

Suncroft Gaelic Football Club

History



The name Suncroft means “a sun blessed croft”.

Local folklore has it that Suncroft was named by a priest who was walking in the croft (or field) long ago, the sun was shining so brightly on the field that he decided to name the place Suncroft.

Location

Suncroft GFC is located on the edge of the Curragh and covers areas such as Suncroft village, Ballyshannon, Maddenstown, Ironhills, Cut Bush and the Curragh.

History

Suncroft GFC is one of 56 Clubs in County Kildare. It is currently an Intermediate football club however its history shows that it won the Senior Hurling championship in 1974 along with a Senior Football League title in 1952.

In 1889 Suncroft GFC was formed. Records from 1890 show that Suncroft had 44 members with officers listed as Revd J Ramsbottom, Paul Cullen, Joseph Kelly and James Clinch.

In its early years Suncroft was not very active and a second club, Maddenstown, was formed in the parish in 1901. Maddenstown won three junior football championships in 1908, 1918 and 1925. Paul Doyle was a member of the 1918 and 1925 teams. 1927 Maddenstown amalgamated with Kildare. After some inactive and indistinct years the amalgamation of Maddenstown with Kildare prompted a Suncroft rebirth in 1929 and they went on to win the junior championship and promotion to intermediate in 1930. Suncroft were defeated in intermediate finals in 1934 and 1937 but went on to win the 1944 and 1950 championships, progressing to win the Leader Cup in 1953.

Suncroft won its first minor title in 1944 and Suncroft minor's beat Sarsfields in successive minor finals in 1948 and 1949. From that team Paddy Feeley won a Leinster final medal with Kildare in 1956, Johnny Boyle went on to win an All-Ireland medal with Dublin in 1958 and he also captained the Kildare Minors for 3 years while Seamus Byrne played for the Irish rugby team. The connection with Irish Rugby continues with former Suncroft GFC Underage player Fergus McFadden lining out for both Leinster and Ireland in recent years and Cian Prendergast captaining Ireland's U18's.

In 1981 Suncroft won a unique treble in under-age competitions winning under 11, 14 and 16 championships. Anthony Rainbow was the most prominent player on a team that won the 1989 Intermediate championship and reached the semi-final in 1995.

In 2003 Suncroft lost the intermediate final to Sallins but won the Tony Keogh Cup beating Rheban that year.

In 2007 Suncroft won the Intermediate Championship Final beating Ballymore and followed this win up by playing senior championship football for the following 6 years.

In 2009, Suncroft completed one of the biggest shocks in the Kildare Senior Championship by beating the highly fancied Sarsfields by 2-12 to 0-15 on All Ireland Sunday morning in glorious sunshine at St Conleth's Park.

Paul Doyle

Paul, from Brownstown, was selected on the Kildare Gaelic football team of the millennium. Few Footballers achieved what Paul Doyle achieved during his career.

He won 3 All Irelands with Kildare in 1919, 1927 & 1928

He won 6 Leinster championship medals in a row from 1926 to 1931.

He helped Leinster win 3 railway cup medals in 1928, 1929 & 1930.

Paul captained the All Army team which opposed the Garda teams in 1927, 1928 and 1929, he also captained the Army Metro teams in the same years. The Army Metro team won the Tailteann Games of 1928.

Paul won 2 junior championship medals with Maddenstown 1917 and 1918. When stationed with army in Cavan he won a senior championship medal with Virginia Blues and an Ulster championship medal with Cavan.

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Hugh Campion, Kildare GAA chairman 1972-81

Suncroft have been fortunate in having had one of Kildare GAA's best known and loved GAA men as a member of the club. Hugh was originally from Portlaoise and was born in 1936 but came to Kildare in the mid fifties. Hugh worked on

the County Hurling board and County Football board, He worked at county board level in every capacity and ended up working as the Kildare representative on Central Council up till his untimely death a position his late father held with Laois. Records show Hugh Father won a senior hurling medal with Laois in 1915.

