

Limerick Hurlers join the Centennial Club

by Tom Toomey

As Limerick hurling supporters celebrate the outstanding performance of the county team in 2018, not everyone realises that the county hurlers joined a very elite club; the Centennial Club, being counties that won All-Ireland Hurling titles coinciding with the centenary of a previous win. Cork was the first county to join the club, when in 1990 they celebrated the centenary of their victory in 1890. Kilkenny then celebrated a centennial win in 2007 and repeated the feat in 2009, 2011 and 2012. Tipperary joined the club in 2016 when they emulated the feat of Johnny Leahy's men of 1916. This year Limerick emulated the feat of Willie Hough and his men who carried all before them exactly one hundred years ago in 1918, although the final was played in January 1919.

In 1918 Newcastle West had the selection of the Limerick hurling team but in an unprecedented move they declined the selection and instead they nominated a panel of five selectors, only one of whom was from their own club. The five selectors nominated by Newcastle West were: Willie Hough (Newcastle West), James Ryan (Claughaun) [County Secretary], Tom Brennan (Castleconnell), Tim Humphreys (Cappamore and Murroe) and Denny Lanigan (Young Ireland).¹ It was the first time in Limerick and probably in Ireland that a club declined the honour and looked instead at a bigger picture. Prior to that, county teams consisted mainly of players from the county champions with the addition of a small number of outside players and consequently the results were always very mixed.

On Sunday 26 May 1918 Limerick lined out in the first round of the Munster championship at Waterford against the home side. After a tight encounter Limerick prevailed by 4 – 1 to 1 – 4. Other than giving the score line the *Limerick Leader* reported no further details of the match.

The Munster Semi-final featured Limerick and Tipperary and the match was fixed for the Markets Field on Sunday 7 July 1918. Matches between Limerick and Tipperary at the time were always tough, tight encounters and this game was no different with play swinging between both ends. Scores were exchanged on a regular basis with Bob McConkey scoring a goal in reply to one from Hugh Shelly. Shelly scored another goal, for Tipperary coming towards half-time in addition to Fitzpatrick's long range free which ended up in the Limerick net. Points by Johnny Leahy (Lahy) and Callinan completed Tipp's first half total, while Jim Griffin (goal) and Dan Troy (point) completed Limerick's first half scoring. Tipp led at the break by 3-2 to 2-1.

In the second half Limerick battled back with two goals by Willie Gleeson² and another from Boher's Paddy Barry giving them a lead coming towards the end of the game. However a goal by Paddy Leahy meant that the game ended in a draw, 5-3 each. Immediately after the match the County Board, under its chairman John (Seán) Kelly of Monaleen, got together and initiated a training fund to ensure that the team was properly prepared for the replay. It was decided to send the team to Foynes for full-time training for one week under a noted trainer James Dalton.³ It was said that Dalton 'murdered' the team in Foynes, having them running up and down every hill within miles. It was also said that some of the more robust members of the team were made fit for probably the only time in their lives. This especially applied to the half-back line of Denny Lanigan⁴, Willie Hough⁵ and Jack Keane⁶ who were the mainstay of the team and who were all big robust men. They were collectively known as the 'Hindenburg line' after a well-known German defensive line in the Great War. Ironically, the biggest man on the team was the goalkeeper, Michael Murphy, who stood about 6' 5" tall and was built in proportion.⁷

The replay took place at Cork on Sunday 18 August, in front of an attendance of 10,000 people, which was a measure of the drawing power of Limerick and Tipperary at the time. Another tight and thrilling encounter ensued, but Limerick's greater fitness prevailed and they edged to victory on a score line of 3-2 to 2-2. Bob McConkey with two goals and Jimmy Humphreys with 1-1 contributed most of Limerick's tally. Tom McGrath of Claughaun contributed the remaining point.

The Munster Final was played at Thurles on Sunday 15 September in which Limerick was drawn against Clare. Exchanges were even enough in the early stages of the match and at one stage Clare led 1-0 to 0-2 but a hat trick of goals coming up to half time, by Bob McConkey⁸ turned the game on its head and Limerick led at the break by 4-2 to 1-1. In the second half the game became even more one sided as Limerick piled on another seven goals and a point, with only one point in reply from the Banner county. McConkey was again among those who recorded goals in the second half making him the scorer of at least four goals during the game. The final score was 11-3 to 1-2, which was a record winning margin for a Munster Final.

