

It started with a Blue - Milford Everton to Armagh City

Richard Gillham and Brian Weir



"The name of Milford is synonymous with sports down the years with football, cricket, badminton, bowls, snooker, darts, and angling among the activities that have flourished under its aegis. Cricket may no longer be played, and the snooker tables may have gone but pool and darts have made their entrance, all bearing their evidence of the endurance and spirit that made Milford Everton a name to be revered."

Belfast Telegraph November 1994

Through my journey around the world searching for football teams with the Everton name I came across Milford Everton who now play under the name of Armagh City and through their club website I contacted Brian Weir.

Brian had previously written books on the Armagh Baptist Church and the Armagh Cricket Club and has also researched the history of football in Armagh. Brian kindly shared his research on the club.

Most young people here claim to support a team in another region of the country, usually, a team playing in London, Liverpool, Manchester, or Glasgow. The word "support" is used loosely and does not imply financial support, attendance at games or any visible support. In my school days, it involved listening to the results on the BBC and debating them on Monday morning with 'supporters' of other teams.

Armagh City FC was formed in 1964 under the name of Milford Everton FC. I have lived in Armagh for only 54 years, so my information is second-hand. Still, I understand that a group of teenagers decided to form a team, could not find a pitch in the city, and eventually got the use of a field in the village of Milford, about three miles away.

Contrary to some literature, even a FIFA article, this was a completely new team and not connected with Milford FC, founder members of the Irish League and the club whose chairman thought up the idea of fouls near the goal being punished with something called a penalty kick which as you will know was supported by the IFA, then by the other FAs in the United Kingdom and has been adopted worldwide ever since.

The teenagers who played in Milford wanted a distinctive name and one of their numbers was a "supporter" of Everton FC who decided to call the team Milford Everton. When I arrived here and took an interest, I noted that supporters wishing to do their bit shouted "Come on Milford". Never once did I hear "Come on Everton". However, it was always written down as the full name of the club, which initially played friendly matches before entering

the Armagh Winter League, then the Mid-Ulster League Second Division and was promoted to the Mid-Ulster League First Division and then elected to the Irish League in 1975.

Brian Weir

Immediately before they entered the Irish League "B" Division in 1975, Milford Everton clinched the coveted Alexander Cup by defeating their great rivals, Benburb 3-1 in the decider.



Alexander Cup winners Milford Everton Irish Football memories – Facebook ⁽²⁾

Back row: George Cullen, John Morrison, Milne Sloan, George Breakey, Philip Foster, Anthony McAneaney (manager), Noel Hutchinson.

Front row: George Steenson, Eric Villiers, Jim O'Haire, John Poland, John Steenson, Sean Daly, Jim Bruce, Dermot McAuley.

NOW THEY'RE OUT FOR GRAND SLAM

MID-ULSTER king-pins Milford Everton have pulled off the double. This week the club lifted the Alexandra Cup to give themselves both league championship and league cup honours.

And the club are also in with a chance of doing the grand slam in Mid Ulster junior soccer. They have reached the final of the Mid Ulster Shield which will be played in the coming week and have got through to the third round of the Alan Wilson Memorial Trophy which is open to all 50 teams in Mid Ulster football.

In the Alexandra Cup, Milford defeated Benburb 3-1 in a final which they always looked like winning.

However Benburb will get a second chance because they are Milford's opponents in the Mid Ulster Shield final which will be played at the Mill Field, Armagh.

The grand slam is within Milford's reach but they have to get over next week's third round tie with Mid Ulster second division side Seapatrick of Banbridge.

But Milford's record in other competitions is impressive. In winning the league championship and reaching their present position they have scored over 100 goals while conceding only 27. And in the Alexandra Cup they only conceded one goal — and that was a penalty in the final.

Leading goalscorers with the club's first team are 22-

year-old electrician John Steenson and 25-year-old school teacher John Morrison, who is now back with Milford after two seasons with Glenavon.

Credit for keeping the club's "goals against" sheet so clean goes to goalkeeper Jim O'Hare of Cragavon and twin centre halves 25-year-old John Poland formerly of Newry Town and Glenavon and Milne Sloan, 22-year-old son of the late Tommy Sloan, formerly of Linfield and Cardiff.

Milford's contribution to Mid-Ulster football over the past seasons was honoured recently when five of the first team played in the League side against the North West League.



