

## The Doyle's of Trinity

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**When ordinary people do extraordinary things, their feats can sometimes become inextricably linked with the area from whence they came. In handballing jargon we had, for example, Ryan from Bridgetown, the Lyng's of Ballyanne, the Buggy's of Clonard and the Cleary's of Ballyanne, to name but a few.**

Mention Dick Lyng for instance and even non-handball folk will say, "he's from Ballyanne, isn't he". Mention Ballyanne to the same people and they will likely say "isn't that where the Lyng's came from". So what does it take to bind the two together in such a fashion, so they go together like copy and paste?

Clearly, the accomplishment or happening has to be noteworthy to get peoples attention in the first place, but then over time the name must continue to make the news, so the connection between people and place grows stronger and the 'brand' becomes ever more recognizable.

Four generations spread over close on a hundred years suggest the Doyle family from Trinity in the parish of Taghmon belong in that category, so to get some context on the sheer longevity of the clan and their association with handball; we need to join the dots that make up the family chain.

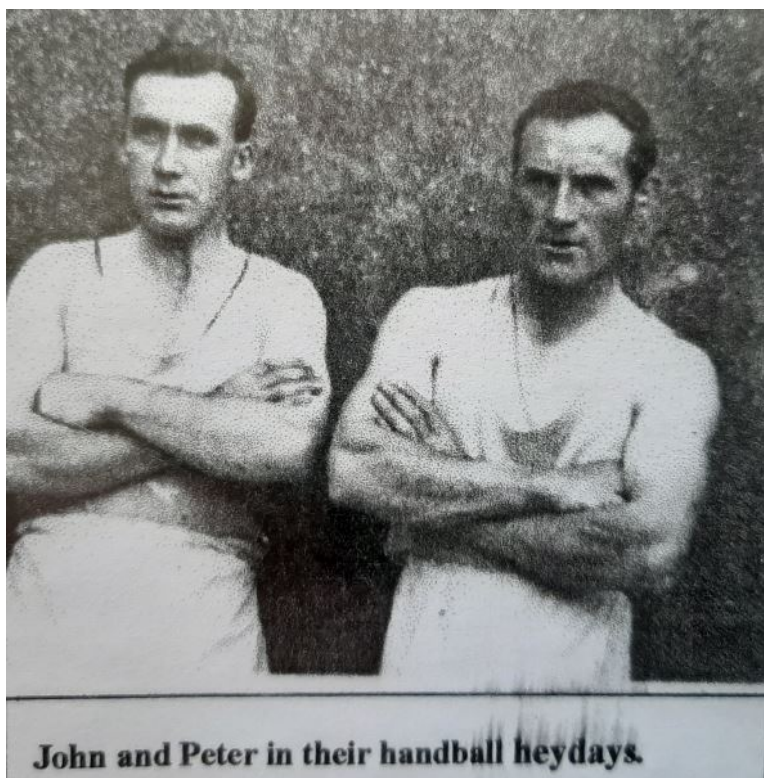
<b>First generation</b>	Robert Doyle
<b>Second generation</b>	Peter, John, Jimmy, Phil (sons)
<b>Third generation</b>	Robert (son of Peter)
<b>Fourth generation</b>	Mark, Bobby, Conor (sons of Robert and Helen)



Although all 4<sup>th</sup> generation boys play hurling and football with their local Taghmon GAA Club and Mark is also a member of the county hurling panel, it is mainly handball blood that runs in their veins. Saying that is not just paying lip service to history, it is also demonstrated by the full size fully functional 4-wall (40x20) court built beside their residence, as well as their commitment to the local Taghmon Handball Club where all regularly play softball and where Helen is a busy and efficient club secretary.

The family also take part in many of the national and club tournaments around the country and, at world championship times, around the world. Additionally, they are also heavily involved in Wexford GAA Handball, where Robert is the county coaching officer and member of Wexford's county juvenile committee.

So where did it all begin and what connects them to the locality of Trinity, and what was it about Trinity that made it so known throughout the handball population and further afield?



