

## Transition Years - (1973–1975) Cloudmount to the Lawn

### Introduction

In 1935, the founding fathers of Castlecomer Golf Club shared a vision: to establish a lasting sporting and social amenity for the people of Castlecomer and its surrounding districts. Local business figures rallied to the idea, not least Con Kenneally, owner and editor of the *Kilkenny Journal*. A keen golfer and member of Kilkenny Golf Club, he encouraged his friend Joe Quinn—who ran a footwear shop on Kilkenny Street—to pursue the prospect of a local club.

Quinn shared the idea with close friends, and soon word reached Canon McNamara. The Canon, as he was known to all, was friendly with Dr. Farrell and the Holmes family. Through this connection, it emerged that Mr. Fred Holmes was willing to lease land for the venture.

Excitement grew quickly, and on 22 October 1935, a public meeting was held in the Parochial Hall. Thirty-nine people attended, including nine women. Chaired by Canon McNamara, the meeting elected him as the first Captain of the new club. Officers and committees were appointed, membership subscriptions were fixed, and by December 1935 members were already walking the new links in preparation for the season. In those early days, most travelled to the course by bicycle or occasionally by car if they could secure a lift.

At a meeting on 6 April 1936, Captain R.C. Prior Wandesforde was elected, and the club prepared to register with the Golfing Union of Ireland. Dr. J.D. McCormack and J. McDermot of Hermitage Golf Club, Dublin, generously laid out the new course at Cloudmount free of charge. In recognition of his commitment, Dr. McCormack was made an Honorary Life Member.

R.C. Prior Wandesforde was elected Captain for a second term in 1937. Given the Wandesforde family's long connection with Castlecomer—their estate having been granted to them by King Charles I in 1635—it was fitting that, many years later, Castlecomer Golf Club would move to the Lawn, a treasured part of the Wandesforde House Estate and Mining Company.

## **Castlecomer Golf Club**

The formal opening of Castlecomer Golf Club took place on 30 May 1937. The original 21-year lease ran until 1956, followed by a nine-year lease to 1965, with shorter annual arrangements thereafter into the early 1970s.

### **Participation of the Lady Golfers**

From the very beginning, lady golfers were integral to the club's life. As associate members affiliated with the Ladies Golfing Union of Ireland, they not only competed but also played a vital role in sustaining the club. Through their organisation of mixed competitions, catering, fundraising, and social events, they ensured that Castlecomer Golf Club remained vibrant during both prosperous and difficult years.

### **The EEC and Cloudmount Uncertainty**

By the early 1970s, the Holmes family, owners of the Cloudmount lands, would only agree to year-to-year leases. The uncertainty deepened in 1973, when Ireland entered the European Economic Community (EEC, later the EU). Rumours circulated that the Holmes family intended to reclaim the land for farming—a development that cast a long shadow over the future of Castlecomer Golf Club at Cloudmount.

### **1973 AGM**

The 1973 Annual General Meeting was held in January in the Parochial Hall where Captain, Vice-Captain and Lady Captain were elected. While the golfing year continued with competitions and social events, it became clear that negotiations with the landowners offered little hope for long-term security. The days of Castlecomer Golf Club at Cloudmount were numbered.

That summer, the Captain's Prize was contested over two days. Pat Kelly emerged as winner against formidable opponents Seamie Coogan and the late Johnny Ryan.

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### 1974 AGM

The 1974 AGM, again in the Parochial Hall, saw Pat Kelly take on the Captaincy, with Seamus “Curly” Farrell as Vice-Captain and Bridget Cunney as Lady Captain. Few in attendance realised the magnitude of the changes ahead.

Despite determined efforts to negotiate with the Holmes family, the outcome was unavoidable: the land would be taken back for farming. The 1974 season would be the final chapter of Castlecomer Golf Club at Cloudmount, bringing to a close many years of sporting enjoyment for generations of members.

### Members’ Options

The decision left members facing uncertainty. With Cloudmount to be vacated by December 1974, many discussed joining neighbouring clubs such as Kilkenny, Callan, Rathdowney, or Abbeyleix. Meetings in the Parochial Hall outlined the situation and explored alternatives.

Auctioneer and Past Captain Leo Conway identified potential sites at Firoda and Smithstown, which groups of members inspected. Although these sites offered possibilities, none matched the needs or promise of a permanent new home.

### Michael Rowe & the Late Tim Mahony

Amid this uncertainty, Past Captain Tim Mahony and Michael Rowe identified a more promising option: a 68-acre stretch of land known as “the Lawn,” part of the former Wandesforde Estate and now owned by Norman Delaney. Purchased by Norman in the 1960s, the land had the rare advantage of being a single, open field—requiring minimal development and offering near-perfect conditions for a golf course.

