



This report will take a while for this I apologise! To put it simply this was the greatest year the club has ever had. I will deal with the senior triumph in more detail shortly but while it is without doubt the overwhelming achievement of the year we must remember the many other fine achievements.

### **Senior:**

It is a difficult task to try and express the achievements of all involved with this squad. They have reached the summit of Galway hurling a wish that many here probably would have never expected until the last few years. The year started with a two point defeat to our near rivals Gort. I think this was one of the most difficult defeats the club ever had to take. We were clearly the better side but failed to put the opposition away on the day. It was a bitter pill to swallow at the time but in hindsight may have played a huge role in the development of the team.

This left the team in a must win game against Liam Mellow or face the threat of relegation. Despite trailing at half time the team stayed resolute to find a victory and so qualify us for the group stages of the championship. We were drawn against Athenry, Tynagh-Abbey-Duniry and Loughrea. In the first game against Athenry the team played some lovely hurling to put the game away with time to spare.

The second game of the group saw us play T/A/D. We have played them often over the last few years and have had some close games. This year however the lads showed real development and maturity by winning this game comfortably. This victory ensured we had qualified for the quarter final of the championship. We faced Castlegar in that match and had a comfortable victory in what was an excellent performance from the entire team.

The semi final saw us up against our close rivals Gort. These contests have become real battles in recent years and attracted attention from far and wide. The first match ended in a draw in what were testing ground and weather conditions. We led this game but Gort struck a last minute 65 to tie the game. Following this many people who didn't know this group of players believed that we had lost our chance. The replay had much more favourable match conditions. The game was nip and tuck all the way but we found ourselves 3 points down then minutes into the second half. The response for the players in the face of that adversity was outstanding. All of the players dug deep and this saw us go into a lead with five minutes remaining. There was a very late rally by Gort but we eventually emerged as one point winners.

We thus qualified for the final against Loughrea. The build up to the final was very exciting but I must complement the management in the way they kept the players focused on preparation. This was in no small part thanks to Dinny who of course had been through it all before with others clubs. The final itself was played again in tough conditions. This did not faze the players in the least who handled the occasion remarkably well. In the game itself we took an early lead and never relinquished it. Again Loughrea but up a stout resistance and forced the issue down to the last few

seconds. I feel it would be unfair to single any individual out for their performance on the day as each and every player had the game of their lives. Robert Murray's speech will go down in the annals as one of the all time greats and it was a fitting way to end the county championship.

Now to thank the numerous people who made the victory happen. First of all to the players who showed tremendous commitment throughout the entire calendar year. To win a county championship now days requires much more than training a few evenings a week. The way they look after their diet and the huge amount of hours they put into gym work are all vital to achieve at this level now. Perhaps when people criticise players they fail to see that to be a senior club player one has to immerse themselves totally into the game. When one witnesses the work first hand you quickly realise that to criticise a player is to be ill informed of what they give to play at this level.

To all who helped out on the sideline a big thank you. To Gerry Fallon who acted as the club respect officer many thanks. In particular to Noel Burke, Vincent Burke and Maurice Headd who helped out in the semi final and final. This I know was hugely appreciated by management as they brought their experience to bear at key stages during games. The sum of the team was only as healthy as its players. To Luke Kelly (Physio) and Doctor Ian O'Connor thanks must also go for having the players in peak physical condition for the big day. So much of the potential injury that the players might have suffered was stopped at source by two hugely important individuals, they being Allan Massey and Patrick Healy. At least one and usually the two have attended almost all games the senior team played this year from challenges to championship. Thank you to them once again.

To Justin Flannery and Jimmy Kelly a huge debt is also owed. They were as dedicated as all the players in their preparation of games and attendance at training. They both played a huge role in helping to bring the team to the summit of Galway hurling. I think no one would mind me saying that Dinny Cahill has made a huge impression for the good on all of these players. He has been with us now in some form or another for a number of years. The sheer energy and dynamism he brings to training is remarkable. I think we may well have the best hurling coach in Ireland involved with our club. His experience of having been involved with previous winning teams was a vitally important as he gauged the training of the team to have them in peak condition for the final.

