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GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

Edward Dundon Of Crecora

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

SEVENTY-THREE years ago the Crecora Hurling Club was formed, and so it must be regarded one of the most ancient and historic units in this far-famed hurling county of Limerick.

The Crecora lads were absent from the arena during some of the years in between, but their overall contribution to Gaelic history and the men the parish produced entitle them to high rank in any evaluation of the part the parishioners have played in the cause of the Gael.

Crecora are again an active and enthusiastic hurling force, and the present lads of the district are determined to prove before long that the traditions of the game are safe in their keeping. They commence 1959 with hopes high that the year is going to see the parish back amongst the leaders in the Limerick junior arena, as a preliminary to a return to the premier ranks, where the lads of old left such a proud impress.

FIRST CAPTAIN OF THE CLUB

Edward Dundon was the first captain of the Crecora Hurling Club. He earned that honour because of the part he played in establishing the first team, and of his connection with the earlier hurling efforts in the parish, when he figured in a few of the great cross-country hurling ties that were the vogue in the traditional strongholds of the caman before the G.A.A. promulgated their earliest rules for the control of the game.

On its foundation in 1886, the Crecora Club affiliated under the Father Sheehy Board, one of a pair of county governing authorities functioning in Limerick at this very early stage of the Gaelic athletic revival.

At the foundation meeting Edward Dundon was the unanimous choice for the position of captain, the position of Secretary falling to the lot of James Lyons, who, as far as I can gather, went later to reside in the vicinity of Rathkeale.

THE ROLE OF TREASURER

The role of Treasurer was filled by T. Hayes, father of Tom Hayes, that well-known, highly esteemed and most popular Limerick referee, and hurler of Young Ireland, Limerick and All-Ireland fame. Tom is still active in the cause of the Gael as President of the Young Ireland Hurling Club, which recently celebrated the seventieth year of its existence, during sixty-

five of which Tom was closely associated with their colours.

The first Crecora team, led by Edward Dundon, made their hurling debut under G.A.A. laws, when they encountered the Shamrocks, at Loughmore. The issue was in doubt all the way and at the long whistle the verdict was a draw, generally acclaimed as the best possible ending to a great game. The replay was another stirring struggle, and Crecora were deserving winners on that occasion.

Crecora next crossed camans with Ballyneety and the O'Connell's, a team that enjoyed a short existence in the city, and were victorious in both contests.

THEIR NEXT OBSTACLE

In their onward march to victory their next obstacle was the famous Ogonnoloe selection, who have contributed much to the hurling story of the Banner County. At this period the Ogonneloes were recognised as one of the premier clubs of the land; the struggle took place at Bridgetown, and after a stubborn conflict Crecora emerged victorious and brought home a fancy made hurling ball, which was the trophy awarded the victors. This ball they voted to their respected Treasurer, T. Hayes, and for many years he prized it dearly as a token of remembrance and appreciation.

That match was discussed in the parish for many a day, and was remembered in a song that was for long the "national anthem" of the Crecora Gaels:

They went to Clare and beat them there

They hurled the brave Ogonnelloes

As I do understand And beat them out of hand.

GRUELLING CONTEST

Two cups were now put up for open competition in the County, and after many preliminary bouts the final round of the senior competition found Crecora and Ballysimon the contestants. After a gruelling contest, which showed dash, determination and stamina, Crecora made the trophy secure just as the final whistle sounded.

Next they travelled to Adare and had another notable victory. They then ousted Faughta-Ballaghs to qualify for a memorable contest with "the other side of the parish," the renowned Mungret boys. This was a terrific battle fought tough and terrible but in commendable sporting

spirit, and Crecora were successful in a stirring finish.

By this win they reached the final of the tournament, in which their opponents were Clounanna, a powerful team of the period. The pair played a hard, unyielding contest of true championship fervour and at the end of an exciting hour Crecora were unlucky to go under by the narrowest of margins.

SPORTING GESTURE

Clounanna, however, in true sporting fashion, then presented a set of silver medals for open competition amongst senior teams in the county. It was a foregone conclusion that it would involve another dire struggle for supremacy between their own (Clounanna) Club and Crecora.

And so it proved. Each having ousted many minor opponents, these old rivals met. It was a huge hosting which saw them play and there were few left in either parish that unforgettable day. The contest, too, proved worthy of the occasion and after plenty of even and exciting hurling, the sides were level at the end of the hour. Both agreed on extra time and the crowd certainly got value that day, for the additional period produced hurling of a very high order, which roused the spectators to a high pitch of excitement and enthusiasm. The teams led in turns but Crecora finished best and were deserving, if narrow, winners. They thus made ample amends for the reverse of the previous year.

A PUZZLE

When the first championships were announced Crecora lost no time in entering a team, and it is a thing which has puzzled many students of hurling form that a side which figured so brilliantly in the many tournaments of the period, never fully reproduced that form in championship competition. They, however, gave some satisfying displays and were unlucky losers on a few occasions, particularly in games with Bruree and the "Plan of Campaign." They did reach an advanced stage of the championship on a couple of occasions but the title always eluded them. These reverses were certainly disappointing but they in no way took from the high esteem and respect the Gaels of Limerick had for the hurlers from Crecora, and their gallant captain, Edward Dundon.