To dig down into the historical connections of the Doyle family and Trinity, we need to go back to the early 1900s when Robert (the current Robert's grandfather) began playing at the local court which had been constructed in 1914. He had four sons, Peter, John, Jimmy and Phil, all of whom took up the game and went on to be successful, in some cases, spectacularly so. Peter was the first to make his name when, in 1938, he created a little bit of history alongside Frank (Harvey) O'Neill, Bridgetown, by reaching the final of the first All-Ireland minor handball doubles championships ever played.

They were not successful on that occasion, but Peter made amends eleven years later in 1949 when he teamed up with his brother John to win the All Ireland junior handball doubles title. The same siblings also captured the Wexford county senior softball doubles that year when they got the better of John Ryan and Charlie Drumgoole, Bridgetown, to win the first of his (John's) ten county senior titles.

The remaining two Doyle brothers, Phil and Jimmy, were also accomplished handballers. Phil won All Ireland minor doubles and All Ireland colleges' titles as well as a Leinster minor singles championship before joining the priesthood. Jimmy meanwhile had moved to Monaghan, where he represented that county in the Ulster championship, winning a provincial junior doubles title in 1949. Later still he went to work in Kildare from where he played in and won a Dublin senior softball singles title at a time when the Metropolitans had a host of top class players such as the Rowe brothers, Larry and George, as well as Austin Clarke, winner of eight All Ireland senior handball titles.

The Doyle brothers played at many venues throughout the 40' and 50s, but wherever they played and whatever colours they wore, one thing remained a constant – they always were **the Doyle's from Trinity**.

With Peter unable to commit fully to handball in the early 1950s, John Doyle formed a hugely successful intercounty partnership with John Ryan from Bridgetown. The pairing went on to win six All Ireland senior handball doubles titles between 1952 and 1958 and one All Ireland senior softball doubles in 1957, in the process gaining for themselves a reputation of being one

of the greatest doubles partnerships of all time. During that period the famed duo were well nigh unbeatable, with hardball their preferred code.

The first of their All Ireland wins had come in 1952 at Talbots Inch, where they survived a massive challenge from Joe Hassett and Jimmy O'Brien, Kerry, who were the reigning champions at that time. With the scores tied at 20-20 in the deciding seventh game, both pairings served twice before the Wexfordmen got the winning point to embark on their historical run.

During those golden years the Wexfordmen enjoyed a terrific rivalry with several top players, none more so perhaps than with the great Kerry player Paddy Downey. Wexford and Kerry were the two strongest senior counties back then, sharing ten All Ireland senior hardball doubles titles in a row between them. John Doyle and John Ryan won six of the ten and many of their toughest battles came against Downey, partnered by either Jimmy O'Brien or Joe Hassett.



Friendships made and respect earned in sporting combat tends to endure over the years and Robert Doyle was particularly delighted that he got to travel to Tralee last November to meet the legend his father and uncle had often spoken about. Robert has fond memories of that evening, “it was a great privilege to meet Paddy” he said “as my father and uncle had talked about him so many times and all the great games they had against each other. We had a great chat that night and he remembered all of those big games so well. He was a true gentleman”. Paddy Downey passed away a short while ago at the age of 89, having won a total of 17 All Ireland senior titles in 22 years.

As the years went by and the nearby club of Taghmon became the first in Wexford to put a roof on their court in the late '50s, the influence of Trinity began to wane. During that period Taghmon thrived and with players availing of the opportunity to play at night and in all kinds of weather, the old open court at Trinity simply could not compete. Gradually its use became less and less as the years slipped by and it was eventually demolished in controversial

circumstances in 2004. Notwithstanding its demise however, the rich handballing tapestry associated with the name survived, as did its connection with those whose achievements placed it on such a high pedestal.



**John Doyle, John Ryan, Joe Hassett and Paddy Downey**

Born into that type of environment in 1969, it was inevitable that Peter Doyle's son Robert would also take up handball. When the time came for the third generation of the clan to play, Trinity was no longer active and with Taghmon having hit one of its barren periods, he 'threw in his lot' with neighbouring Ballymitty.

In keeping with family tradition, he was soon visiting the winners' enclosure at county juvenile level, before going on to represent Wexford at different ages up to and including under 21. A few years later in 1995 however, he suffered a shoulder injury that was to keep him out of handball for 18 years and all but end his career.