Hugh was county board chairman of Kildare GAA for 9 years.

Hurling

For a number of decades in the mid 1900's Suncroft had a strong hurling team. The hurling club was founded by Dick Cahill and Bill Laford in 1948. Throughout its history, Suncroft had close connections with the nearby Curragh camp, and won junior championships in 1951 and 1953 in the era of Paddy Feeley, Laford, James, Freeman, Seamus Gough, Patrick Fahy and Billy Quinn.

Billy Quinn starred on Suncroft teams that never reached a county final but beat Athy in 1962 and Éire Óg in 1963 in championship matches. Suncroft defeated Broadford in the junior final of 1973 to regain senior status and despite a 3-19 to 3-6 defeat by Ardclough in a championship group match, qualified for the County final. They won with a brand of hard ground hurling and by keeping Johnny Walsh scoreless from play. Frank Fogarty, and Donncha O'Keeffe, survived from Kildare's 1966 junior championship team. Tommy Doyle scored two goals, Con McNamara and Eugene Sheehan a goal each as Suncroft came storming through for victory in the second half. One year later Ardclough defeated Suncroft 7-18 to 0-7 in the 1975 final.

The Suncroft side of the early sixties was probably its strongest, Frank Fogarty, Derry Noonan, Niall Cummins, Fintan Morrissey, George Shaughnessy, Denis Hanley and Mick Cunningham, all playing for the county, as did Noel Fahy throughout the 1950s.

Not being content with just establishing Suncroft's hurling club Dick Cahill, a Tipperary man living in Brownstown, was elected as the first Cathaoirleach of the Kildare Hurling Board in 1955 and within a very short time underage hurling was established throughout the county.

Underage Football

Throughout the club's history Suncroft Underage teams have provided our young players with friendship, enjoyment and achievement. Our teams have experienced success and our young players have learned to master the skills of Gaelic Football in a supportive environment.

The first significant underage success was when the club won the Kildare Juvenile Championship in 1953. This was preceded by Under 14 Championship success in 1939; 1940; and 1941. The 1970s and the 1980s saw titles won in the Under 16 league in 1978; 1981; 1986 and in the Under 14 Championships of 1978; 1984; 1985; and 1986.

The highlight of this period was when Suncroft won a unique underage treble, when winning the 1981 under 11, under 14 and under 16 county competitions. The players coached and developed during this period would go on to win the Intermediate Championship of 1989.

In 2004 a new underage coaching structure was established to put more focus on underage development and players as young as six and seven years of age started to learn the skills of football. These young players, born in 1997/1998, were the first to benefit from this change and they achieved some successes along the way.

Under 10 Div 3 league title in 2007; the under 12 Div 3 League title in 2009; the under 13 Div 1 Shield in 2010; the under 14 Div 2 league in 2011; the under 15 Div 3 league in 2012; the under 16 Div 3 league and Kildare County 'B' championship double in 2013. In 2014 the U12 Div 1, U13 Div3 U14 Div 5 and U16 Div 5 all came Suncrofts way but with all the teams stepping up a division 2015 was a barren year.

2016 saw the U18 win the Div 4 league and in 2017 the U14's won the Feile A Shield and A Championship Shield.

2018 again saw some success with the U14's wining the Div 4 league and U17's winning the Div 3 league. While the U15's lost out in the semi-final they had an amazing run in the Div 1 league putting a string of nine wins together before

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losing out to Balyna in the semi-final on a horrible wet and windy night in Hawkfield. They had beaten Balyna by 24 points earlier in the league.

In 2019 Suncroft secured the U17 Div 3 and U15 Div 4 league titles. The U16's again got to the Div 1 league semi-final and lost out to Athy. In the A championship the U16's had a great run to make the final, unfortunately while beating Naas in the semi-final four players picked up injuries that excluded them from the final day panel and they lost the final to an impressive Clane team.

2020 was severely disrupted by the Covid Pandemic but Suncroft qualified for the Minor(U18) C championship final and went on to win that when it was played in early 2021.

