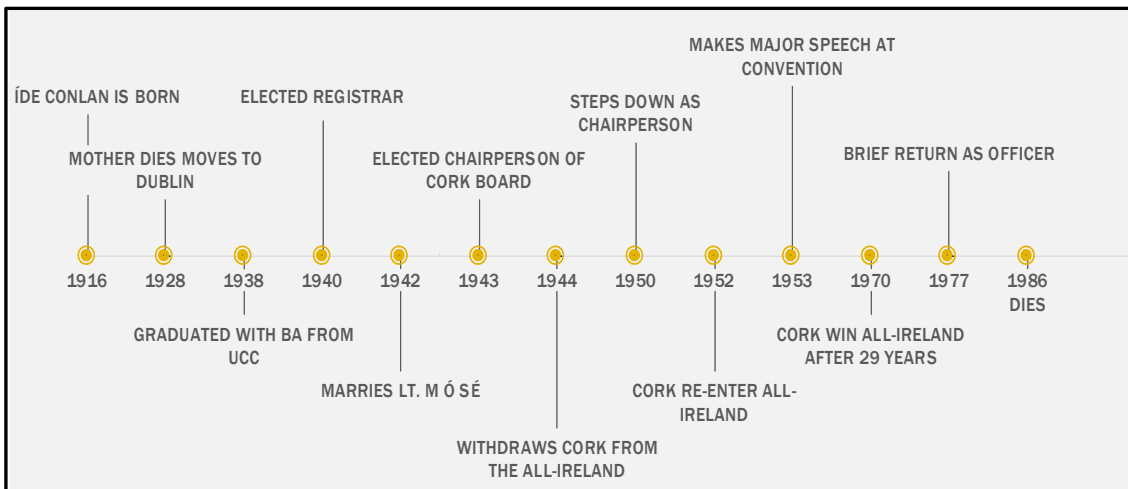
<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

language, and she was a member of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society. In August 1973, she was the keynote speaker at the unveiling of a plaque at Gougane Barra on the West Cork poet, Maire Bhuí Ní Laoghaire.<sup>108</sup> She made a brief return to the Cork Camogie Board as an officer in the late 1970s, as Vice-chairman in 1977, Registrar in 1978 and Treasurer in 1979. Her health was failing at that time, and she withdrew from public life.<sup>109</sup> She was 70 years old when she died on 23 March 1986, survived by her sons Cian and Colm.<sup>110</sup>

## Conclusion

There can be little doubt that Cork Camogie was a stronger and better unit of the Camogie Association at the end of Bean Uí Shé's time as chairperson. There were more clubs, more activity and a healthier recognition for camogie. Nationally, women finally controlled an organisation founded to cater for their sporting needs. Her steadfastness in keeping Cork out of inter-county camogie during her term as chairperson, may have made her appear obstinate to some, but by remaining focused on her beliefs and ensuring the game continued to develop within Cork, she not only increased participation but also raised members' expectations, particularly in terms of administration, and eventually moved the national Association towards an all-female affair.

### Timeline of major events of Íde Bean Uí Shé and Camogie



Some of her ideals and aspirations have yet to be fulfilled. It is only in the past decade that camogie and other women's sports have begun to achieve some semblance of parity in terms of media coverage. Consequently, the raising of finance has been a continuous problem. The cultural and political movements, like the Gaelic League, from which the game of camogie sprang and which helped to establish and nurture the GAA, have long since lost their influence on sport. Because of this, the promotion of the Irish language and Irishness in general, so dear to the heart of Íde Bean Uí Shé, have long been dropped as a major principle by camogie and the G.A.A.

Bean Uí Shé's chief legacy is not that camogie survived the middle decades of the twentieth century, but that during her time as chairperson and for her remaining time of involvement in camogie, she challenged the accepted norm of a woman's role in any organisation, and encouraged a generation of Cork sports women to think for themselves, organise for themselves and not to be dependent on others—like the GAA and its clubs—to achieve goals. The opening of the Cork Camogie Board's

<sup>108</sup> 'Ex-University Camogie Players at Historic Monument', *Evening Echo*, 9 August 1973, 10.

<sup>109</sup> Interview by the author with Carmel Desmond (Chairperson of the Schools Board in the 1950s and 60s).

<sup>110</sup> 'Íde Bean Uí Shé, Corcaigh' *Cork Examiner*, 26 March 1986, 20.



grounds in Blackrock in 2012 was the culmination of an ambition first proposed by Bean Uí She at the annual convention of 1947.<sup>111</sup>

At the intercounty level, Cork had a healthy rivalry with Tipperary throughout the 1950's and 60's, but both counties failed time and time again to win the All-Ireland title. Dublin won 18 All-Ireland titles between 1948 and 1967. It was 1970 before Cork would regain the All-Ireland title and then hold it for four years. Between 1970 and 2020, Cork have won the senior title 22 times, making it one of the strongest counties playing camogie.<sup>112</sup>

While camogie has been overtaken in popularity by Ladies Football, there is no reason why the game should not continue to develop; but possibly not as we have known it. It is likely that within the next few years, Camogie, Ladies Football and the GAA will merge into a new super-Gaelic Games Association. Camogie will then have a better opportunity to be on an equal footing with the GAA, both in terms of facilities and, to some degree, finance. The price for this merger will be the autonomy of camogie, and the influence of men on camogie affairs may once again be a feature. Would Íde Bean Uí Shé be happy with this, or would she declare, as she did in 1944, '*It's a small price to pay*'? Her speeches over the years would suggest that she may well have chosen the latter. This may be food for thought for the Camogie Association (and Ladies Football), as they begin to consider the possibility of merger with the GAA in coming years.

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<sup>111</sup> 'Camogie's Remarkable Progress in Cork—Grounds are now a Vital Necessity', 20 January 1948, 6.

<sup>112</sup> Only seven counties have ever won the senior All-Ireland Camogie title. When Cork regained the title in 1970 there were only four counties on the roll of honour. Since then, Kilkenny (13), Tipperary (5) and Galway (3) have joined Dublin, Cork, Antrim and Wexford as winners.

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### **Links**

Irish American Cultural Institute, [www.iaci-usa.org](http://www.iaci-usa.org)

The Camogie Association, [www.camogie.ie](http://www.camogie.ie)

Irish Newspaper Archives, [www.irishnewsarchive.com](http://www.irishnewsarchive.com)

The Gaelic Athletic Association, [www.gaa.ie](http://www.gaa.ie)

RTE.ie, [www.rte.ie](http://www.rte.ie)

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<sup>113</sup> Author's note: this is a 32-page pamphlet produced by Donal Ó Drisceóil for the Cork Council of Trade Unions to mark the 90th anniversary of the death of Tadgh de Barra. Ó Drisceóil is about to publish a full biography on de Barra. The pamphlet is available in UCC or Cork City Library.