Fast forward to 2013 then and with Robert's oldest son, Mark having won the county under 10 championship the previous year, and two others, Bobby and Conor already straining at the leash, he decided to return to the court and start playing once more. It proved to be a watershed decision as not only did he win the All Ireland softball silver masters B doubles with Ricky Barron in 2014, he went on to win both the All Ireland and World silver masters B singles titles the following year.

In 2016 all three sons won county 4-wall singles titles in the colours of St. Josephs, but later that year when a fully refurbished Taghmon reopened its doors after a long absence, the family transferred their allegiance back to their native soil in time for the county softball championships. The following year Helen took on the role of club secretary and she still holds that position today.



Meanwhile, on court, the playing members of the family continued to set the pace and after winning their respective county 4-wall singles championships earlier this year, Mark, Bobby and Conor all went forward to represent Wexford in the Leinster championships.

Additionally the county 4-wall adult championships threw up an unusual occurrence back in February of this year when the father and son combination of Robert and Mark teamed up to win the junior doubles title, coming through a talented and very competitive field to do so. And, while fathers and sons playing together in Wexford championships is not new, this could well be the highest grade won by such a partnership.



Family and friends celebrate the Minnesota homecoming at Taghmon GAA Centre

Unlike the men of 60 or 70 years ago, today's handballers have many grades at county and national level as well as world championships to look forward to. Back then of course any international clashes were of the challenge variety between the top players from Ireland and America.

One such match took place in the new ball alley at Emmet Place, Wexford in September 1957 when John Doyle faced off against American champion Tom Ginty. Although better known as

a doubles player it was Doyle who produced a magnificent performance to claim a 21-15, 14-21, 21-16 victory and delight the packed attendance.

According to newspaper reports from that time the popularity of the occasion was such that in addition to the full house who attended, many hundreds were turned away. It was an extraordinary turnout for a match that had little at stake apart from the honour of being an Irishman taking on an American, but it showed the massive interest such a contest generated amongst the local community.

Nowadays world championships take place every three years and back in Minnesota in 2018 the current generation of the Doyle's, Mark, Bobby and Conor all took part with great success, bringing home a total of five medals including two gold. By any standards it was a massive family achievement of which their ancestors would surely have been proud.

So is this success down to genes or what? The debate goes something like this... Having a relative who was a famous All Ireland champion handballer is not always the advantage it is cracked up to be. *Why not?*

Well for a start there are the comparisons – he's not as good as his father, for instance! Or, he should be good because his grandfather was good – isn't that reason enough, huh? *It's not!*

Then there is the youngster who turns out to be a brilliant handballer, but who doesn't really get the credit - *why not?*

Because his father, his uncle or maybe his grandfather were good and that means he was bound to be good too. He was born good if you know what I mean! *No, I don't actually!*

The moral of this story is that we make it or we don't because of what we do ourselves and while it is nice to have a tradition of handball in the family, it can hardly convey an advantage unless all those other building blocks necessary for success are also in place. The Doyle's of the past knew that when they were creating their own history so they backed up their talent with commitment and determination. The current crop knows it too and those qualities will always be front and centre, despite the advances in coaching and training methods available nowadays.

Today the court at Trinity is little more than a wall and a memory, but whatever about the controversy surrounding its final days and months, the reality is that once Taghmon offered an alternative to daytime playing and dry weather handball, the writing, so to speak, was on the wall for this historic court.



What can never be taken away however is the massive contribution this tiny place made to the fabric of life in the area. The endless hours of activity at this iconic location and the joy it gave to those who availed of this most basic of amenities. For decades, the ball alley was the go-to place whether you played handball or were just happy to watch others do so and without it, the local community would surely have been a lesser place.

Society benefitted from Trinity handball alley and the name deserves to be remembered every bit as much as those whose achievements placed it firmly into the annals of history, whenever and wherever handball is spoken about.

And so this chapter ends, but the story will go on for as long as the Doyle family tree remains. Their connection with the place their ancestors made famous will be unmistakable and unbreakable.