Finally a massive thank you to John Burke. He took this team on over 5 years ago as a project and it has ultimately yielded what we all wanted. There have of course been bumps along the way and questions were asked. John however stuck resolutely to his vision for the team and has turned them into one of the finest club hurling sides in the county and indeed country. As an officer of the club there are numerous duties that need to be carried out that can take quite a bit of time. It however pales in comparison to the amount of work and time that John commits to the hurling team and indeed to other parts of the club. We as an entire club owe John Burke an enormous amount of gratitude. He would also be the first to tell us not to rest on our laurels and to focus on the upcoming all Ireland semi final against Loughiel Shamrocks. Once again thank you John for leading this team to triumph.

## **Under 21:**

This year we again qualified for the final unfortunately losing out to close neighbours Craughwell. The championship format was altered with groups of three being played off. In the first game we defeated T/A/D by two points in an entertaining affair in Loughrea. The second game in the group pitted us against Gort. A huge group attended this game as it was seen by many as a warm up to our later first round tie in the senior. We were able to get the victory by a point in a tense affair. This saw us through to the quarter final where we met Castlegar in an easy one sided victory for us. At this stage the championship was being run off in a timely fashion. We were drawn against Athenry in the semi final. The first game ended in a draw and we were unfortunate to lose Sean Skehill to bad injury during the game. This draw along with our players' involvements in Galway's league campaign meant that the semi final could not be played until November. Much had changed since the first match not least the weather conditions. Despite the game being only a few weeks after the senior victory the lads found a way to win the game by a goal. We were then to face Craughwell a week later in the final. We did not deliver on the day and can have no arguments that Craughwell deserved their victory. Many factors may have played a part in the defeat such as fatigue after such a long year but on mature reflection we did not meet the standards we would have for ourselves. Last year's campaign is over now and we must look to the immediate future. The U21 championship is scheduled to begin the first weekend in February. We will be asked to play the weekend following the All Ireland club semi final and so we must be ready to meet this challenge. The team is again a strong one and so we hope to make a pitch to regain the U21 title again.

## **Minor:**

This was probably one of the nice surprises of the year. Kevin Cunningham was elected at last year's meeting to take up the position but he relayed to me later in the year that he would not be able to commit to it. We then went in search of a minor manager and Colm Farrell stepped forward. It was late notice and so the teams preparations are not what we would have wanted but Colm made the best of things. In the first championship match we beat Abbeyknockmoy by a point. This was followed by an excellent win over Killimor. We were then beaten by Portumna in the group stage in a very entertaining game in our own pitch. This was followed by a late comeback win against Killimordaly to win by a point. We were defeated by Mounbellew in our final group game where we were missing a number of key players due to injury. The outcome of all of these results saw us qualify for the quarter final where we were drawn against a fancied Kinvarra team. The team showed great resolve to win the game by four points in a game that went down to the wire. The semi final pitted us against Oranmore who had topped the other qualifying group. This was perhaps our most impressive display all year and saw the team run out healthy winners. In the final we met out fellow group qualifiers Portumna. The first game was nip and tuck and the lads showed great courage to get a draw in the game. We had lost Ross Caswell one of our wing backs in the lead up to the final and to add to this woe one of our outstanding performers from the first final John Massey picked up an injury that kept him out of the replay. Despite this blow the lads responded like champions and went into a good lead during the game. However Portumna kept chipping away at the lead and one got that sense that the pendulum had swung in their favour. They ran out four point winners. Pride is the word that comes to mind when describing the year that the minors had.

They suffered many adversities from the lack of preparation time to the injuries that this small squad was confronted with. Despite this they showed great character to keep coming back from all of these knocks. The majority of this was down to the players themselves but Colm was an inspiration to the lads from day one. All year he told them they were champions and he was proven correct even if they don't have the silverware they deserve to show it. Thanks must also go to Robert Murray for his contribution to the minor team. To summarise the year in minor has to be seen as a bonus when one looks at the starting position.

