Black Raven Pipe Band

http://www.blackravenpipeband.net/

It is always very difficult to discover the exact moment of the birth of an idea. In the case of the Black Raven Pipe Band it is probably true to say that the beginning of the band coincided with the resurgence of pride in all things National.

The revival of interest in the Irish Language early in 1900?s led to a renewal of interest in the National game of Hurling. One of the earliest and most enthusiastic of the clubs in Fingal was the Naomh Mac Cullen Hurling Club. They travelled about playing matches in the Dublin Junior Hurling League and on one of their visits to Dublin they saw the Beady Pipers from Armagh marching through the city. The colourful uniform and the enthusiastic reception given to the band by the people of Dublin made a deep impression on the Lusk lads. About this time the late Thomas Ashe then schoolmaster of Cardiff school and also a member of the hurling club had obtained a set of bagpipes from Paddy White the marathon runner. Paddy had won the pipes as a trophy for his marathon running. Thomas Ashe taught himself how to play the bagpipes and sometime early in 1910 he and John Rooney on Raheney House decided to start a pipers club. At that stage they had little hope of being able to gather the funds and support they knew were needed to form a band and so described themselves as a club.Jimmy Sheridan of Corduff and Dick McArdle of Lusk soon joined the two men. They organised a collection and due to the help of the hurling club and the dramatic class they were soon able to purchase two more sets of bagpipes and the band came into existence. The Library Hall was used for practice and one evening during practice a certain Jack McNally happened to be passing complete with tin whistle and following an old Lusk tradition he looked in the Library window to see what was going on. The band were playing 'The wind that shakes the barley". The pipes finished the tune but a tin whistle echo remained until Thomas Ashe ordered the tin whistle man to be caught. He was finally captured on the 'Green' He did not succeed in escaping from the band until the time of his death in 1965. During the winter of 1910 and the spring of 1911 Dick McArdle and Jack McNally travelled to Dublin for tuition under the careful eye of Professor Liam McAndrew. Dick and Jack then returned to Lusk to teach the remainder of the pipers. Davy Langan of the St Maurs Fife and Drum band taught the drummers. During this period, local ladies notably Miss Margaret Clark, Miss Theresa Carton, Mrs Lambe and Miss Kate McArdle were busy designing and making uniforms for the band. A Mr. F J Bigger, the noted antiquarian of Belfast, procured the material. It was he who gave the band it's name and gave the members every help and encouragement. He also presented the first Black Raven flag, which was made in Belfast. The origin of this flag goes back to the Battle of Clontarf when Brien Boru captured the Black Raven Flag from the Danes. In early summer of 1911 the band paraded for the first time in uniform. Two designs were adopted for the band; the first one was a black tunic, green kilt and white plaid shawl. The second uniform was white tunic, saffron kilt and black plaid shawl. The original members of the band were almost all members of the Lusk Hurling Club. The enthusiasm for all things National at this time ensured the band had the full support of the people in the locality. The band that paraded on that occasion were as follows: Matt Kelly (Flag) Jack McNally, Jimmy Sheridan, Matt McCann, Mickey Meehan, Dick McArdle, Dick Aungier, John Clarke, Thomas Ashe (all pipers) and John Rooney on the bass drum. The side drummers were Joe Clarke and Paddy Doyle. Pipe Major on that first day was Dick McArdle. During 1911 and 1912 the band went from strength to strength. The original members were joined by further enthusiasts, notably Johnny Devine, Tom Rafferty, Tom McArdle, Frank Morgan, Pat Kelly, Charlie Weston and Willie Mehan (all pipers). Pat Caddell played the bass drum and the side drummers were Pat Halpin, Frank Murphy, Dan Brophy, Tom Doyle and Jack Rafferty. In 1913 the band competed for the first time in Galway