Milford Everton 1974 (Armagh City Facebook -Courtesy of Milne Sloan) ⁽¹⁾

Before entering the B Division, Milford had one of their greatest seasons when they won the Mid Ulster League, the Alexander Cup, and the Alan Wilson Memorial Cup. The winning side along with the trophies plus a Reserves trophy is in the photograph above, the line-up in the photograph is as follows: -

Back row (L-R): Hugh McEneaney, Niall Kelly, Milne Sloan, George Steenson, Eric Villiers, Davy Magwood, Anthony McEneaney (Manager), John Steenson, Philip Foster.

Centre row (L-R): Eric Davidson, John Morrison, Jim Bruce, Maxie Patton, John Poland, George Cullen, Sean Daly.

Front row (L-R): Dermot McCauley, Dennis Wilson, Robert Megarity, George Breakey, Andy Crozier, Jim O'Hare ⁽²⁾

Milford Everton decided to leave Junior football in 1975, when then on they played in Intermediate Football from 1975 to 1999 and moved to senior football in 1999.

Intermediate football in the Irish League is on a Province-wide basis; junior football is localised, so the club left local leagues in 1975.

In June 1975 Milford Everton along with Chimney Corner and Stranmillis College were accepted into the B Division, Milford was geographically put into the South Section with the other two sides in the North.

At the end of the 75-76 South section season, Milford finished in fourth place.

Moving Home - Armagh City are Born

In 1988 a crowd of 190 gathered for a Cup Match and caused chaotic congestion, which made the club realise that the ground was no longer fit for intermediate football

Many senior clubs don't own a ground and Armagh City has never owned one. It rented a ground in Milford, then shared the ground of Armagh Boys' Club and currently has a long lease on Holm Park.

Brian Weir explains the transition.

"As for the transition from Milford to Armagh the pitch at Milford had no spectator facilities and no car parking other than on the roadside. In 1988 the club committee decided to move to a ground in the city. At the same time, the manager resigned, and a new player-manager was recruited. He lived in Banbridge and brought in a player from that town so the team which started in Armagh had nine of the same players, played in the same league and entered the same cups; only the name and ground changed."

Aidan Murphy Armagh city Chairman further explains the transition.

In 1988 Armagh City FC took to the pitch for the first time, drawing 0-0 with Chimney Corner at the Mill Field. Having ended the 1987/8 season as Milford Everton, playing at the famous Holm in the local village, the difficult decision was taken to move the club to the city. The Holm, surrounded on three sides by the Callan River, proved a difficult surface to protect from flooding, and with limited facilities for spectators and players, a move to Armagh seemed like the only option. The Mill Field, the long-time home of Armagh Boys' Club at the time was generously rented to Armagh City while a more permanent home was sought. It would be just over 5 years until Holm Park opened in January 1994, and Armagh City had a home of its own.

scoring 30 go

JUNIOR FOOTBALL

THE Bass Irish Cup kicks off next Saturday without the name of Armagh City in the first round line-up.

City's Holm Park ground has been passed by the Irish Football Association as fit to host senior fixtures, leaving the club just one step away from a potential money-spinning tie against some of the big guns.

It's the culmination of many years hard work by the boys from County Armagh who made their name in the early Eighties when knocking out Portadown at Shamrock Park.

Those were the days the club played under the name of Milford Everton, having entered the B Division four years earlier.

Old stager George Steenson missed that game because of injury but he continues to play a part on the field in today's version managed by Tony Bell, scorer of the winning goal which earned Cliftonville the trophy at Portadown's expense in 1979.

Grounds for celebration

"We're delighted," said Armagh chairman Aidan Murphy who had a special word of thanks for Armagh Boys Club.

"Only for them we would not be where we are today. They provided us with the Mill Field pitch when we changed our name and moved into the City in 1988."

The present pitch was laid three years ago and further improvement work was carried out over the summer.

Also in the pipeline are plans to improve spectator facilities, but for now City officials are keeping their fingers crossed that a big pay-day may be just around the corner.

NIGEL BALLANTINE

Sunday Life 18 September 1994 ⁽³⁾

In the 1999-2000 season, Armagh took the step from intermediate football to senior football.

Armagh City (known as the Eagles), donning the Inter Milan colours, joined the Irish League Division One maintaining their position for five years. They were runners-up, in the 2003-04 season before eventually losing out 4-1 on aggregate to Cliftonville, in the Premiership Promotion Play-off.

