

The Beginnings of The Lifesaving and Swimming Club in Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare.1937

The Lifesaving Apparatus, now in place at Spanish Point and the White Strand, Miltown Malbay, since late 1935, was a much valued resource in the community and was put to good use during the 1936 and 1937 summer seasons. However, there was concern regarding the availability of instruction in the skills of Lifesaving using this new equipment.

Mr. John Quinn of Clare Co. Council, was approached for help in this matter. He had a very keen interest in furthering developments in the saving of lives at Co. Clare beaches. He played a very important roll in sanctioning the provision of lifesaving equipment similar to that already in use in Miltown Malbay from an earlier date, to other beaches in Clare. He was secretary of The Public Health and Public Assistance Section and was aware of the many lives lost in drowning accidents in the County. Detective Officer Harry Gillespie of the Gárda Siochána and working in the Ennis area, was identified by John Quinn as the person best suited to instruct swimmers in the required skills . He was from Northern Ireland and was fully acquainted with the necessary techniques involved.

A meeting was called of the people of Miltown Malbay in the Parochial Hall on September 17th 1937 and Sergeant Gillespie was invited to attend. Mr. P. J. Hurley was the secretary and Mr. E. J. Carroll, chairman. The question of forming a branch of The Irish Lifesaving Society was considered and after a long discussion, it was decided unanimously that this should be done.

The following attended the meeting:-

Dr. M.J.Hillery	Rev. Fr. Murphy.P.P.
Dr. D.Mc Clancy	Rev. Fr. Mc Kenna.C.C.
Mr. P Collins	Rev. Fr. Neylon.C.C
Sgt. Lalor	Rev. Canon Elliott (Church of Ireland)
Mr. J. Fitzpatrick	Mr. Jn. O Connell
Mr. John Sullivan	Mr. Jas. Kearney
Mr. P.J. Hogan	Miss M. E. Vaughan
Mr. Ml. Hynes	Miss M. White
Mr. Ml. O Brien	Miss C. O Brien
Mr. Jn. O Neill	Mr. N.C. Philpott
Mr. T. Nestor	The Gárdaí, Miltown Malbay
Mr. Mtn. Flynn	Mr. J. Devitt
Mr. P.J. Harrisson	Mr. E. Moroney
Mr. D. Comerford	Mr. P. Morrissy
Mr. Jn. Jones	Mr. Mtn. Lynch
Mr. E. Carroll	Mr. P. J. Hurley

It was decided that all would attend a meeting on Sept 21st to elect officers to the organising committee of the new club and Detective Gillespie gave a commitment to attend and give land drill instructions to those swimmers who intended joining the club. The following swimmers gave their names to P. J. Hurley and attended the meeting on the 21st:-

Ml. Hennessy	Tom Flynn	Jn. Sullivan	Jn. O Connell
P. Corry	M. Fox	Ml. Benn	Paddy Morrissy
P. Downes	J. Devitt	P.J. Harrisson	John Casey
Jn. Griffin	J. Mc Mahon	Jas. Kearney	Stephen Kearney
Jos. Tierney	E. Moroney	Ml. Kearney	Guard Mc Gee

Jn. Killeen	Jas. Quinn	J.J. O Friel	Jn. O Brien
T. Brown	Ml. St. John	Jn. Mc Mahon	Ml. O Brien
D. Comerford	Denis Benn		

The following officers were elected:-

President: Mr. E.J. Carroll
Vice Presidents: Rev. Mc Kenna C.C.
Rev. T. Neylon C.C
Rev. Canon Elliott (Church of Ireland)
Dr. M.J. Hillery
Treasurers: Mr. Ml. O Brien
Sgt. Lalor
Hon. Secretary: Mr.P.J. Hurley

Finance committee:- Mr. P Collins, Mr. Jn. O Sullivan, Miss Moira White.

General committee:- Miss Mollie Ellis, Mr. P. O Brien N.T., Mr. Jos. Mc Mahon.

An arrangement was made with Fr. Murphy P.P. regarding the use of the hall for use by the club and the following was agreed on:-
The Club could use the hall on any night that it was not being occupied for any other purpose and that a record be kept of the length of time spent there and also of the amount of electricity used---all to be paid for by the club. Det. Gárda Gillespie came to Miltown on eight occasions between Sept. 21st and October 3rd to prepare the swimmers for examination. Fourteen hours were spent on land drill exercises in the Town Hall. Many hours were also spent training in the water at the Whitestrand.

