

GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

Ned Jackson of Kilmallock

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.

NED Jackson was one of the great Co. Limerick Gaels who played a leading part in spreading the gospel, as it were, of two great national organisations—the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Gaelic League.

A veteran who could recall some of the old football games played before the foundation of the G.A.A., Ned often spoke of a famous contest played in a field that was quarter of a mile long, with the goal posts set in the walls at either end. The teams comprised fifty men on each side and were drawn from the parishes of Ardagh and Foynes. The captain of the Ardagh team was a son of William Smith O'Brien.

Ned was only about eight at the time; the year was 1872, but he had a distinct recollection of the event, and of a return game at the Lawn, Foynes, which Ardagh won. His youthful imagination was gripped by one feature of the latter game, when he saw players thrown into a trench bounding the pitch and actually walked on by their opponents.

BIRTH OF THE G.A.A.

Kilmallock was one of the first centres to answer the call sent out from Thurles that early November day of 1884. The attendance at the birth of the G.A.A. was a mere seven, including one to be well known in Kilmallock in later years, J. K. Bracken, but from that historic gathering developed what in after years became the world's greatest amateur sporting organisation.

Ned saw the G.A.A. through all its early difficulties. He could speak of how it experienced a rather stormy infancy, with open hostility from many quarters. It had to fight enemies of great power and influence outside its ranks, and worse still had also to face considerable differences inside as well.

The fight raged for many years, and several times the G.A.A. was faced with extinction. It survived, however, and grew to one of the greatest nationalising forces in the land, paving the way for the language movement and the founding of the Gaelic League.

HIVE OF GAELIC ACTIVITY.

Kilmallock, and its surrounding area, was a hive of Gaelic activity from the start, and in the first year of the G.A.A.'s existence athletic sports were held at Kilmallock, Kilfinane, Bruff, Knockaney, Hospital, Ballylanders and Ballingaddy. Ballingaddy also had a very early hurling club, which

attained much distinction.

The first athletic meeting under the new regime held in Cork in June, 1885, saw Kilmallock in a prominent position with Larry Feore second in both the 440 and 880 yards. At the same meeting P. McGrath, of Lackanarra, won the hop, step and jump, and was second in the high jump, whilst Frank Dinneen was second in the 100 yards.

Kilmallock was a notable venue, and attracted many famed athletes, those from nearby areas including Dan Shanahan, J. McCarthy and Denis Carey from Kilfinane; John Flanagan of the Staker Wallace district and the brothers Conneroy of the same area. Elton produced a marvellous performer in M. J. Creed; Clogher offered Dr. J. C. Daly; Dromin Larry Roche and Cregane, the famous Leahy brothers, all men who shed lustre and renown on the Gaelic Field.

THE GREAT CENTRE OF ATHLETICS IN IRELAND.

Kilmallock was the great centre of athletics in Ireland then—Flanagan in the hammer and weights, the Connerys in jumping and sprints, Fitzgerald in the long distance running, Dan Shanahan putting up world record marks in the hop, step and jump; Larry Roche, a good all-round performer, and this fertile period culminated in the coming of the Leahy brothers and J. J. Bresnihan—so that for more than a score of years the cream of the world's athletes were to be found within easy radius.

Kilmallock boasts a great Gaelic arena nowadays, one of the best to be found in any centre of like size and one that most of the Irish counties would be proud to call their own. That popular arena has been the scene of some great gatherings in recent years, but its history as a sports arena goes back deep into the misty past to give it a connection with Gaelic endeavour that is as old as the G.A.A. itself.

Kilmallock had its hurling and football teams, too, from the commencement, and although they won many laurels in the early years they did not attain to the distinction of their Kilfinane neighbours, who won the 1897 All-Ireland Hurling Championship title.

WORTHY REPRESENTATIVES.

But the Kilmallock lads had a close association with the Commercials All-Ireland football suc-

cess of the previous year, and in Tom Campion, Larry Roche, Jim and Jack Riordan, had worthy representatives, who played no small part in that great success.

The Balbec Club, Ned always boasted, maintained its connection with the G.A.A. "through thick and thin" and he often claimed that they were at one time the only club in the county being affiliated direct to the Central Council.

They had great games and great players in the early days—John Flanagan, Larry Roche and Tom Campion, to mention but a few. The genial, unassuming Larry was a great favourite and his long jump of 23 ft. 7 ins. at Kildorrery in September, 1895, is still considered in the district as the best ever accomplished under similar conditions.

Of the earliest matches played by Kilmallock Ned had only a vague remembrance but he often spoke of the occasion, in 1888, when they brought three teams to Ballynea—a first, second and juvenile selection, and all won. Five brothers played for Kilmallock that day, and were to give for many years after sterling service to our native games.

A GREAT FINAL.