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EDWARD Dundon played a captain's part in piloting Creora through the many games in which they participated with such distinction. His leadership was of the inspired type, and he always conveyed the spirit to his team mates that helped to spur them to the greatest endeavour for the honour of the little parish.

The olden arena had many examples of the part a captain played in rallying a team, and he occupied a much more important role in the scheme of things than his counterpart of to-day is permitted to perform.

We have lost a lot in the change-over. The captain, as chief pilot of his side, and the man in control on the field, was an institution of immense value to his team. He was a real skipper and his mates trusted him completely, obeyed his orders and displayed a unity of purpose in team work that made all the difference in performance.

What he said went with his colleagues and in return he was expected, and almost without exception he gave to his team the lead and the lesson which always meant so much, and never more so than when the need was greatest.

GLAMOUR OF THE OLD DAYS.

Our present day teams could take a page from the past, and were they to restore to the captain the power and the glory of the old days it might help them recapture some of the glamour we miss so much in our club games now.

A good captain is of immense value to a team. He should be selected with great care and discernment, and should then be encouraged to display his individuality and resource in moulding his combination to a united force fully animated with the same objective and fired with the spirit and enthusiasm that are of such importance on the playing field.

Creora responded to Edward Dundon's leadership in masterful fashion and each member of that great side deserves an abundant mede of glory. It may seem invidious to mention names, but a few, however, who were especially noteworthy cannot be permitted to sink into oblivion.

NAMES TO REMEMBER.

Bill Nestor and Tom Griffin, both of the parish, were selected by Father Sheehy and played for Munster honours at Cork and elsewhere, in the limited inter-county competition of the very early G.A.A. days.

Tom Hogan was picked by St. Michael's when they were County champions, and played for the Munster title on more than one occasion. The City lads appreciated his worth following a great game between the pair at Loughmore, in which the issue was close fought all the way. Tom also starred in other important games about that period, helping in the defeat of Croom and Desmonds, and figuring strong, too, in the games against Manister and Meanus, in which defeat was their portion.

A problem that is acute now, also reared its ugly head at the period when Creora were at the zenith of their power as a hurling force. I refer to emigration.

These brave sons of Ireland having made hurling history in their parish, and chalked a glorious name for themselves in the annals of the game by Shannonside, fell on dark and evil days.

THE PARNELL SPLIT.

Political divisions at home and the bitterness aroused following Parnell's downfall split the nation, and the playing fields soon were deserted.

The life went out of the land, and in the midst of frustration and despair the lure of the foreign shore appealed to many, and the emigrant ship bore the flower of

our youth to a land of destiny beyond the wave, to seek a livelihood in an alien clime.

The greener fields and bluer skies they yearned for were probably never realised, and most were to pine away in the big industrial cities of the new world far removed from the carefree life of the Irish countryside.

Creora did not escape the general exodus, and soon many of those hearts of oak, such stalwarts on the hurling field, were swept away by the flowing tide of emigration, and the famous club, once the pride of the county, was left tottering.

The remnants of the old guard tried manfully to carry on but time was against them and the club tottering along the road to decay soon became a name, time-honoured and esteemed.

TRADITIONS LIVED ON.

The traditions of the game were, however, strong in the parish, and even if the team could no longer muster the requisite number to claim representation in the championship, individuals maintained the fair name and shed lustre on the parish. They came to the rescue when things looked blackest and their names now loom large in the pages of Gaelic history, maintaining a place which as long as Gaelic games retain a hold on the minds and in the hearts of the people is not likely to be lost.

The Egans and Dooleys must gain mention for their heroic endeavour in the years of difficulty and the great efforts they made to re-establish the club.

The Buskins, too, though not inside the parish, had the interests of the club at heart, and Pat Buskin, who is closely associated with Creora, won a name of great renown as a member of the great Kilfinane All-Ireland side which won the first great double for the county, of All-Ireland championship and Croke Park hurling renown. And nowhere were Pat's feats better appreciated and honoured than in Creora.

The Hayeses, too, who bear a name which can boast of glowing association, assisted South Liberties in many a hard-fought field, winning much renown with that ancient and renowned club. The Kilpeacon branch of the family, though not actually within the limits of the parish, belonged to old Creora ancestry.

WON PROUD LAURELS.

Attached to the Fedamore Club, Tom and Martin were connected with the famous Limerick selection of 1913 and other years, and Tom especially won a place of fame in the side. Later Martin, bedecked with further laurels, went to Dublin, where he continued his Gaelic activities and even enhanced his reputation by assisting Dublin to procure All-Ireland honours. Then playing at centre-back he was largely responsible for the memorable victories of the Leinstermen. They are of the same lineage as Tom Hayes, the Young Ireland life President, who having made a great name as a hurler later enhanced it considerably as one of the best referees the game has known.

CANON PUNCH.

No reference to Creora would be complete without mention of another distinguished son — Very Rev. E. Canon Punch, P.P., who has given a lifetime of service to the cause of the Gael, to fully earn the wonderful tribute of having in his own lifetime a worthy sportsfield in the City of Limerick raised in his honour.

So, from the tiny seed planted by Edward Dundon and his companions many years ago Limerick Gaeldom has already reaped a rich harvest.

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