against such bands as The City of Dublin Pipe Band, St. Laurence O' Toole Pipe Band, Fintan Lalor Pipe Band and DeLacey Family band from Ferns in Co. Wexford. This was their first competition and they won the Championship of Ireland. The following year 1914 they travelled to Killarney and were accorded a special welcome by McGillicudy who expressed himself as being proud to be host to Thomas Ashe's band. Lispole near Tralee was the birthplace of Thomas Ashe and the Kerrymen could not do enough for the Black Raven band. They won first place in the competition and their numerical strength at the time was such that while in Killarney they were able to parade a full band and still allow some of the bandsmen to take advantage of the sightseeing tours. A story is told that one of these parties while returning to the town on a sidecar met a pipe band marching and playing towards them. While some distance away they remarked among themselves what a fine band it was and when just abreast of it discovered it was their own. They had not seen the band from the outside before this day. The year 1915 found the Band competing in Cork where they obtained 3rd Place. About this time some of the lads patronised a fortuneteller for fun and she told them they would make a journey across water. A good number of them duly did so when after the Rising in 1916 they were interned in England. On Easter Sunday they played at a function held by the Irish National Foresters at Lusk. The history of Ashbourne becomes the history of the Black Raven Band for this period because may of the lads fought in that engagement and the aftermath resulted in the Band being practically suspended till the General Amnesty of June 1917. Almost at once the band reformed and on Tom Ashe?s tragic death in September they had the sad privilege of leading his funeral cortege. The memory of Tom Ashe will live and his name can never be forgotten as long as the Black Raven Flag flies in Lusk. Another visit to Killarney in 1918 gave the Kerrymen an opportunity to show their loyalty to the memory of Tom Ashe by the great welcome they extended to his Band, they won the all Ireland Championship and famous Carl Hardebeck commented very favourably on their performance. During a competition in Cork the following Year 1919, a tragi-comical episode occurred which showed that the Lusk lads had an eye for beauty as well as an ear. It happened that while marching and playing one of the side drummers caught sight of a lovely young lady in the audience. This no doubt helped to improve his playing but unfortunately it prevented him from turning when the rest of the Band turned to counter march. He, wrapped up in the contemplation of feminine beauty, just marched straight on and the band was disqualified. It is not recorded how or in what condition he returned to Lusk. The Black and Tans brought more than the their share of trouble and finally in November 1917 on the night John (Rover) McCann and Joe Sherlock were shot they raided the band room which was then in the Foresters? Hall (the old Billiard Club). They took those instruments, which had not already been hidden, and also the Black Raven Flag. Some time before the loss of the instruments, Frank Devine joined the band and soon was to become Pipe Major. Two other people joined at the same time, namely Joe Connolly (Bass Drum) and Frank Clark (Piper). Efforts were made from time to time to find out what had become of the instruments but with no success. One of the surviving sets of pipes was in the possession of Matt McCann and he never lost his interest in pipe music. He often played them in his own back yard and the music attracted the lads who were the backbone of the reformed band. In November 1927 Frank Devine, Charlie Hurley, Dan Sherry and Eamon Monks started on practice chanters, encouraged and taught by Matt. Their music-room was a barn behind Matt?s house, and the music itself was written out on a whitewashed wall. In May 1928 a meeting was called in the Library Hall and the band was officially reformed. Paddy Doyle becoming Secretary, Rev. Fr. Flood then the Parish Priest gave permission for the band to use the Library Hall for practices and he also told