Kilmallock won out the Bulgaden Tournament, beating Knockaney by a point in one of the greatest finals played in the area for many years. The prize they won on the occasion they presented to their President—Rev. J. Costelloe, one of the earliest of our great Irish missionaries, who was about to leave for Van Dieman's Land, where he died shortly afterwards.

The games played by the Faugh-a-Ballaghs, by which name the club was then known, included a draw at Elton against Arravale Rovers of Tipperary; a similar result on two occasions in opposition to Dromore and victories against Doneralee Football Club twice, against Shanballymore, Mitchelstown and Kildorrery in the Kildorrery Tournament, and against Ballyorgan, Ballylanders, Ardpatrick, Kilfinane, Effin and Croom in a home tournament.

LANGUAGE ENTHUSIAST.

A keen Irish language enthusiast all his lifetime, Ned Jackson, was a fluent Irish speaker, and a foundation member of the Kilmallock Gaelic League, in which he took a deep and abiding interest.

Another project that had his enthusiastic support and encouragement was the provision of the Kilmallock People's Hall, and he was Treasurer of the fund raised to build it.

The second and concluding article, will deal with Ned's part in a great hurling and football spell in Kilmallock, and his official Association with the South Limerick Divisional Board and the County Board G.A.A.

Ned Jackson Of Kilmallock

(CONCLUDED)

WHEN the G.A.A. was re-organised in Limerick towards the end of 1894, following the period of inactivity due to the "Farnell Spit," the Cork firm of Brewers, Messrs. J. J. Murphy & Co., Ltd., through their Limerick agent, Mr. M. D. Carr, presented two silver cups, value £60 each, for competition amongst hurling and football clubs.

Kilmallock were first winners of the Murphy Hurling Cup, when they defeated St. Michael's, 6-7 to nil in the final, played at Caherline on July 12th, 1896. They were the first team to get a set of gold medals from the County Board.

The officers of the Club at the period were: President, Larry Roche; Vice-President, M. T. Conolly; Treasurer, J. Dunworth; Secretary, James Casey. Team Captains: Senior Hurling, T. Murphy; Senior Football, F. Campion.

ANOTHER NOTABLE TRIUMPH

Another notable triumph of the Kilmallock lads around this time was in the final of their own Senior Hurling Tournament, in which they defeated Kilfinane, 2-4 to 1-3. Considering that Kilfinane were County, Munster and All-Ireland champions just twelve months later, that win must be rated a great achievement.

Kilmallock figured in another first timer when they contested the initial final of the County Junior Football Championship. On this occasion, however, they were unsuccessful, losing to the Newcastle West Boers, 2-10 to 1-4. Their team on that day will be of interest: P. Quilty (captain), J. O'Malley, D. O'Grady, P. Mackessy, J. Higgins, P. Buckley, T. Hickey, J. Keane, M. F. Ryan, T. Ryan, J. Scanlan, C. Treacy, M. Adams, M. Nagle, P. Murphy, J. Doherty, J. Healy.

The Kilmallock lads came back to win the title the following year, defeating Sarsfields, 2-9 to 2-5, in a hard fought final, played at the Markets Field.

They had to wait for eight years for revenge on Newcastle West. It came at last at the Markets Field on February 28th, 1909, when Kilmallock beat Newcastle West, 2-8 to 0-3, in the 1908 Co. Senior Football Championship Final.

THE TEAMS.

The teams on that occasion were:

Kilmallock—D. O'Grady, Captain; P. Cassidy, E. O'Kelly, M. O'Grady, D. P. Connelly, John Savage, Jack Mackessy, Tim Nunan, Dr. D. O'Keefe, J. J. O'Keefe, Tim Hennessy, Thomas Campion, Joe Higgins, Chris O'Kelly, Wm. Sheedy, E. O'Doherty, Peter Halpin.

Newcastle West—J. Curtain, Captain; J. Nash, G. Mulcahy, P. Mulcahy, T. Scanlan, J. Griffin, T. Hunt, C. O'Sullivan, T. Reidy, T. Hart, T. O'Connell, T. Moore, J. Sheehy, W. Reidy, F. Guinee, D. O'Dwyer, M. Nix, J. Fitton.

Ned Jackson was Treasurer of the Kilmallock Club at the time, and took a very active part in the preparation of the team for its many engagements.

Kilmallock retained the title the following year, defeating Commercials in the semi-final, 2-3 to 0-4, and Glin in the final, 1-8 to 1-1.

They met Commercials again a short time later, this time in the Murphy Cup competition, and were defeated by a point, after a great game, 1-5 to 1-4. They had a similar experience in the Murphy Cup senior hurling competi-

GREAT GAELIC SPELL.

This was a great Gaelic spell in Kilmallock and the junior hurlers were also to the fore. They beat a strongly fancied Commercials side, 6-5 to 3-2 in the County semi-final at the Markets Field on October 9th, 1910, but lost to a great Caseleconnell team a few weeks later in the County Final.