2021 was again disrupted by the Covid Pandemic but it saw the senior team take their first forward step in many years when they won the Division 4 league and had a really good run in the Intermediate Championship. The U12's won the Division 2 league and the U16's won the Division 4 league.

As this cohort of U12 to U18 players migrate to the ranks of the senior team the skill level and winning attitude that they bring is the result of the vision and hard work of those that changed the club underage structure back in 2004.

In 2009 the leadership of the underage section took on a number of significant and demanding projects to promote the game in the community, the main effort being the hosting part of the Under 14 National Féile competition of 2009. The hard work of all involved and the successful conduct of this competition was rightly acknowledged when the Kildare County Board awarded Suncroft GFC the title of Underage Club of the Year for 2009.

Since 2011 our underage teams learn to play the game within the structures and rules of the GAAs "GO GAMES" development philosophy. This system focuses on the games played from under 7 to under 11 age groups. GO GAMES are a small-sided version of Gaelic Football which has been devised for children up to and including 11 years of age. The following are the key underpinning principles of GO GAMES;

- All children get to play.
- Activities are structured in a manner which optimises the level of fun, friendship, fair play and achievement derived by participants.
- Participants train and play in a safe, supportive and stimulating environment where they are encouraged to risk error, to learn and to derive maximum enjoyment from their involvement.
- Players master the basic skills and experience the sense of accomplishment, which derives from acquiring playing proficiency on the left and right side of the body.
- Everybody involved in GO GAMES, whether as players, parents/guardians, spectators, mentors, teachers, officials etc, should adhere to the key underpinning principles and give expression to the GAA 'Give Respect, Get Respect' initiative.

Since the commencement of GO GAMES, player participation numbers have increased within our club and success on the field of play for the competitive age groups continues to go from strength to strength. In 2016 over 150 underage players successfully participated at the various age grades.

Thanks to the hard work and countless hours of voluntary service by coaches, officials, parents and guardians Suncroft Underage, under the stewardship of Mark Prendergast, is committed to meeting the needs of our young players. The greater the sense of achievement, fun and fair play experienced by young players, the more they enjoy their involvement and the greater the effort they will make to excel.

Suncroft GFC will continue to assist our coaches, administrators and referees as they promote the playing of Gaelic Football and the co-ordinating of skills development which will in turn support the retention of young players. It's fair to say the future for Suncroft GFC is a bright and very exciting one.

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Ladies Football Club

The first Ladies Football Club in Suncroft was established in the early 1970's. The team was made up of Suncroft ladies along with ladies from neighbouring Nurney. The team was managed by Ollie Brannock (snr) and captained by his wife Rose. The Suncroft Ladies won their first Kildare County Championship title in 1975.

There was a gap of some twenty-five years before Suncroft fielded another ladies team in 2001. This team was managed by Ollie Brannock (jnr) and Christy Brennan (jnr). In 2003 they reached their first League final and it was a very close encounter against Prosperous with Suncroft losing by two points on a score line of 2-14 to 2-16.

2004 was a very successful year for Suncroft Ladies. Overcoming Prosperous in the Championship Final Suncroft was crowned Junior B Championship Winners and also received the prestigious Kildare Ladies Football Club of the Year award. The team also reached the league semi-final.

In 2004 the ladies club decided to set up a minor team under the management of Eamon O'Modhrain and Alan Troy (Originally from Kilcormac in Offaly, one of the first parishes in the country to field a ladies' team in the mid 1960's) with Patrice Behan assisting. In their first year the minor team reached the Championship final and were unlucky to lose to Sarsfields/Athgaravan. The club has continued to enter the minor competition thereafter.

