

The Bluffer

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CÚPLA FOCAL

A new museum pays tribute to the living legend of Belfast Celtic

THE Bluffer thinks it must have been a grand old team to play for and a grand old team to see, but he is too young to remember Belfast Celtic, one of the greatest soccer clubs to play in the Irish League. (Na Ceiltigh are the Celts (with a hard c) so Belfast Celtic would be Ceiltigh Bhéal Feirste.)

The Celts went out of business way back in 1949 when, after a match between themselves and their great rivals, Linfield, on Boxing Day 1948, Blues fans rang onto the pitch and viciously attacked Celtic players, most notably Jimmy Jones. After the horrific incident, the board decided that enough was enough and after a few more friendlies, never played again.

But why are people still fascinated by the team that has been gone for over six decades?

For Martin Flynn of the Belfast Celtic Society, the team was wrapped up in the entire social history of the Falls area and when they went out of business, it left a gap that was never ever filled.

"Such was the bochtaineacht - the poverty, that there was a saying, "even when we had nothing we had Belfast Celtic, then we had everything" which shows what the team meant to people in long periods of hardship," he says.

During the 1930s and 1940s Belfast Celtic dominated Northern Irish

football.

"They won every trofai - trophy there was going and at one point they went undefeated for three years so an immense sense of pride existed in a fairly marginalised part of the community that their heroes were sweeping all before them.

"When they disappeared, it left an enormous bearna - gap in people's lives which hasn't been filled to this day," says Martin.

Now, however, the Society has opened an iarsmalann - a museum dedicated to the Mighty Belfast Celtic in the Park Centre, which sits where Celtic Park used to be. Here, you'll find many truly fascinating artefacts relating to the team - geansaithe - jerseys, caipíní idirnáisiúnta - international caps, boinn - medals, grianghráfanna - photographs and much more.

As much as it is the story of a football team, the museum tells a very human story, it breathes of an lucht leanúna - the fans, na himreoirí - the players, na bainisteoirí - the managers, including the legendary Elisha Scott.

Charlie Tully Jnr, son of the great Belfast and Glasgow Celtic legend, Cheeky Charlie Tully, mentions the greats, his father, Jackie Vernon, Jimmy McAlinden, Paddy Bonner and others

"The excitement of the exhibition is seeing all this memorabilia and getting a sense of what



■ **GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN:** Charlie Tully Jnr, son of the legendary cheeky chappie who played for both Belfast and Glasgow Celtic stands in front of a mural showing some of the Belfast team's greatest players

Belfast Celtic meant," he says.

There is a letter from Linfield fans apologising for the fateful Boxing Day events, Bertie Fulton's 1936 Berlin Olympic security pass - he captained the GB team - and much more.

The museum would love to add to the collection so if anyone has material relating to any aspect of the team, the can be contacted at admin@belfastceltic.org

There is also a treasure trove of information and photos as well as the museum's opening hours on the website at www.belfastceltic.org

Cúpla focal

Na Ceiltigh (*ne keltchee*) - the Celts
Ceiltigh Bhéal Feirste (*keltchee vayl farshta*) - Belfast Celtic
bochtaineacht (*bokhtinakht*) - the poverty
trofai (*trofee*) - trophy
bearna (*barna*) - a

gap
iarsmalann (*eersmalaan*) - a museum
geansaithe (*gyanseeha*) - jerseys
caipíní idirnáisiúnta (*capeenee idernaashoonta*) - international caps,
boinn (*bwin*) -

medals
grianghráfanna (*greeangraafana*) - photographs
an lucht leanúna (*u lukht lanoona*) - the fans
na himreoirí (*ne himroaree*) - the players
na bainisteoirí (*ne banishtoree*) - the managers