Kilmallock won a fine set of senior hurling medals when they beat Bruree, 1-6 to 0-1, in a Tournament Final at the Markets Field on April 30th, 1911. They were at Adare the following Sunday where they lost their senior football title, going down to their old rivals, Commercials, 0-3 to nil, after a most exciting game.

In Munster Championship games played at the Markets Field on July 2nd, 1911, Kilmallock players figuring with Limerick were Joe Higgins and J. Carroll in hurling and Dominic O'Grady and John Savage in football.

A SPECIAL COUNTY CONVENTION.

Ned Jackson and J. P. Cahill represented Kilmallock on the County Board for several seasons, and when that body was suspended, arising out of the refusal to send a team to play Kilkenny in the disputed All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final for 1911, both were present at the Special County Convention called by the Central Council, and at which Ald. Jim Nowlan of Kilkenny, the President of the Association, presided.

Ned Jackson was elected County Treasurer on that historic occasion, and it was a great tribute to his popularity that he was one of the very few to be returned unopposed. The other officers appointed that day were: Chairman, John Kelly, of Ballin-garry (by 25 votes to 16 for Councillor P. Farrell); Vice-Chairman, Michael Ryan, D.C.; Secretary, Mick Feely of Croom (by 26 votes to 17 for Albie Quillinan); Assistant Secretary, P. Halvey.

One of the first duties of this Board was to field a team in the 1912 Munster Championship semi-final, which proved one of the great games in the history of the Southern arena. Played at Waterford, it proved one of the toughest struggles ever waged for the Munster Crown.

The teams were level, 1-2 all, at the interval and twenty-nine minutes of the second half passed in incredible excitement, with only a solitary score on the register—a Limerick point. The title holders looked all set for victory when the Shannonside captain led a last minute assault that seemed destined for the net. The Cork net keeper—the famed Andy Fitzpatrick, made a remarkable save, and got great distance into his clearance. In the last seconds of this hurling epic Cork pushed to victory with a sensational goal, to win, 2-2 to 1-3.

OFFICERS ELECTED IN RESHUFFLE.

Ned Jackson resigned from his official post on the Kilmallock Club Committee to give more time to County Board affairs, and Kilmallock officers elected in the reshuffle were: Chairman, J. P. Cahill; Vice-Chairman, W. O'Grady; Treasurer, J. O'Dea; Secretary, J. Moylan; Team Captains: Hurling, J. Moloney; Football, J. Savage; Vice-Captains: Hurling, P. Cassidy; Football, E. O'Reilly.

There was keen competition for the various posts at the 1913 Co. Convention, and a very tight fight

C. Holland. Ned Jackson retained his appointment, defeating Albie Quillinan by 88 votes to 60.

Five Kilmallock players figured on the Limerick Senior Football team beaten by Cork in the Munster Championship of 1913. They were: J. Cleary, J. Savage, D. McCarthy, J. Moloney and M. Fitzgerald.

Ned Jackson played a leading part in the formation of the South Limerick Junior Hurling League, and it was a great satisfaction to him to see the Kilmallock lads victorious in the first competition they organised, defeating Bruff Stars in the final, 7-6 to 0-2. The winning fifteen were: J. Moloney (Captain), J. Sheehy (goal), D. O'Grady, J. Savage, J. Sparks, M. J. Houlihan, P. O'Callaghan, P. D. Mehan ("Carberry"), J. McGrath, M. Fitzgerald, P. Cassidy, J. Mackessy, Ted Young, J. O'Connor, W. Lee.

"A LAST LOOK AT GLORY."

Kilmallock footballers had a last look at glory in the 1916 Senior County Championship, which they won. Abbeyfeale were their opponents in the final and the pair met at Rathkeale on June 10th, 1917, where, after a great game the sides finished level: Kilmallock, 1-3; Abbeyfeale, 0-6. The re-play did not take place until September 30th, again at Rathkeale, where Kilmallock took the laurels by the narrowest of margins, 1-2 to 0-4.

Always keenly interested in the progress of the South Limerick Board, Ned Jackson was one of the earliest Vice-Chairmen of that body, being appointed at a Convention held on June 4th, 1922, shortly before the outbreak of Civil War. He became Treasurer of the Board in 1927, and so gained the distinction of having held that post in his club and on both the Divisional and County Boards.

Kilmallock won the 1925 County Junior Hurling Championship and Mick O'Connor subsequently captained Limerick to the County's first Munster success in this grade. That Kilmallock-led side beat Tipperary at Clonmel, Cork, at Dungarvan, and Clare at Kilrush, to take Southern honours, but were defeated in the All-Ireland semi-final by Meath at Thurles.

Ned Jackson bridged the Gaelic years in no uncertain way, and when he died in early April, 1948, at the fine age of 84, he carried to the grave a lifetime of service in the cause of the Gael—as athlete, hurler, footballer and trusted official. Once he walked thirty miles to a sports meeting and won his