

J. B. Hickey Of Kifinny

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

which Ballingarry pulled the
 sue out of the fire by a very nar-
 ow margin.

HURLING records under organ-
 ized rules go back in the parish
 of Kifinny to the year 1886.

There is evidence, however, that
 much earlier the game held sway
 in the district. The origin of hur-
 ling goes back to the misty past of
 our nation's history but there is no
 evidence to show that earlier than
 the eighties it had been governed
 by any rules that would equalise
 the chances of participants in
 what afterwards became such a
 skillful test. Previously the only
 means of testing competitive
 superiority were the challenges of
 parishes or districts, and then,
 without adequate regard for equal-
 ising the number of opponents or
 even providing proper playing
 pitches.

BRINGING "HOME" THE BALL

The most popular form of com-
 petition was what was called "At
 Home," when the contestants met
 in some central place between their
 respective home districts and the
 struggle began and continued until
 the ball was brought "home" or the
 mantle of darkness signalled "time
 up." Other goaling objectives were
 distant land marks.

Wonderful advancement has been
 made in many directions for test-
 ing skill and the physical powers
 of even horse as well as man. For-
 instance, in those far-off days, to
 test the running and jumping
 abilities of racehorses, a distance
 steeple was invariably selected as
 the winning post, when the horse's
 prospect of winning depended very
 much on the weight the jockey
 happened to be. Hence the term
 "steeplechasing."

The method often employed in
 hurling contests which led to the
 development of scientific skill was
 when the practitioners met in
 "puck about," and two of the leading
 players would stand out and call
 man for man alternatively to their
 respective sides until the number
 present was exhausted, when im-
 proved "goals" were erected and
 a clash begun.

GREAT HURLING CHALLENGE

Tradition tells of a great hurling
 game of this nature in the Kifinny
 area almost a hundred years ago.
 The hurlers of West Limerick sent
 a challenge to a famous welder of
 the caman, named Donovan, who
 lived on the outskirts of the city,
 to play an "all home."

Donovan gathered his forces, and
 the challenge being accepted, they
 travelled practically all night for
 the town of Rathkeale, near where
 the ball was put rolling in a place
 known as the "Commons."

The struggle began, and it is on
 record that the toughest part of it
 took place in the Kifinny area, and
 continued until darkness obscured
 the ball, in the vicinity of Adare,
 which, being somewhat nearer the
 "home" of the city side, left them
 narrow victors.

The subject of our sketch this
 week, J. B. Hickey, was the guid-
 ing influence behind the moves to
 introduce hurling under G.A.A.
 rules into the parish of Kifinny.

For his work in this regard he had
 the honour of being appointed
 first President of the local club,
 which was called the St. Kiernan's
 Hurling Club.

CLUB FOUNDED IN 1886

This club was founded in the
 year 1886, at which period J. Hickey
 already had the reputation of being
 one of the most active figures in
 the Gaelic revival in the county,
 which was amongst the foremost
 in the spread of Gaelic games
 and athletics.

"J. B." was even then past his
 youthful stage, but as one who
 participated in the old "hurling
 home" the cult of the caman was
 very dear to him, and he held
 most sacred the older traditions
 of the game.

It was not surprising, then, that
 the sons of this old Gael should
 come dextrous wielders of the
 caman, figuring with distinction
 all the early Kifinny teams.

The first team, which continued
 until 1893 and played many great
 games with the leading teams of
 the surrounding areas in the
 great flush of the hurling revival,
 included many who continued
 great enthusiasts of the game to
 the end of their days.

MEMBERS OF TEAM

The members of that St. Kiernan's
 team deserve a remembrance here.
 They were: J. Conaghan (captain),
 P. Hickey (goal), J. Kiely, M. Toomey,
 P. Sheehy, T. Nash, J. Cowhey,
 M. Lynch, J. Cahill, M. Comhey,
 M. O'Brien, J. Quinn, P. Cowhey,
 E. Casey, M. O'Donoghue, W. Cussen,
 J. Haloran, P. O'Donoghue, Dick
 W. O'Brien, S. Long, T. Lynch.

A short break occurred during
 the worst period of the Partition
 Split, and when the club was re-
 established it was under the name
 of the "Raparees."

In 1896 the Raparees were for
 their President Thomas Hickey,
 who was also the team captain.
 M. O'Kelly was the club secretary.

It was in this year the club made
 history for themselves by defeat-
 ing such famous combinations as
 Fedamore, Rathkeale, Ingrete
 and Sarsfields, but unluckily
 went down to the well-known Ballin-
 garry selection at a vital stage
 of the championships.

DEBATED AT MA A FIRESIDE

This was a match, or rather series
 of matches, which evoked much
 interest, and was for years after-
 wards debated by many a fireside.
 It was a thrilling serial, actually,
 for it was only in the third con-
 test that a winner was found—and
 then only by a very narrow mar-
 gin, and with an element of luck
 into the bargain.

The first contest—a tight-packed
 and closely fought affair—all the
 hour—ended in a draw. The second
 was unfinished with Kifinny lead-
 ing; and the third also ended with
 laurels level at full time. In an
 effort to decide the issue both
 teams agreed to play over an ex-
 tra half hour, in the closing stages

KILFINNY TEAM

The team that represented Kil-
 finny in those memorable games
 were: T. Hickey (captain), M.
 Lynch (goal), W. Hannon, P.
 Toomey, W. O'Donoghue, P. Hic-
 key, M. Kelly, M. O'Donoghue, J.
 Hickey, D. Hartigan, M. Burke, J.
 Fitzgibbon, W. O'Donnell, E.
 Burke, J. Morrissey, T. O'Dea, D.
 Ahern, J. Mangan.

Ballingarry later went under to
 Castleconnell in the Championship.
 Kifinny then challenged the Castle-
 connell lads for a set of jerseys,
 and after a thrilling game were
 only defeated in the last minute by
 a well-timed goal.

The next great Kifinny spell was
 in 1904, and J. B. Hickey again had
 his finger in this pie, playing an
 important role in the management
 of the side, besides continuing an
 active association through his son,
 who was one of the best players on
 the side.

MOST SUCCESSFUL YEAR

Kifinny had a most successful
 year and beat many fancied sides
 before falling to Monegav in a un-
 forgettable struggle. 1905 saw them
 continue their winning way, and a
 match they derived great satisfac-
 tion from was the one in which
 they revenged the defeat by Mone-
 gav of the previous season. In the
 next round, however, they met an
 unexpected reverse when they
 failed before their old Ballingarry
 rivals. The Kifinny team of the
 occasion was: E. Hartigan (cap-
 tain), M. Lynch (goal), J. Carmody,
 M. Kelly, J. Hickey, M. Morrissey,
 J. Morrissey, M. Mangan, J. Kelly,
 E. Burke, M. Kelly, D. Ahern, T.
 Hannan, M. Lynch, T. Piggott, J.
 Cathrell, W. Burns.

That might be written the end
 of that story as far as Kifinny of
 the J. B. Hickey era was concerned,
 for the club went out of existence
 in 1908 and was not revived until
 Mick Neville got the lads to hur-
 ling action again in 1923. But the
 veteran Gael, first President of the
 Club, held his interest in G.A.A.
 affairs right to the end and re-
 mained an honoured link in a gol-
 den chain.