They then reverted to intermediate status in 2004 when the Irish Premier League was established, and the number of senior clubs was reduced from 20 to 16 and the Irish League First Division was replaced by the Intermediate First Division. Armagh celebrated the restructuring by winning the Intermediate First Division and were promoted to, the topflight of Irish League football for the first and only time in their history, the Irish Premier Division, as champions at the end of the 2004-05 season, going through the entire season undefeated.

In 2005 the Irish FA took over the management of Irish League football. Unfortunately, the club could not retain their Premier Division status long term and were relegated at the end of the 2007-08 season. They were therefore unable to join the new Irish FA Premiership but instead joined the Irish FA Championship instead. At the end of season 2009-10 further relegation was to follow to Championship Two.

At the start of the 2013-14, the organisation of Irish League football was taken over by the newly formed Northern Ireland Football League. Armagh succeeded in winning promotion to NIFL Championship One, as Championship Two Champions, at the end of the 2013-14 season. They then finished the 2015-16 season in third place however a year later they lost out in a relegation play-off against Newry City, losing 7-1 on aggregate, resulting in relegation to the Premier Intermediate League. They club have remained there ever since.

COVID interrupted the 2019-20 season, and the following 2020-21 season was cancelled. The former was decided on a points-per-game basis. When football resumed following the pandemic Armagh had a much-improved season finishing third, only missing out on a promotion play-off place on the final day of the season.

The Magic of the Cup

Throughout the years since 1969/70, the club has had some success in cup competitions winning the Mid-Ulster Shield, Mid-Ulster Cup, Gerald Kennedy Cup and the Bob Ratcliffe Cup.



Shock exit to 'Milford'

In 1983 one of the greatest Irish Cup shocks of all time was pulled off by Milford when they turned over the might of Portadown 1-0 at Shamrock Park, with a goal from 35-year-old former Ballymena player Jim Nelson. Portadown was flying high in the Irish League at the time. Sean Daly was a member of the Milford Everton management team that day and was one of the club's greatest servants and ambassadors from the Milford Everton days right through to the Armagh city days of Holm Park.

A player who consistently topped the Milford scoring charts, Sean joined Milford Everton in the early 1970s and made close to three hundred appearances for the club, scoring sixty-five goals. In season 1973-74, he helped the club win the Mid-Ulster First Division title, the Alan Wilson Trophy, and the Alexander Cup.



Sean was part of the very talented side that entered the Irish Football League 'B' Division in 1975 despite playing mostly in midfield, he was the club's leading goal scorer in seasons 1975-76, 1976-77 and 1978-79.

*Aidan Murphy (Chairman of Armagh City)
– Armagh City Twitter*

"We have not appeared in it since," said chairman Andy Crozier, who is an IFA Council member and is in the Everton squad for Saturday's match. "We took part in the first Junior Cup final in 1888, but haven't won a trophy since joining the B Division in 1975. However, our confidence is very high, and in view of Portadown's recent performances, we just might create an upset."

Milford have a blend of experience and youth. Full-back George Breakey has been a club stalwart, while former Distillery goalkeeper Brian Turkington has been in sound form.

Seventeen-year-old Neil Hunter has been attracting attention as a winger, catching the eye of several senior sides, including Portadown. Wouldn't it be ironic if he turned out to be a match-winner here?

Belfast Telegraph, 19 January 1983 ⁽⁴⁾

Several of the pre-match interviews with the club had shown that the Everton side was revelling in the lead-up to the occasion. Andy Crozier – player, chairman and IFA council member talked about how the former team Milford had been part of the IFA from its inception and played in the final of the IFA junior cup in 1888.

The Mid-Ulster Cup is a competition which has traditionally been based in County Armagh, East County Tyrone, and West County Down, with guest clubs invited by the league also competing.

The original Milford side were the winners in the competition's inaugural season of 1887/88. They returned the following season in 1889 beating Loughgall, who would prove to be a constant thorn in the history of football in Milford / Milford Everton and Armagh City. They lost in 1891 to Donacloney.

Milford Everton reached the Mid-Ulster final in January 1976, whilst still unbeaten in their very first season in Irish League, but were to suffer a 2-0 defeat at the hands of Dungannon Swifts.