### **Junior B:**

This was undoubtedly a year of frustration and what if's. In the group stages we lost out to Beagh in a well contested game in Gort. We followed this with victories over Craughwell and a four point defeat to Abbeyknockmoy. This left us in danger of not qualifying from the group stages. The lads rallied to produce their best performance of the year against Kilnadeema-Leitrim where they won by three points. This left us in a situation where we had to get at least a draw against Spideal to qualify. We were well in control of the game only for Spideal to rally. In the end we did just enough to get the draw that saw us through. We were drawn to play a youthful Cappataggle in the preliminary quarter final. This was a high scoring game that went to extra time where we were defeated by a point. The last junior B season is one where we never really got going like the year previous. The team lost numerous players from the final team the year before through emigration and the natural transition to the senior grade. Despite these losses the championship was not beyond the realms of possibility as the overall standard of the competition was certainly lower than that of previous years. However the necessary commitment was not shown by enough of the team to warrant a county final win. We did qualify for the league quarter final and are still waiting on this to be played. I am firmly of the belief that this championship is still attainable but it will require a total commitment of the panel to the training field. Let's hope that 2013 sees us back in the mix for this championship. Thank you to Vinny Healy, Maurice Headd and Kenneth Larkin for their commitment over the past two years.

### **Junior C:**

We again fielded a junior C team this year and played three championship games. While we were not victorious in any of these games it was still an enjoyable experience for all involved (excluding oneself who was so harshly sent off in one of the games!). Despite the lack of success at the grade I continue to feel it has an important place in our club as an outlet for players. Changes to the junior C1 championship for the forthcoming year should allow for the team to be playing in a more appropriate level. I will outline these changes as well as changes to other championships later on. Thank you to Kieran and his team for their continued commitment.

## **Finance and Sponsorship:**

The year in terms of our finances were hugely altered by qualifying for the senior final. If we had not them we would be under severe financial pressure. I want to thank all of the people who sold the raffle tickets we had in August. This was a Trojan effort by all involved and it brought in circa 18000 euro. The lotto continues to be the lifeblood of the club and s special thanks to all those who sell the tickets and indeed all those who purchase them. As you are all aware we moved to 32 numbers in the lotto as it was won in quick succession on a number of occasions which stretched the club financially. Despite this we continue to get healthy weekly intakes. As you will see form the treasures report the club went thought a huge amount of money this year. It is no small undertaking and I want to point out everybody what a task it can be to keep account of all of this. Here I would like to draw attention to the fantastic work that Mary Cooney does as treasurer. We could ask for no one better to keep account of all the incomings and outgoings.

Moving on to seal with sponsorship is something that I thread carefully on. I say this as there was so much goodwill this year that I am afraid I will leave somebody out. I will not try to list everybody out here as to do so would require a forest in paper. Never the less I want to thank our main sponsor Minihanes Supervalu in Gort. Peter was fantastic to us this year. He provided all the items we had for our raffle as well as mountains of supplies to the senior team in the run up to the final. This has been a tremendous partnership for us and I would urge people in the club to give back to Minihanes.

To Michael Kelly who continues to sponsor the lotto as well as getting tracksuits for the seniors a big thank you. Kieran Kelly in the Castle Inn continues to provide the club with sponsorship when called upon, thank you to him also. Justin Flannery also continues to come up trumps and we thank him also. Billy Shearer of XL shops came on board with the minors and we were delighted with this. Senator Lorraine Higgins also contributed towards the minors and we recognise her here. To John Naughton in the Village in special thanks for the sponsorship he offered. The Minors on two occasions, the U21's and the seniors on several occasions were given meals after games free of charge. To Mike Buckley in Aran sports also a huge thank you. We received a new set of senior jerseys through him from Masita as well as other items. As I referred to earlier we literally received hundreds of donations. To one and all a massive thank you from the club.

## **Development:**

As you all know the club purchased land a number of years ago. We still have an outstanding sum owed on our loan but despite this I am off the belief we need to seriously look at trying to develop the new pitch in the coming year. Our current account is relatively healthy but this will soon run down over the course of a normal year. With this in mind I believe we should at least look at the possibility of availing of capital to complete the project. The community has continually given over the past few years and it is my view that we need to be seen to make progress over the course of the next year. We still have a grant of 10,000 euro to draw down from the Connacht Council on completion of a playing pitch. The need for a second playing pitch is a dire one now. Weather conditions seem to be constantly wet year round and one field is simple not able to take the amount of traffic that goes on in our pitch. I know that people will be wary on burdening the club with more debt in this current climate but I would ask that an incoming executive at least do a feasibility study on the project.

