

GAELIC football was played in the parish of Mountcollins several years prior to the foundation of the G.A.A., when the game was contested in a rather rough manner, not being governed by any scientific rules, such as is the case now.

Inter-parish challenges were the custom in the pre-G.A.A. days, and a great game long spoken of in Mountcollins took place in the townland of Seconglass, in a field called Pairc-taobh-a-guir. The ball was a dog-skin, manufactured locally, and the teams were fifteen-a-side.

A tremendous crowd witnessed the match and well marshalled along the sideline they acted as a buffer to prevent the ball leaving the field, on to the gorse or bushes outside. No boots were worn, play commenced after ten o'clock Mass and did not finish until darkness set in. This required a good deal of endurance but the men of that period possessed wonderful stamina.

Thus the traditions of Gaelic football were laid in Mountcollins and a love of the game engendered which has survived the passage of years, and is as strong to-day as in those far off times when the tempo of life was leisurely in comparison.

It may be news to many to learn, however, that the first club affiliated to the then infant G.A.A. from Mountcollins was a hurling one.

In the year 1888 the Rev. Bernard O'Mahony was transferred from the curacy of Ashford to the curacy of the united parishes of Tournafulla and Mountcollins.

A STERLING IRISHMAN.

A sterling Irishman and a great priest, he had an intense love for Ireland and took an active part in the land agitation of the period. He was an ardent enthusiast of the games of the Gael, especially hurling. He did not fancy football an awful lot, as he often stated there was too much "English" about it. He felt it had some similarity to rugby and soccer, which were the games of the hated British garrison, and he wanted to avoid contamination with them at any cost. Hurling was distinctly Irish, he said, and the best game in the world, with imitation impossible.

Immediately on his arrival in Mountcollins he set out to form a hurling club, which he named the "Shamrocks"—this emblem being conspicuous on the front of their jerseys, which were of red, with a green sash, and the shamrock, also, of course, in green.

This team afterwards made a name for itself on many a playing pitch in West Limerick.

The subject of our sketch this week—William W. Curtin, he selected to lead the team, and no better captain could be found anywhere. He inspired the other members of the side by his own example; was a great man to train and be perfectly fit for every engagement; was a fine leader both on and off the field; and an outstanding hurler, being a splendid exponent of ground play. He was also a man of strong nationalist principles, an essential in the olden days when the pioneer workers for Gaelic games had to fight so strenuously the opposition of the foreign faction.

ALL NOT AVAILABLE.

Unfortunately, the names of all that first fine hurling team in Mountcollins are not now available—the passage of seventy years has dimmed the memory of all but their

outstanding deeds, but the majority of them, however, are remembered, and in the homely way by which the loved ones of any parish go down to posterity. Yes, many of them have nicknames, as the list reveals: John ("Mocky") Lyons, "Big Phil" O'Connell, Con Guiney, Pat Flanagan, Dan Curtin, W. D. Cahill, John Collins ("Gonse"), Dan Leahy, Michael ("Kell") Sheehan, Thade Curtin, Jack ("the Carman") Lenihan, "The Lodger" Lane, Dick ("Jacky") Brosnahan, who was goalkeeper; "Big Jim" Hartnett, Dan T. Cahill, and Jack ("Mick") Lenihan.

The first great match was against Tournafulla at Jerry James O'Connor's field at Ballybeg, and a great turn out of the parish, led by Father O'Mahony, were in attendance for what proved a very entertaining match and a fine victory for the Shamrocks, with four clear goals to spare—a success that fired the players with a new enthusiasm and sent them training hard for their next engagement.

This was also against Tournafulla, and Mountcollins repeated the success of the previous occasion although they had to fight much harder this time.

For their next game Templeglantine provided the opposit on and it was a terrific tussle fought at a very fast pace between well trained and eager players. The Shamrocks were generally regarded as lucky to win by two points.

Strangely enough a match in which they were defeated is the best remembered in the parish. This was against Ashford, and was played in Maurice Halloran's field in the latter place. It proved a wonderful match that was the most talked of encounter of their entire campaign. In fact, this game was the topic of conversation at the cross roads and around the fire-sides of the parish for a generation—and lost nothing in the telling!

HOTLY CONTESTED.

It was a very hotly contested match apparently and accounts say that the day was going against the Ashford men, mainly because of the predominance of John ("Mocky") Lyons and "Big Phil" O'Connell, who was the Mountcollins blacksmith.

Ashford, it appears, decided that those two should be put out of action, and they were duly rendered hors-de-combat, a circumstance that very effectively reduced the power of the Shamrocks challenge, with the result that Ashford scored a convincing win, and Mountcollins suffered their first reverse.

This only spurred them to greater endeavour and they prepared earnestly for the return game with Ashford, arranged for the Lanes, Skagh, Knockulcara. Ashford were very much in winning mood until "Big Jim" Hartnett of Cragg took matters in hand, displaying fine stamina and some amazing bursts of speed. Notwithstanding his many feats of valour, however, Ashford again emerged victorious but this occasion with only two points to spare.

The Shamrocks were disappointed at this outcome but they suffered even a more discouraging reverse when, showing very poor form, they were well beaten by Templeglantine.

The captain, Willie Curtin, called them together after this defeat and insisted on a rigid course of training for their next outing, which was against Abbeyfeale, whom they were particularly anxious to overcome.

They had a great match at Ned Mick Curtin's field at Inch and the Shamrocks emerged victorious after a right tough engagement.

The Abbeyfeale lads looked for a replay but Mountcollins again triumphed. This was also a great match.

ROUGH TACTICS.

Shamrocks next lined out against Broadford, at Kileedy, and they were having the best of matters until some members of the latter side started rough methods and a few of the best of the Shamrocks team had to retire. This was too great a handicap and Broadford won by a few points. In a return game, however, the result was reversed.

A notable event of the period was the part some players from the parish took a much talked of match played at the Crooked Tree, Newcastle West.

Abbeyfeale were fixed to play Granagh there, and as the latter were raed a first class team the Abbeyfeale mentors, notably Father Casey, P.P., and Father Tim Curtin, C.C. (afterwards Canon Curtin of Croom), got the best of the Shamrocks including Willie Curtin, to play with them.

The plan was made up that when both teams lined out and the ball was thrown up, the combined teams of Abbeyfeale and Mountcollins would give the "hand and leg" to the Granagh men, and knock them down (rules were not as strict as they are now). This was done, but Granagh were equal to the occasion and they won the match—a splendid one—by a point.

In the year 1811, Father O'Mahony, who was born near Mitchelstown, was called away to the Diocese of Buffalo, U.S.A., where he died some years later.

Lacking his inspired leadership, the Shamrock Club fell away, and nothing remains but a grand memory of old hurling days in Mountcollins. There is still a hurley in the parish given to John "Mocky" Lyons by Rev. Father O'Mahony—a relic that may one day inspire our youth to great hurling deeds once more, that will put Mountcollins again on the hurling map.