

# The Catholic Institute Athletic Club, Rosbrien

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LIBRARY

by **Ralph McMahon**

**I**n 1875 the Catholic Institute Literary Institute was established by Most Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer, Bishop of Limerick, during the mayoralty of Ambrose Hall. The Literary Institute was housed in the large three storey building located at the junction of what is now Henry Street and Sarsfield Street and incorporated reading rooms, meeting rooms and billiard room, as well as a large function room on the ground floor.

For years the building was popularly known as the 'Catholic Institute' and it was subsequently sold to help finance the construction of the present Diocesan College, which was built in Corbally to replace the old college building in Henry Street. For a time it housed the offices of the Transport Union, when it was renamed Connolly Hall, before being acquired by the nearby Franciscan community, who renamed it the Franciscan Hall. In recent years it has been turned to commercial use that included a showroom, a shop and a restaurant.

The provision of a sports field activity in conjunction with the Catholic Literary Institute was often mentioned but it was not until 1909 that the idea finally took shape. At that time, the games of hurling and football, as well as rugby and soccer, would have been the popular sports amongst the general population. However, general access to the games of hockey, tennis and cricket would have been extremely difficult, as these games would only have been catered for by schools and clubs of a non-Catholic denomination. It

was decided to form a club that would cater for these games for the general Catholic population.

A committee that included members of some prominent Limerick families was formed and a six acre area of land was located at Rosbrien Road and leased from a Mr. O'Sullivan of Cork for an annual rent of £30. This six acres of land was part of a 14 acre parcel at Rosbrien and originally had been part of the Major William Richard Goold Adams estate. The new club was named the Catholic Institute Athletic Club.

Four tennis courts and three cricket creases were laid out under the supervision of Mr. P. Griffin of Ballinacurra Nursery. The grounds also included a playing field suitable for rugby and hurling. Mr. Griffin also presented the club with twenty trees to be planted in the grounds on Arbour Day. A pavilion was erected to the design of Mr. R. W. de Courcy, B.E.

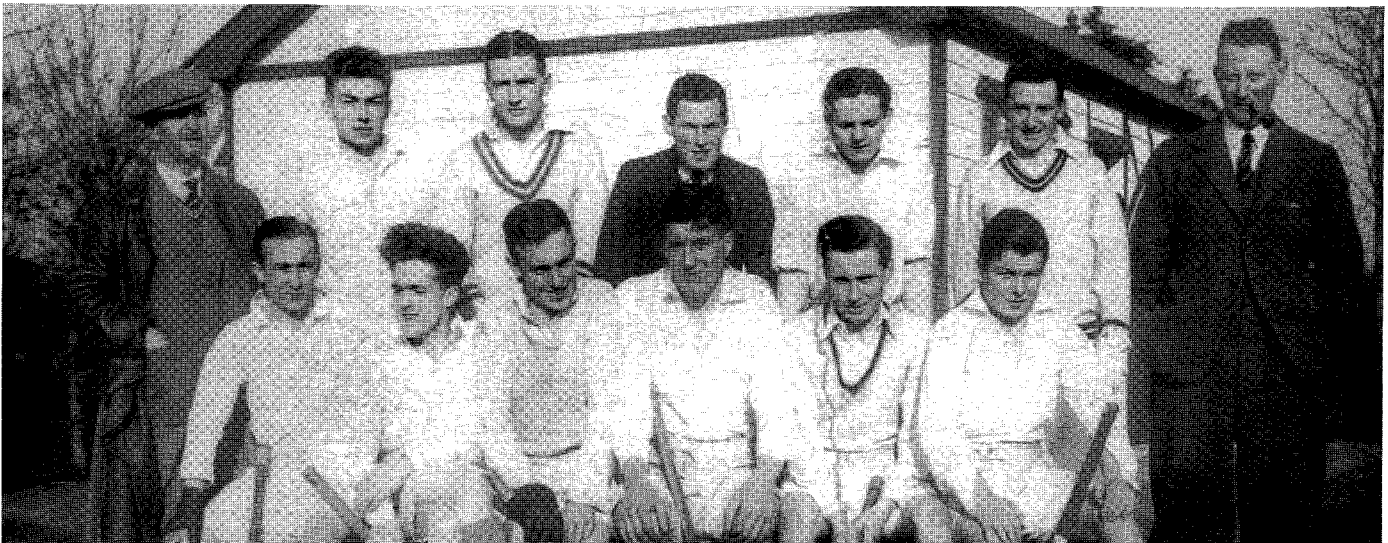
The grounds of the Catholic Institute Athletic Club were formally opened in June 1910 and the colourful opening ceremony was attended by the Mayor, Timothy Ryan, with the City Swordbearer and Sergeants-at-Mace, together with William Holliday, the City High Sheriff, and a distinguished gathering. The Mayor was invited to unfurl the club colours of cerise and black with the initials 'C.I.A.C.' and the Industrial School Band played 'Garryowen'. The Mayor bowled the first

ball in the cricket match, with the High Sheriff batting.

In October 1918, the club wished to further develop the grounds, so Mr. O'Sullivan was approached with the view to the possible sale of the grounds to the club. However, the property was now owned by Mr. Christopher Sheehan, of 2, Mortell Villas, O'Connell Avenue, farmer, and also victualler of 47, Roches Street. Mr. Sheehan was anxious to dispose of the entire fourteen acres as he considered the Catholic Institute Athletic Club's six acres the best of the land, but the asking price was well outside the clubs resources. For the next three years negotiations continued between the parties. Eventually the figure of £700 was agreed for the six acres and on 23rd October 1924, the purchase agreement was signed. Some forty years later, the remaining eight acres was acquired by Portland Estates for the construction of Ballinacurra Gardens.

In 1921 the figure of £700 would have been substantial and for a young voluntary club to raise such an amount at that time would have been a major undertaking. The club decided to raise the finance through the issuing of mortgage debentures and at an extraordinary general meeting of members on 26th May 1921, the club was authorised to offer 160 debentures at £5 each. The issue was fully subscribed and the necessary £800 raised.

For the past ninety-five years the Catholic Institute Athletic Club has played a major part in the sporting activity of Limerick city for both men and women. It now draws its membership from all religious denominations.



**CATHOLIC INSTITUTE MENS HOCKEY, 1932. Back, L. to R.: Alma Fitt, umpire, Kevin O'Sullivan, Dessie O'Malley, Dave Barry, Paddy O'Connor, Willie Hanrahan, M. McNabb, umpire. Front, L. to R.: Arthur McMahon, Red McDonnell, Noel Ryan, Greg Graham, Hugh O'Donovan, Brian Begley.**

(Photo courtesy the author)