## **Communications:**

Over the past number of years the club has endeavoured to improve communications with its members. A text messaging service is now going to over 100 people. I would like to extend this as much as possible and so I would ask that nay member pass on their number to the incoming secretary/assistant secretary. The club's FaceBook page now has 500 followers and it is regularly updated with fixtures, results and club events. We also now have a twitter feed which received a lot of attention in the wake of the county final win. Last year we also launched a new website which can be found at [stthomassqaclub.com](http://stthomassqaclub.com). Special thanks must go to Thomas Geraghty who developed the website and continued to update it for us all year. I hope that it continues to grow as a tool to keep everyone updated as to club events. I would recommend to any incoming executive to continue to build on pr/communication side of the club, perhaps a monthly newsletter might be an option here.

## **Championship Formats:**

The Galway hurling committee have proposed changes to most of the championship formats in Galway. In Senior there are now 22 teams and they want to keep the current format in place as much as possible. In order to do this a preliminary game will be played prior to the first and second round. As senior champions we will be excluded from the first preliminary game. This game will see 20 teams put into a hat with only 2 of those being chosen to play. The winners advance to round one proper with the losers going into round two(round one losers game). We will come into the championship in round one where 20 teams will be drawn to play in head to head games. This will produce 10 winners who will advance to the group stages. The ten losers will then be joined by the losers of the preliminary round to make 11 teams. This will again require a preliminary round to get it down to 10 teams. The preliminary round 2 losers will go into the relegation process. The 10 teams left will then play to five winners who advance to the group stages and 5 losers who enter the relegation groups. Relegation this year will consist of 2 groups of three. The winners of each of these groups will be let back into the senior shield. Those who finish second and third will cross play in relegation semi finals with the losers playing a relegation final. Each club will be required to sign a charter agreeing to the championship in advance so as to avoid the disputes of last year.

The U21 championship is reverting to the old system where who get a second chance if you lose the first round or win the first round and lose the second round.

Minor is going to have large groups of between 7 and 9 and as we will be in A this year will be played in neutral venues.

Junior B will see the most radical change. The leagues in junior are being abolished. To reach the level of games required to meet rules the championship will have groups between 7 and 9. The top four will qualify for the knockout stages and the remaining teams playing in a shield.

Junior C1 as I referred to earlier should now include teams of a standard that will be more appropriate for our third team.

## **County:**

We were well represented in county panels again this year. The year was a great one for the county with them surpassing all expectations to reach the All Ireland final and to force a replay. David, Conor, James and Darragh represented us with great distinction. We were all extremely proud when David was deservedly awarded out clubs first All Star. This has been backed up recently by his Galway Sports award for hurling. Congratulations also to Anthony who led the team. His vision for Galway hurling has breathed new life into the game and we are all behind him for the forthcoming year.

We were also well represented in the county U21 and intermediate panels with Patrick, Anthony, Cathal and Bernard adding to the lads above. James Regan also had the honour of captaining the U21 team.

In minor we were represented By Shane Cooney and Eanna Burke and it's great to think that they have another year of it to look forward to.

Finally on this topic I want to thank the hurling board officers in particular Pat Kearney and John Fahey for their advice and help during the year.

## **To Close:**

To finish we pass on condolence to any members who lost loved ones this year.

The camogie club had a great year at underage and but on a great event in the mock wedding. We wish them further success for the year to come.

I would like to thank all of the executive members for their work over the year. I also want to thanks all those who got involved in the county final fundraising committee, in particular Adrian Burke whom without we would have been nowhere! To my fellow officers Mary and Joe who do such an incredible job. Their dedication to the club is unmatched by any and we are fortunate to have them.

Lastly I apologise for the length of this report and if I have left something or somebody out I apologise. Thank you to all the members for all the support over the year in my role.