them a set of pipes, which had come into the possession of Canon Ryan in Skerries. Jack McNally, Johnnie Devine and Charlie Hurley went to see the Canon and when he handed them the pipes, Jack immediately identified them as his own set, which has been taken by the Black and Tans. The members of the Band, new and old were helped by enthusiastic supporters notably Tommy Thompson and they organised a house-to-house collection. Now with six sets of pipes and willing members they soon got down to practice in earnest. Pat Jones of Saint Maurs taught the drummers, repeating the good work of David Langan. Matt McCann and Johnnie Devine held classes with practice chanters in the Library hall and often in the summer evenings they practiced outdoors on the ?green?. Practice continued through the 1928 and into 1929. In November 1928 Paddy Doyle emigrated to England and Charlie Hurley became secretary and served in that position until 1948.As the band progressed they often paraded in and out of the village and in August 1929 they accepted an invitation to pay at a bazaar in Donabate and also at a Fingal football final between Saint Maurs from Rush and Reynoldstown Rovers from close to Naul County Dublin. They did not have any uniforms as yet and the band played as follows: Pipers, Frank Devine, Johnnie Devine, Matt McCann, Dick McArdle (Pipe Major) John Clarke, Paddy Doyle, Pat Halpin, Charlie Hurley, and Eamon Monks, Drummer that day was Dan Sherry. Jack McNally played the bass drum and Joe Kiernan was trainee bass drummer. When Joe became proficient, Dan Sherry resumed playing the pipes. Every effort was made to collect funds, concerts, raffles, dances and Trojan work by Minnie Devine and Tommy Thompson. These led to the acquisition of a new set of uniforms, which were made by Padraig O?Flasain, then of O'Connell Street Dublin. On the 29th June 1930 the day of Father Martin's ordination Mass in Lusk the band paraded their new uniform for the first time. After the Mass they continued to Swords to play for the Feis Cup Gaelic Football Final between Fingallians from Swords and Pioneers from Balbriggan, an all North County Dublin final. That day the band paraded as follows, Riorbard Hand was the Drum Major, pipers were Charlie Hurley, Dan Sherry, Frank Devine (Pipe Major), Eamon Monks, Dickey Bently, and Matt McCann. Drummers on that day were Jack Haslem (tenor). and Joe Kiernan (bass). Jack Connor and Billy Williams were the side drummers. At this time the Black Raven flag had not been replaced and Riorbard Hand carried a blackthorn stick to lead the band at all events where the band performed. During the winter of 1929 Colm O'Loughlin lectured in the Library hall in Lusk on Irish songs and how to sing them and after his talk he was speaking with the late Thomas Jenkinson in the book room. The band started to practice after the lecture and when Colm heard the band playing he became keenly interested. During the course of the conversation he offered to present a new flag to the band. The band undertook to hold an Aeriocht in Lusk. This they did at a later date and the proudly carried their new flag and have done so throughout many parts of the country. After suffering the inevitable wear and tear this flag has been replaced again through the kindness of one of their founders John Rooney. The design of the new uniform was based on that of the old one with the kilts again in two colours, green and saffron. In 1934 at the Fingal Feis 9 (an event for competitive, music song and dance), the band lost the competition, due to the lack of uniformity in dress and as a result the saffron kilts were dyed green and history can be completed by recording that at the suggestion of Garda Sergeant Colloky it was decided to purchase some unused surplus tunics. These tunics of excellent material and cut lent themselves to adaptation by P J Kelly a well-known tailor from Drimagh in Dublin and with the epaulettes and silver flashings, gave richness to the appearance of the band. The sporrans were added in 1954 and gave that important finishing touch. Believing that competition is a great motivation towards perfection and a valuable booster of morale, the band travelled all over the country to compete against the pick of pipe bands from North and South of Ireland and indeed Scotland. Before and since the formation in 1944 of the Irish Pipe Band Association the band a list of successes in both junior and open grade competitions far too much to document. Like most statistics would make rather wearing reading. Suffice to say that the people of Lusk are frequently pleased to see that the local lads can more than hold their own. As well as actual playing members a band needs active enthusiastic supporters. One person at that time was Robbie Cowley. In many ways Robbie took the burden of organising the important jobs of organising transport and making arrangement for transport for the many events at which the band played. This assistance from Robbie was very valuable as it relieved the playing members of a lot of work and could concentrate on their playing. The members who remember him and his days in the band, to this day often speak about Robbie, with great fondness. A momentous amount of credit must be given to Liam Clare (senior) for the care he took in the training of new pipers. The time Liam spent with the trainees eased the burden of Pipe Major Frank Devine who had a full time job arranging the playing of active playing members. The drum corps must have been a rather unique feature of any band as they composed entirely of Boylan Brothers. The story of the Boylan Brothers is a story in itself and will be told in a separate part of this history. It can be seen also among the pipers that the surnames keep cropping up.

Grouping: Pipeband
City: Lusk, County Dublin
Country: IE
Year-Joined: 2012
UL Rank (1 is highest, 4 is lowest): 4

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