Tim and Michael approached Norman to discuss the possibility of leasing the land. Norman declined but mentioned that he had once considered developing it into a golf course himself, only to abandon the idea because of the high costs involved. He added that he might be willing to sell if he received a satisfactory offer — the price turned out to be **£30,000** (equivalent to approximately **€481,900 in 2025 terms**).

Within an hour of that conversation, Tim convened an urgent meeting of the golf committee. The situation was outlined to a shocked but determined committee. By the following day,

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they had reached out to Nicky Byrne, the local Bank of Ireland manager and a fellow club member, who proved to be very supportive.

Maintaining secrecy was crucial; if word had leaked, another buyer might have stepped in. Within a week, Norman agreed to grant the club a **one-year option to purchase** the land — a vital step that secured the property and gave the club time to raise the necessary funds. Over the following year (1974–1975), the members successfully raised **£14,000** toward the purchase (equivalent to approximately **€224,886 in 2025 terms**).

### Fundraising Efforts

Led by Past Captain Johnny Ryan, the committee launched a carefully planned fundraising drive while the club was still vacating Cloudmount. This was one of the most ambitious fundraising campaigns in the history of the club.

It began in April 1974 with member contributions and loans, collected at Leo Conway's Bar on Kilkenny Street—a popular hub for golfers. Soon after, the club unveiled its centrepiece fundraiser: the “Monster Raffle” for a Bambino car.

Ticket sales spread across towns and counties, with cars needed every weekend to transport three or four lady members who sold tickets tirelessly. Friends and supporters joined in, extending the campaign's reach.

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Over the following months, ticket sellers travelled across Kilkenny, Carlow, Laois, Kildare, and Waterford, calling at pubs, race meetings in Tramore and Gowran Park, the Irish Open at Portmarnock, and numerous other golf clubs. The campaign was relentless, exhausting, and pressure-filled, but the commitment never wavered.

The raffle culminated in a grand draw at Rowe's Hardware, just prior to the store's own opening. A celebratory night was held with wine and cheese, music, and entertainment from comedian Noel V. Ginnity. The event was a resounding success, providing vital funds even after covering the cost of the Bambino car. The ticket sellers could rightly take a bow for their extraordinary efforts.

Additional fundraisers—including barbeques, marquee dances, and social events—helped boost the total further.

### **Farewell to Cloudmount**

The last Captain's Prize – Pat Kelly - at Cloudmount was held over two Sundays in August 1974 with 66 players competing. Michael Rowe emerged the outright winner. The prize presentation evening was filled with excitement, as members looked ahead to the Lawn.

A champagne-themed golf event and closing party in October 1974 marked the end of an era. To generate additional funds, the club pavilion was sold to a contractor for dismantling and removal. It was a poignant farewell, closing the chapter on decades of cherished memories.

## **1975 AGM and the Move to the Lawn**

The 1975 AGM, held at Castlecomer Tech, elected Seamus Farrell as Captain and Nicky Byrne as Vice Captain Ellen Kelly as Lady Captain. Planning for the new course dominated proceedings. Trustees were appointed, and a new draft constitution was prepared with the assistance of solicitor Kevin Keohane and barrister Thomas Teehan.

The Lawn was formally signed over in March 1975. From that moment, everything began from scratch. Golf correspondent and course designer Pat Ruddy—through his friendship with Captain Farrell—generously agreed to design the new nine-hole layout without charging a fee. Several proposals were submitted, and after a general meeting, a preferred design was chosen.

In the meantime, the land was set out for meadowing by a local farmer, with hay cut and removed in June. Sheep grazing followed, providing natural maintenance while generating much-needed revenue. By July, work was underway to mark greens, tee boxes, and fairways. The open, unobstructed nature of the Lawn meant no heavy machinery was required—just mowers, hard work, and determination. The old gang mower from Cloudmount was even repurposed for use on the new fairways.

By mid-summer 1975, members were already playing on the new course and though far from finished the first competition took place in July with the Captains Drive in.

The first Captain's Prize at the Lawn was held on 4 August 1975, formally opening the course under Captain Seamus Farrell. In a memorable touch, Past Captain Jim Buggy donated a bus to serve as a changing room, meeting space, and prize-giving venue. It became a quirky yet beloved feature of the early years—and today lies buried beneath the 12th tee box.

The nine-hole course quickly became popular for its natural setting and upkeep, maintained with great dedication by Past Captain Paddy Curry over many years.

## **Conclusion**

The transition from Cloudmount to the Lawn stands as one of the most remarkable chapters in the history of Castlecomer Golf Club. Faced with the loss of their home, members responded with resilience, generosity, and determination.

Through tireless fundraising, countless meetings, and sheer belief, they secured not only a new course but the future of the club itself. It was the everyday members—those who sold raffle tickets, donated time, and gave freely—who made it possible. Their unity and pride forged a legacy that continues to inspire.

The move was not merely a change of venue; it was a defining moment of survival and renewal. Against all odds, the Lawn became a lasting home for golf in Castlecomer and a tribute to the spirit of those who built it.