

Our Lady's Boys Club, A Galway Gem

This happy group of Boys Club lads was taken in the mid fifties and includes Paddy O'Connell, Dominick Curran, Seanie Flaherty, Joe Walsh, --- Harty, Tommy Gannon, Dessy Fitzpatrick, Tommy Gannon, Michael Burke, Tom Cunningham, Bartley Hynes, Tony Conboy (taking the shot), Sean McNamara, Gerry Ryan, Willie Golding, Colie Rushe, William McDonagh, Peter Folan, Leo Creane, Francis Walsh, Danny Collins, Jackie Molloy, Dominick Geary and Paddy McDonagh.

The main objective of the Club (the oldest Boys Club in the country) when it was founded in 1940 was "To provide for the relief of poverty by serving homeless kids in need, by promoting human services, which would meet immediate and long term needs, and by these means, to encourage their development, and give their lives a dignity which is their birthright";.

Lofty ideals, it would seem, but amazingly OLBC has been achieving those goals since it started from very humble beginnings during the war. At that time, there were virtually no recreation facilities in Galway available to the youth of working class areas, so a Jesuit priest, Father Leonard Shiel got the idea of starting a club where young people could come together in a spirit of fellowship, and enjoy whatever games and competitions the committee could provide for them. In fact, the club was lucky to have a strong committee from the start, dedicated men like Amby Roche, Willie Silke, Paul O'Dea, Peter O'Donoghue, Des Kenny, Gerry Dillon, Gerry Glynn. They built up a strong organisation whose philosophy was based on the personal and spiritual development of the individual, and offered the boys a lifeline and a means to improve their station in life.

The club has always worked behind the scenes with the authorities and has helped keep the crime rate low in the city. One of its great strengths has been a strong sense of loyalty, a willingness to help each other, to visit people in jail or in hospital. It is now run entirely by men who have come up through the ranks, who have grown to manhood with the club.

Since its inception, OLBC has been based in a building at the back of the Columban Hall in Sea Road. In the recent past, they demolished this structure and have built a state of the art clubhouse which will open shortly.

Many of the Club's activities are done through the medium of sport. Shortly after its

foundation, soccer teams were set up, later rugby teams. There was a boxing section, Irish dancing, swimming and lifesaving, and later on a golfing society. Indoor games included table tennis, snooker and billiards, rings, darts etc. The highlight of the Club's year has always been the annual 'camp', a week-long holiday for up to 100 boys. The first ever 'camp' took place in a farmhouse in Maree in 1940, where the budget for 2 committee members and 33 boys was £28. The next camp took place in Kilcornan, and then for a number of years, Lord Gort gave them Lough Cutra Castle. It sounds exotic, but in those early years, the boys brought their own straw and stuffed it into bags to make mattresses to sleep on. Later camps took place in Lough Inagh, Clifden, Roundstone, Limerick and Gormanston. For a number of years now, St. Colman's College, Claremorris has been the venue where the boys enjoy a week of swimming, water safety, horse riding, baseball, basketball, roller bowling, mountain climbing, soccer, rugby etc.

It is a memorable experience for them. There are men in all walks of life in many different parts of the world today who will tell you that the happiest days of their life were spent 'on camp' with OLBC. None of this would be possible without the generosity of Galwegians who have supported the club through the years. This year's camp will be the 71st, and they have just launched their annual appeal for funds, so please be generous with this wonderful Galway institution. Donations can be sent to Our Ladys Boys Club, Sea Road, Galway, or to Unit 1, Liosban Industrial Estate, Tuam Road, Galway.