

# FINGAL

By Edwin Handcock



*Edwin S. Handcock*

## TAKING THE STRAIN

*The large enthusiastic crowd roared "Pull Will Ye" in encouragement as the men from the "D" District tug-of-war team dug in their heels and tried to pull their opponents from the "C" past the marker.*

*The occasion was the Local Security Force (LSF) Sports at Dunlaoghaire on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1943. The team from the "D" was comprised of (left to right), Con O'Connor (well known high jumper), John Lambe, J. Duffy, Mick Hackett, Mick Lohan, Pat O'Shea (rugby), Paddy Fitzpatrick, ? Carr, Joe Handcock (swimmer), Tim Hurley and Leo Hanagan.*

*Station Sergeant James Kirby was their coach.*



L.S.F. Sports, Dunlaoghaire, "D" District Tug-O-War Team D.M.A 12<sup>th</sup> September 1943. L-R: Con O'Connor, John Lambe, F. Duffy, Mick Hackett, Mick Lohan, Pat O'Shea, Paddy Fitzpatrick, ? Carr, Joe Handcock, Tim Hurley, Leo Flanagan

I met Pat O'Shea 8997 a Limerick man at his home in Finglas in July this year (2007) and he is a hale and hearty 90 year old Taca man, his sitting room is a veritable gallery of tug-of-war photos, his father and uncle pulled for Garryowen, his brother for the DMP and himself for the Garda. He remembers the LSF sports day as if it was yesterday. He recalls that Sergeant Joe Handcock 11776 from Aghaboe in County Laois (yes he is a relation), shouting at Carr in

front of him to take up the proper position with the rope for he was all over the place, but Carr lost his footing and pulled a muscle in his back. The "C" won. At that time Pat and some other members of the team were living in official quarters in Green Street, beside the famous courthouse, Pat had to rub Wintergreen into Carr's back, that night all the windows in the dormitory had to be opened on account of the pungent odour. Pat is also a founder member of the Garda Rugby club.

Sir Thomas Henry Grattan Esmonde, speaking to the Seanad on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1925 as the house debated the second stage of the Police

Forces Amalgamation Bill 1925 said, "May I for sentimental reasons express the regret that I feel personally at the passing of the DMP. The Metropolitan Police, whoever their successors may be, were physically the finest body of Police in the world, as we all know, they were famous for generations in tug- of- war contests. They defeated about every team that came before them".

According to a report in the Garda Review of July 1928, the history of tug-of war in Ireland is associated with the DMP, who made their debut in the sport in the 1870's when they responded to a challenge from a British Army team who were unbeaten in Great Britain and India, in a military tournament held at the RDS showground in Ballsbridge in Dublin, the DMP won. They subsequently won the World Cup in 1893 at the same venue by defeating the Scot's Greys. In 1894 in recognition of their prowess in the sport, the officers and men of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, based in Dublin at the time, presented them with a magnificent silver mounted shield.

An Garda Siochana continued this proud tradition as some of the finest sportsmen in the land joined its ranks. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1924 they won the World Championships held at Wembley Stadium in London. In 1928 the Dublin Metropolitan Perpetual Trophy became the "Sam Maguire" of tug-o-war in the Garda and was eagerly competed for on a national level right up until the 1960's, when the popularity of the sport waned. This magnificent trophy then suffered the indignity of lying forgotten on a dusty shelf in Garda HQ for the next decade. In 1974 it was "rescued" polished and restored to its former glory by Martin "Murt" Vaughan of Coolock, whose name was to become synonymous with the sport in the Garda for the next 28 years. Murt formed the famous Coolock Garda tug-o-war team in 1974 and was instrumental in bringing the sport back



Garda members of the Midlanders Team with their World Championship medals 1980. L-R: Pat O'Connor (Raheny), Mick O'Connor (H.Q.), Bosco Muldoon (Finglas), Ted Nolan (Traffic)



Victorious Coolock Tug-O-War team - Coiste Siamsa Sports late 1980's Back Row L-R: Tom Flaherty, Murt Vaughan, Barry O'Brien. Middle Row L-R: Tim Mulvey, Comm Moran, Gabriel O'Malley, Bart Doherty Front Row L-R: Adrian Lomasney, Gerry Cadden, Philip Kelliher

to prominence in the Garda sporting calendar. The coolock team represented Ireland at the World Games in Jersey in 1977, finishing 4<sup>th</sup> out of 23 countries. Between 1974 and 2000 the Garda Championship has been won by Mayo (1), Garda College (3) and Coolock (23). Murt is a grade 1 Judge and also qualified as an international judge in 1997 and has officiated at European and world tug-o-war championships both indoor and outdoor.

In 1989 at the World Police and Fire Games in Vancouver there were teams from 29 countries competing in tug-of war, the Garda team

comprised of Barry O'Brien, Larry Baxter, Murt Vaughan (Captain), Charlie O Reilly, Pat Hayes and Tom Flaherty with John Donegan as Coach won the Gold. A colourful report appeared in the Vancouver Sun Newspaper, an extract reads, *The Irish team were six big lanky lads, florid faced and toothy, unlike all the other teams, North American and Australian given to sunny climates, the Irish were as pale as potatoes. Like Clydesdales fighting for purchase against the plough, the Irish drove the heels of their big clodhoppers into the turf.* The article finishes with, *and now, said Captain Martin Vaughan of County Clare, "I think we'll get a bucket of Guinness"*

Did you know that tug- of-war is one of only two sports where the winning team goes backwards, the other is rowing?