As the Spanish 'Flu⁹ had taken hold in the country in the latter part of 1918, it was not until 26 January 1919 that the All-Ireland Final was played. It was a cold damp day but nonetheless 10,000 turned up to witness what was expected to

be an exciting contest against their opponents from Wexford. A light shower passed off quickly before the referee, Willie Walsh¹⁰, threw in the ball and set the game in motion. Wexford attacked from the outset, but without any success. Limerick's first score came from a free pointed by Dick Ryan of Pallasgrea. This was followed some minutes later by another point from Bob McConkey. Dan Troy of Cloughaun was next on the mark as he sent over a point from long distance. Wexford soon opened their account with a point by Kavanagh but Willie Gleeson stretched Limerick's advantage with a well taken goal. Two more goals were registered for Limerick by McConkey and Tom McGrath. This was followed by a point for Limerick by McGrath and just before the interval Cummins scored a point for the model county.

At the start of the second half Tom McGrath and Bob McConkey bundled the Wexford goalkeeper into the net, which was like Mossie Dowling's goal in the 1973 All-Ireland final. Minutes later a shot from Boher's Paddy Barry came back off the post and was finished to the net by Willie Gleeson. Wexford got their only goal soon afterwards when Leary finished to the Limerick net. The last scores of the match were a goal by McConkey and a point by Dick Ryan to leave Limerick very comfortable winners by 9-5 to 1-3. There was great celebrating after the game, as Limerick had won their second All-Ireland Hurling final after a wait of 21 years. The Limerick team lined out as follows:¹¹

	Mick Murphy (Young Ireland)	
Mick Rochford (Cloughaun)	Paddy Kennedy (Pallasgrea)	Paddy McInerney (Young Ireland)
Jack Keane (Castleconnell)	Willie Hough (Monagea)	Denny Lanigan (Young Ireland)
Willie Gleeson (Young Ireland)	Jimmy Humphreys (Murroe)	
Dick Ryan (Pallasgrea)	Willie Ryan (Cappamore)	Dan Troy (Cloughaun)
Tom McGrath (Cloughaun)	Bob McConkey (Young Ireland)	Paddy Barry (Boher)

Subs: Mick Burke (Pallasgrea), Willie Penny (Cloughaun), John Foley (Murroe) and Chris Ryan (Pallasgrea). Christy O'Brien (Cappamore), Paddy Flaherty (Rathkeale), Paddy 'Feeney' Shanny (Cloughaun), and Jim Griffin (Newcastle West)¹³.

The amazing point about Limerick's victory in the 1918 championship was that there were two separate boards catering for hurling in the county at the time. The GAA Board under the Chairmanship of John (Seán Kelly), Vice-chairman; Richard Gleeson Young Ireland and formerly of Fedamore, Secretary; James Ryan: Pallasgrea and Treasurer Charlie Holland of Cloughaun. A breakaway body known as the NAGAC (National Association of Gaelic Athletic Clubs) claimed the affiliation of twelve clubs including some of the strongest clubs in the county. This body had the following officers: Chairman: Michael McKnight (Rahillys),¹⁴ Vice-chairman: Michael Kelly¹⁵ (South Liberties), Secretary: Thomas Mangan (Croom) and Treasurer: Tom Harrington¹⁶ (Fedamore).

In December 1918 the NAGAC in Limerick was wound up following the death of a South Liberty player Michael Considine in a tournament final with Croom, at the Markets Field.¹⁷ A measure of how strong hurling was in Limerick at the time can be gauged from the fact that the two teams who contested the 1919 GAA Senior Hurling Final, Croom and

Fedamore had been affiliated to the NAGAC and their players were not available for GAA selection in 1918.

In the years after, of the men who won glory for Limerick at Croke Park in January 1919, many forsook the camán for the rifle and were active in the War of Independence. Paddy Kennedy was IRA Company Captain in Pallasgrea. Jimmy Humphreys was First Lieutenant in the Murroe Company and he was involved, with Seán Carroll and Dick O'Connell in planning the Dromkeen ambush in February 1921. A number of the Cloughaun men, Tom McGrath, Dan Troy¹⁸, Jack Rochford, Paddy Feeney Shanny and Willie Penny, were very involved in activities in the city area and Jack Keane of Castleconnell was a member of the Castleconnell Company.

There are many parallels between the 1918 Limerick team and the team of 2018. This was particularly so in the physique of the half-back lines. Lanigan, Hough and Keane were very big men as were Diarmuid Byrnes, Declan Hannon and Dan Morrissey in 2018. There is also a parallel between the two midfielders of 1918, Humphreys and Gleeson, and Darragh



The Limerick team that won the 1918 All-Ireland Senior Hurling championship.

Front row (L-R): John Foley, Richard (Dick) Ryan, Dan Troy, Bob McConkey, Paddy Barry (white shirt), James Dalton (trainer).

Middle row (L-R): Jimmy Humphreys, Willie Penny, Tom McGrath, Rev S. Connolly, Willie (Liam) Hough (captain), Rev J. O'Keefe, Jack Keane, Willie Gleeson, Paddy 'Feeney' Shanny.