On October 3rd, at the Whitestrand, the swimming tests took place under the supervision of Mr.F.Mc Cabe,(R.L.S.S) who travelled down from Galway and the following certificates were awarded:-

Bronze Medallion:	Mr. Stephen Kearney
Intermediate Certificate:	Mr. Stephen Kearney
	Mr. E. Moroney
	Mr. James Kearney
	Mr. John O Sullivan
	Mr. P. Corry
Elimentary Certificate:	Mr. Jn. O Connell
	Mr. Ml. Hennessy
	Mr. Jos. Mc Mahon
	Mr. P. Morrissy
Resuscitation Cert.	Sergt. Lalor
	Guard McGee
	Mr. P.J. Harrisson
	Mr. Ml. Kearney
	Sgt. Hegarty,Quilty
	Mr. P. J. Hurley

A payment of £1-11-6, was made to the Irish branch of the R.L.S.S. (The Royal Lifesaving Society),Dublin in September/ October 1937.

This was to pay for:

Affiliation to R.L.S.S. 10/6

Certificates 21/-

It is worth noting that again, as in the initial fundraising committee of 1935, the members of the Swimming and Lifesaving Club committee, represented the general population of the area and included swimmers, local clergy, doctors, gardaí, teachers and other members

of the general public. Noteworthy also, the lifeguards who patrolled the beaches at Spanish Point, the White Strand and other beaches in Clare, were the first in the country to be remunerated for their work. Many of the early members of the Club served on many beaches in the county and also became certified instructors and examiners. Many of those who moved to other parts, helped to found other clubs. P. J. Hurley was the first elected President of the Swimming and Lifesaving association of Co. Clare.

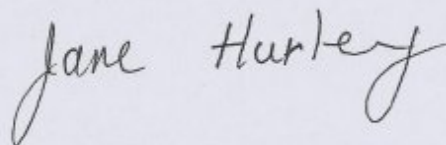
Some of the early successes of the Miltown Malbay Swimming and Lifesaving club. Details taken from 'My Affair with Malbay' by Gabriel Vaughan

1938. The Clare and Munster titles .There was no other club Outside of Clare contesting the Munster title so the Miltown Malbay lifeguards automatically qualified to Contest the Irish Title. They lost out to a Dublin Club, the only other club competing.
- 1939 The Clare and Munster titles. Swimming Gala in Killaloe. The National competition was cancelled.
- 1940 The club did not travel to National competition in Belfast.
- 1941 The National Competition was not held.
- 1945,46,47,48, 49. The Clare title.
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The Irish Red Cross was founded in 1939 and in 1945, the instruction in Life Saving skills, came under its control. In the society's bulletin of 1950, a photograph showing some members of

the club holding the Lifeline at Spanish Point, was used to advertise water safety classes. Those included in the photograph were:- John Casey, Peter Downes, Paddy Hillery (lifeguards) and P. J. Hurley. There is a fourth lifeguard also present, probably John Sullivan. The green flag was flying proudly over the lifeguards' Hut. The club continued to raise funds by holding many public events including several dances a year in the Parochial Hall and Flag Days. In the 1940's and 50's, four sets of concrete steps were made at the White Strand. These steps gave access to the beach and further on along the cliff edge, another gave access to the rocks underneath where sunbathing and 'fishing' in rock pools were popular pursuits. A footpath was made along the rocks that connected the second set of steps to the third flight further on. This allowed people to return to the high grassy area. Walking on a short distance, the fourth set of steps led down to that wonderful, naturally formed swimming pool known locally as Kerin's Hole. Iron steps leading from a concrete platform at the side of the pool, could be used to enter the water here. None of these steps exists today. Access points to the beach at Spanish Point, were also put in place.

Jane Hurley. August 2012



In 2013, the original steps leading down to Kerins' Hole, were replaced. This gives easy and safe access to swimmers. The restoration project was organised and financed by the local community and financial contributions were also given by people living further afield.

Jane Hurley. 2015