Tim Mulvey, IPA member until his retirement, served in Coolock and pulled for their team for a number of years, he tells a little story from the 1980's;-*"The CIE Broadstone lads, some of whom trained with us all the time, wanted to make up numbers for a Sunday festival pull in Enniskerry, a few members of the Garda went along, we won the competition and the prize was a calf. The problems began there. How would we transport it back to Dublin's Northside? There was much debate about who had the biggest car, someone had a mini bus, a vote was taken but no way was a calf going in his mini bus. All the problems about keeping it arose-whose garden would be big enough, who had the biggest fridge, who would get the headage payments, did it like cornflakes. Who would pay the vet etc? Suggestions about killing it and dividing it posed even greater discussion, who would get which part and so on. To make a long storey short, it was auctioned off to someone at the festival, a few weeks later I received a crystal tankard and a £20 note, another miracle"*

Bosco Muldoon from Rhode in Co. Offaly,



"Pull will ye" - the victorious Coolock Tug-O-War team at Templemore, Coiste Siamsa late 1980's. All stationed at Coolock except two as stated. L-R: Murt Vaughan, Tom Flaherty, John O'Brien, John Shaughnessy (Malahide), Pat Hayes (Dog Unit), Tim Mulvey, Gabriel O'Malley, Phil Kelleher. Coach is Jim Egan



Pub team pull At Swords Castle in the 1980's. The coach is Eithne Kennedy then stationed at Santry. Three Gardaí on team L-R: Anchorman is Murt Vaughan (coolock), 3<sup>rd</sup> is Pat Hayes (Dog Unit), 5<sup>th</sup> is Tim Mulvey (Coolock)

an IPA member now retired, and who was stationed in Finglas, was a noted puller with both the Garda and "The Midlanders" with whom he won a World Championship medal in 1980. The Midlanders were based in Leixlip, Co. Kildare but comprised of men from different parts of the country who were living in and around Dublin. Having won the National Championships held in Drumsna, Co. Leitrim they toured the USA for three weeks in June 1980 competing against teams in New York, Boston, Chicago and Pine Valley, winning in all four venues. On the 26<sup>th</sup> September 1980 they represented Ireland at the World Championships held at Basle in Switzerland, where there were over 80 teams from 12 countries competing. The Midlanders team included three members of the Garda, Tim Mulvey (Finglas), Pat O'Connor (Raheny) and Ted Nolan (Traffic), they were coached by Mick O'Connor who



Murt Vaughan & daughter Sinead, IPA



Murt Vaughan "Taking the Strain"

was based at Garda H.Q. They took bronze, finishing in third position in the 720 kilos class. Bosco remembers training was taken seriously in his time, twice a week in all weathers. Their equipment may have been basic and of the DIY type, unlike today's sophisticated off the shelf designer models, but it successfully developed national, international and world champions. There was static rope training with the rope secured to a tree, weight pulling utilizing a pulley mounted on a makeshift "gantry" with rope affixed to a weight comprised of a 40 gallon oil barrel filled with cement, or partially filled, depending on the status of those pulling.

The first competition for female members of the Gardaí was held in 1987 at the D.M.A Championships in the Phoenix Park. In 1991 two ladies teams competed



Garda Tug-O-War team after winning Gold at the World Police & Fire Games in Vancouver 1989. L-R: Barry O'Brien, Larry Baxter, Murt Vaughan (Capt), Charlie O'Reilly, Pat Hayes, Tom Flaherty, John Donegan (Coach)

in the World Police and Fire Games in Memphis, the lightweight team won bronze. The heavyweight team comprised of Anne Shore, Collette Quinn, Mary Aldridge, Una O'Shaughnessy, Mary Burbage and Caroline Tighe, won silver.

Colin Murphy based in Coolock, the current Hon Secretary of the Garda Tug-of-war Club, comes from a family with a great pedigree in the sport. The Murphy family achieved national fame on Christmas Eve 1993 when the Father and two sons featured on the Gay Byrne Radio Show. They participated in a unique tug-of-war contest between the Garda and the Army which was held on Dublin's Grafton Street. The Father, John Murphy, (C/Supt., CDU), was the referee, son John, (Supt., Traffic) pulled for the Garda and son Martin a Captain pulled for the Army.

Alas Sir Thomas Esmonde would not be impressed by the current state of the sport in the Garda for it is in a serious state of decline, but at least the magnificent Dublin Metropolitan Perpetual trophy is safe and proudly displayed in the Garda College.

A training manual for tug-of war once stated that;-"A good team should be keen, hardworking, cheerful and willing-there is no place for those of a sourly disposition and constant grouchers". Sounds like the perfect sport for the Polis.

Edwin S. Handcock.



## CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

*I offer sincere good wishes to all readers of IPA Journal in Ireland and overseas, especially to any of our members who may be away from home and loved ones during the Christmas season.*