Back row (L-R): B Croke, John (Seán) Kelly (Chairman of the County Board), D Hennessy, Mick Rochford, Paddy Kennedy, Willie Ryan, Willie Gleeson (senior), Denny Lanigan, James Ryan (County Secretary), Mick Murphy (goalkeeper), Chris Ryan, Mick Bourke.

O'Donovan and particularly Cian Lynch. Humphreys and Gleeson ranged up and down the field continuously and they were the highest scorers after Bob McConkey. Unlike the Limerick team of 2018, however, the team of a century earlier did not have the same range of scorers that the modern side has and this is reflected in the fact that Bob McConkey was by far the leading scorer. One major difference between the two teams was that the 1918 team scored 32 goals and 14 points in

five matches whereas the 2018 team scored 14 goals and 189 points in eight matches. The scoring disparities reflect differing playing styles. In 1918 Limerick played direct ground hurling which is reflected in the number of goals scored, whereas the 2018 team played a much different style of hurling which is reflected in the high number of points scored.



Willie Hough, with the 1918 All-Ireland Hurling trophy.



Bob McConkey, the first Limerick captain to receive the Liam McCarthy Cup, in 1921. (Photo courtesy of his nephew Sean Buckley).

Remembering Harry Greensmith

In the year in which we celebrate Limerick's return to the greatness of former times, it is only fitting that we remember one of the quiet giants of Limerick GAA who sadly did not live to see the great victories of 2018. In March 2018 Harry Greensmith died at University College Hospital, Limerick following indifferent health over a number of years. Over his lifetime Harry had two great passions local history and GAA, especially hurling. Over a period of thirty years Harry wrote several local history books, which were invariably well researched and impartially written.

Harry's life revolved around his love of GAA and he established a record which will probably never be equalled let alone surpassed, as he trained teams to win county championships in five different decades. In 1958 he trained South Liberties to win the County Juvenile Hurling championship. In 1960 he trained the club to win the County Minor Hurling championship. In 1972 he trained South Liberties to win the County Senior Hurling championship, thus providing the captain for Limerick's All-Ireland win in 1973.

In 1983 he trained Hospital Herbertstown to win the County Junior Hurling title and in the 1990s he trained their Minor Football team to win a county title. He also gave great service to Knockainey at various levels. Harry was also involved as an official of the South Limerick GAA board for a long number of years as well as acting as PRO for the Limerick GAA County Board for some years. The editorial committee of the *Old Limerick Journal* would like to extend condolences to Harry's wife Christina and his sisters and relatives. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.