The younger ladies of Suncroft played on the same, mixed, teams with the young gents under the auspices of the GAA up to under twelve level (The official cut off in the GAA for playing mixed teams is under twelve, due to child welfare and protection issues). Following on from the successful establishment of the minor team, in 2007 an increased emphasis was put in by Diane Behan and Eamon O'Modhrain to expand the Suncroft Ladies Club's underage setup to bridge the gap between the GAA's under twelve teams and the ladies' minors. In 2007 the club entered teams for the first time ever in the under thirteen, under fourteen and under fifteen competitions and the under thirteens went on to win the Division 3 League title in their first year.

In 2007 the Senior Ladies overcame neighbours St Laurence's to win the Division 2 League title and for the first time Suncroft Ladies would be playing Division 1 football in 2008.

In 2008 the club entered teams in all ages from under eleven. Suncroft went on to win the under eleven Division 5, under thirteen Division 4, under fourteen Division 3, under fifteen Division 4 leagues and narrowly missing out on the under twelve and under sixteen leagues. The under fourteen team also entered the first Féile for the club in 2008 and made it all the way to the Leinster final before losing out to Kilkenny in the Division 4 final.

Through commitment of the more mature players and their nurturing of the younger players the senior team went on to win the Junior B Championship and Division 2 league in 2012. In the same year the under thirteens won the Division 5 League.

In 2013 the under thirteen team won the Division 3 League. In 2014 they under thirteens won the Division 4 League and the minor team won the Division 2B Shield. After the success of 2012 a number of the senior ladies' team moved on and the team was rebuilding and giving older underage players senior experience in 2013 and 2014.

2015 was a very successful year for the ladies. The under fourteen's winning the Division 3 League and they also won the Kildare Féile B and went on to represent the County in the all-Ireland Féile competition where they were beaten by New York in the quarter final. The senior ladies team won the Division 4 League and the Junior B Championship.

2016 was again a very successful year for the ladies with Suncroft fielding competitive teams at all age levels. The senior Ladies won the Division 3 League and the Junior Championship and went on to overcome Westmeath, Kilkenny and Offaly in the Leinster Junior Club Championships before losing out in the Leinster final to the Dublin Champions, St. Maurs (St. Maurs went on to win the All Ireland). The minors won the Division 2 League and the under fourteens reached the Division 4 League final.

2016 was closed out with the fantastic achievement of the club being awarded Kildare LGFA Club of the Year.

In 2017 the under sixteens won the Division 3 league and while there was finals and semi-finals there were no other titles apart from that.

2018 saw the senior team win the Intermediate Championship and League Division 2. With a good or youngsters coming along Suncroft also won the under sixteen league Division 5, under fourteen league Division 4 and under thirteen league Division 2.

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In 2019 the senior ladies performed admirably in their first year in senior championship and in league Division 1 and just missed out on semi-final places in both. The minor ladies won the Division 3 league. The under fourteen team was playing Division 1 football and held their own.

2020 was severely disrupted by the Covid Pandemic and on top of that Kildare LGFA introduced some additional covid restrictions that basically meant that small clubs like Suncroft couldn't field teams at a lot of age levels.

2021 was similarly disrupted by the Covid Pandemic again Kildare LGFA kept their rules in place and seriously curtailed Suncroft's ability to field teams and compete. Despite this the U14 ladies did manage to win the Division 4 league.

There has been a few stumbles and setbacks along the way but with the perseverance, commitment and efforts of the committee, team managers, coaches, mentor's helpers and players over the years Ladies football in Suncroft has gone from strength to strength.

Facilities

Facilities are always a challenge and the dressing rooms in the community centre, which opened in 2015, were a great step forward. In 2019 a new sand-based training area with floodlights opened for use and the main pitch was drained and sanded. The new training area pitch upgrade will benefit all going forward. In 2020 railings were erected around the main pitch and two new, and robust, dugouts were installed. 2021 saw Suncroft purchase a large new grass mower which will help keep the pitches in good condition for the players.

With growing numbers of players (just on 300 in 2021) the focus needs to continue to be on the development of the facilities to ensure the youth of our parish and its surrounds have the facilities that they need and deserve to remain engaged with sport and physical activity.