Milford Everton never managed to again win or get to the final of the Mid Ulster Cup, but their renamed successor Armagh City won the trophy in the 2000/01 season with a 3-1 win against Newry Town, and later were runners-up from 2015 to 2017, losing twice to Dungannon Swifts and finally in 2017 to Warrenpoint Town.

In the Bob Ratcliffe Cup, which is an intermediate cup for clubs from Northern Ireland, Milford Everton lost to Portadown Reserves in 1983. After Armagh took up the mantle they won the cup in 1992 beating Oxford United - not to be confused with the English team. In 1997 the club started their ding-dong battles in the final with Loughgall again losing in 1999 and losing to Loughgall once more in 2004.

Armagh returned triumphantly the following season beating Coagh United. It was then almost a decade before they returned to the final, this time in the 2014 season where they beat Dollingstown on penalties 5-3 (after the game finished 1-1). They were then back in the final again during the 2015/16 campaign, where they triumphed against long-time foes Loughgall. Their last win came in 2021 when they won the cup for the fifth time under the Armagh name, this time against Rathfriland Rangers 4-3. ⁽⁵⁾



2020/21 - Bob Ratcliffe Cup Winners (courtesy of EDS Photography via MUFA Flickr)

Famous Players



Eoin Toal and Armagh Chairman Aidan Murphy (courtesy of Armagh City Facebook Page)

Kyle Neill moved from Armagh City in 2001 to Portadown and on to Glentoran where he played in Europe would be a contender for one of the Armagh side's most famous players playing as a left sided player at full back and midfield

Kyle Neil (Photo Courtesy of Belfast Live)



Armagh City manager Shea Campbell (Image: Tony Hendron – Courtesy of Belfast Live)



The current manager, Shea Campbell, played over 200 games for the Armagh side, Shea appeared for The Northern Ireland U21's during his career which started at Dungannon Swifts he would have three spells on loan at Armagh firstly in the 2004-05 season for six games with 6 goals , then returning from Glenavon in 2006-7 season after an initial 11 games on loan completing 29 games and scoring 15 goals, after spells back at Dungannon and

Cliftonville Shea was back on loan for 28 more appearances scoring 13 goals before being sold by Cliftonville to Glenavon, Shea was back for the 2010-11 season, before heading to Dungannon for the third time before eventually leaving Annagh United in 2017 for Armagh where he scored 13 times in 15 appearances. He has been the Manager since 2019.



Gavin McParland was an all-round athlete and top swimmer but excelled in both Association and Gaelic Football.

Starting in the GAA, Gavin left to play Association Football with Armagh City and received underage caps for Northern Ireland.

Gavin played in the Northern Ireland Milk Cup tournament for youth teams that had teams from the English Premier League take part, Gavin went on trials at Portsmouth and Stoke City before returning to the GAA in 2009

Another Armagh Player who hit the heights in the Gaelic game was **Ger Houlahan**.

Ger started at Milford Everton at the age of 17 and also played for Monaghan United, Ards and eventually the Eagles of Armagh City, Ger never played a full season for our club; he made 91 appearances, spread over 13 years. Ger also had a spell with Sligo Rovers who famously had Dixie Dean in their side in the 1930s and lately our current club captain, Seamus Coleman. Ger played for County Armagh for 17 years in the Gaelic game, winning two Ulster Senior Football Championship medals.

Here is a link to show a few of his goals in the Gaelic game for Armagh;
<https://youtu.be/POjoW6T9UX0> ⁽¹⁶⁾



The Irish Times 20 May 2023

Another Player to hit the GAA scene was John Corvan for Armagh Harps, whilst at Milford Everton he had trials at Arsenal, then managed by Terry Neill. Corvan scored against Denmark in the lead-up to the 1977 International Youth Championships tournament in France. He played in all the group games and scored the only goal in Charleroi against Austria. ⁽¹⁷⁾⁽¹⁸⁾

Here is a montage of his GAA moment from YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wnxk3TRRCIE>



Former Newry Town FC Chairman the late Billy McVicker with John Corvan and the late Terry Davey.
<http://www.newrycityafc.co.uk/old-newry-towncity-fc-photos/> ⁽¹⁹⁾

Written by

Brian Weir (Author and Historian)

Aidan Murphy (Former Milton Everton Player and Current Chairman of Armagh City)

Richard Gillham

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