Harry Greensmith

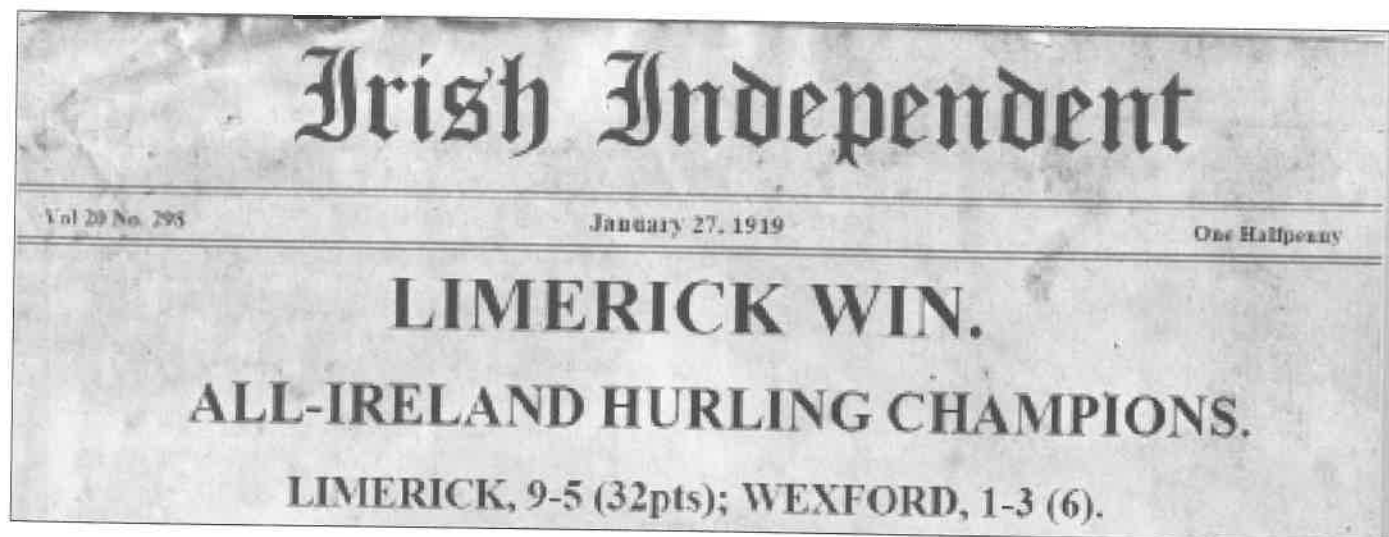
References

- 1 Seamus Ó Ceallaigh and Seán Murphy, *One Hundred Years of Glory 1884-1984*. (Limerick, 1984).
- 2 Although he was from Fedamore, Gleeson was playing for Young Irelands in 1918, due to a split in the Fedamore club. A total of five players who featured in the All-Ireland final played with Young Ireland during their career. They were Gleeson, Bob McConkey, Denny Lanigan, Jack Keane and Paddy McInerney, who was a native of O'Callaghan's Mills, county Clare. He died in the USA in 1982 aged 87.
- 3 James Dalton was a noted boxer, oarsman and Gaelic footballer. He was also among the founders of the Volunteers in Limerick city. He was later a victim of a split in the Volunteers in the city and he was shot dead in Clare Street in May 1920 by members of the 2nd City Battalion, who contended that he was a spy. When the charge was investigated by members of Michael Collin's Squad, Dalton was totally exonerated.
- 4 Denny Lanigan had a large building company in Limerick and he devoted all his spare time to the GAA. He was responsible for training the first Harty Cup winning team at Limerick CBS in 1920. He later served as Secretary of the County Board for almost twenty years.
- 5 Willie (Liam) Hough was later Treasurer of the Munster GAA Council for many years. He worked as a principal teacher at Monagea National School.
- 6 Jack Keane lived at Garden Hill, Castleconnell and he was a father of Willie and PJ who played for Limerick at various grades. PJ played in the Railway Cup for Munster on a few occasions.
- 7 Mick Murphy worked as manager for Irish Shell in Sligo. He was killed in a road traffic accident in Barna, county Galway in 1955.



Limerick Leader advertisement for the Munster Semi-Final between Limerick and Tipperary on 7 July, 1918.

- 8 Although he lived in Clare Street, Limerick city from early childhood, Bob McConkey was born in Killaloe. He was also the first man to lift the McCarthy Cup, when he captained Limerick to the 1921 All-Ireland Hurling championship.
- 9 The first cases of the Spanish 'Flu occurred in Limerick at the end of September 1918 and the epidemic occurred intermittently over the following six months. The worst month was November when 136 people died in Limerick city alone. Approximately, 800 people died in the city and county between September 1918 and March 1919.
- 10 Willie Walsh was for many years the leading GAA man in Waterford city and Walsh Park, the main GAA ground in the county, is named in his honour.
- 11 The website entitled 'Limerick – Ireland's Oldest People', available at: <https://finbarrconnolly.com/limerick/> has assembled a large amount of biographical information on Limerick All-Ireland players including the 1918 championship winning team.
- 12 Jimmy Humphreys also played for Cappamore and Cloughaun.
- 13 Jim Griffin captained Newcastle West to their last County Senior Hurling title in 1926. Willie Hough, the two-time All-Ireland medal holder, was on the same team. It seems that the older and more experienced Hough was still generously allowing young players to develop, as he had done while captain in 1918.
- 14 Michael McKnight owned a public house at the corner of Thomas Street and Wickham Street. He died on board a shipping liner bringing the Limerick hurling team back from their American tour in 1936.
- 15 Michael Kelly died while attending an East Limerick Junior Hurling final between South Liberties and Cappamore, at Caherconlish, in 1952.
- 16 Tom Harrington later became a very active member of the Mid-Limerick Flying Column during the War of Independence. Seán Carroll of Castleconnell specifically requested Harrington's attendance at Dromkeen, in a dispatch to Seán Clifford O/C of the Caherconlish Battalion prior to the ambush.
- 17 Fr Connolly (also spelled Connelly), Administrator at St John's Cathedral, was instrumental in facilitating the return of the twelve breakaway clubs to the GAA.
- 18 Dan Troy, a native of Newport, county Tipperary, was one of the youngest members of the 1918 winning team. Ironically, he was the first of the team to die in 1953.



Irish Independent headline reporting the result and large winning margin.

Thomas (Tom) Toomey, who lives in Castletroy, Limerick, has published books, including *Forgotten Dreams*, the biography of Major Ged O'Dwyer (1995), *An antique and Storied Land*, a history of the parish of Donoughmore co-written with Harry Greensmith, (1991) *The War of Independence in Limerick (1912 – 1921)* (2009) and *The History of the Institute of Industrial Engineers* (2013). He has edited the Kilmurry Review and lectured in local history. He has also organised the erection of several memorials to victims of the War of Independence and edited commemorative booklets. In 2006 he was awarded an MA in Local Studies by the University of Limerick.