Proud County Tradition

Over the years Suncroft has had several representatives on the Kildare Senior football and hurling teams Seamus Byrne, Toss McCarthy, Paddy Feely, Frank Fogarty, Derry Noonan, Niall Cummins, Fintan Morrissey, George Shaughnessy, Denis Hanley and Mick Cunningham, Noel Fahy. More recently Anthony Rainbow, Killian Brennan and Mickey Harnett had donned the Kildare jersey. Killian Brennan was once famously referred to by RTE Commentator Michael O'Muircheartaigh as "The Real Gooch" held the honour of being captain of the Kildare Senior Football Team in 2007.

Fionn Downling was a member of Kildare Senior Team Squad up to 2020 and at the end of 2021 Eoghan Lawless stepped up from the Intermediate team to the Senior Team Squad. Killian Brennan was once famously referred to by RTE Commentator Michael O'Muircheartaigh as "The Real Gooch" held the honour of being captain of the Kildare Senior Football Team in 2007.

Anthony Rainbow played with Kildare for almost 20 years he won 2 Leinster Football Championship Medals in 1998 and 2000. He played in the 1998 All Ireland Final where Kildare lost out to Galway. In 2000 along with winning a Leinster Medal Anthony also won an All Star and was the only representative from Leinster to win an all-star award that year. Anthony also won an O'Byrne cup medal in 2003. He played with Ireland in the International Rules Series in 2001. In 2021 Anthony Rainbow was appointed to the Kildare Senior Team management team.

In 2007 Suncroft's John Brown went to Australia to play for Ireland in the Under 21 International Rules series. He won a leinster Under 21 title in 2008. John also played on the Kildare team that won a Leinster Junior medal 2011.

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In 2015 Suncroft GFC was represented on the County ladies' senior team by Ellen Dowling, Trina Duggan and Rebecca McGuirk and they won the Intermediate Leinster title. In 2016 Ellen Dowling and Trina Duggan helped Kildare to go a step better when they won the Leinster and went on to win the Intermediate All Ireland Final.

In 2018 Suncroft GFC had four players on the Kildare LGFA's County Minor team that won the Leinster and All Ireland B Championship, Eve Kehoe, Aislinn Dooley, Megan Troy and Carla Ennis.

In 2019 the long and proud Suncroft GFC tradition of producing top quality county footballers continued with thirteen Suncroft GFC ladies and eleven Suncroft GFC gentlemen representing their community, their club, and their county at intercounty level.

In 2020 Ellen Dowling, Trina Duggan and Aislinn Dooley all featured on the county senior ladies. Jack Doyle played with the U20's and Conn Kehoe played with the county minor footballers. Conn also played with, and captained, the county minor hurlers.

In 2021 Ellen Dowling and Trina Duggan featured for the county senior ladies although Trina has a short season due to an injury. Ruth Dillon won a leinster title with the Kildare U14's. Tom Martin played with the U20 footballers and Conn Kehoe with the U20 hurlers. Sean Brown and Ryan Behan played with the county minors.

Chairperson

Rev. J Ramsbottom PP - 1889
D McDonagh
Andy Cullen
Eugene Austin
Con Toft
Joe Walsh
Jack Higgins
James Dillon
Val McDonagh
Liam Murphy
John Moore
Ted Rooney
Matty Duggan
Cathal Malone
Paddy Conneeely
Christy McNally
Johnny Moore
Ollie Brannock
Des Brannock
Val Dillon
Shane Kavanagh
Des Brannock
Mick Kehoe

Secretaries

Paul Cullen
P Lynch
Mick Delaney
John Hanlon
Paddy Conneeely
Rose Brannock
Bernard Duff
Liam Murphy
John Moore
Liam Birmingham
Martin Duggan
James Keane
Shane Kavanagh
Louise McGuirk
Shane Kavanagh
Margaret Malone

Based on the best available information. Please e-mail any corrections, updates, or additional information to pro.suncroft.kildare@qaa.ie

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