



It was in the early thirties, Limerick had reached the All Ireland Final. Money was scarce and the prospect of getting to Dublin for the match remote, until word got round that Sweeney could provide a lorry and driver for a modest ten shillings a head. There would be a canvas cover in the event of rain. After much scrimping and scrounging, we got the money together and a few bob to spare. We were off to see Limerick play Dublin.

The lorry arrived at eight-thirty a.m. that Sunday. What a thrill we got as we scrambled aboard and secured seats on the forms provided! The more senior passengers were given first preference for the comfortable positions. The very young made cushions of their coats on the floor. The entire avenue turned out to wish us luck. The green flag was raised to resounding cheers.

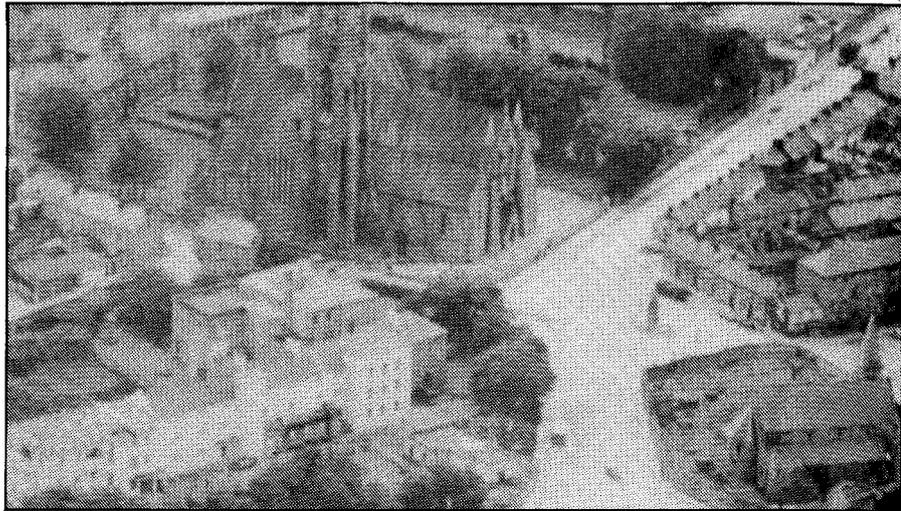
It was 9 o'clock when we sallied forth. We had been to early Mass and packed a few sandwiches. There would be nothing to eat until after the match. The driver was cautious; he had a heavy load, so he decided to take the quieter roads. We went through Cashel. We met the Archbishop on the road, walking back from Mass. He blessed the passing lorry. Shortly after, disaster struck. We came to a sudden stop as a tyre exploded. We looked at one another in awe ... surely it wasn't his Lordship. There were comments about the ancient rivalry between Tipperary and Limerick. Paddy Mick Ryan, whose origins were inside the Tipperary border, only laughed and said that of course his county had enlisted supernatural support against our team. The driver hustled us off the lorry to stretch our legs while he changed the wheel. He told us to exercise our tongues too and start pleading with Saint Christopher for his support.

Soon we were on our way again. The sun appeared and our spirits rose. On entering the square of the next town, our soaring spirits once again sank into our boots; we had two more flat tyres! It was 1 p.m. We were still forty miles from Dublin. Our dream match was only two hours away. The driver, with the authority of a sergeant-major, marshalled his troops and buckets of water. Those past the age of strenuous work joined the locals in the nearby pub. They supped pints and peered through the windows while the repairs were being carried out and we took turns to pump up the tyres. Our elders, two pints calmer, were loaded aboard and we were off again, with the hearty cheers of the locals ringing in our ears.

The next few bad patches of road were treated with respect. Only the elderly were allowed stay on board while the driver steered through cut stone chippings. He shouted encour-

A JOURNEY TO AN ALL IRELAND

by C.B. McKernan



Old Garryowen in the 1940s.

agement at us. We kept up with that lorry as if she was a stage coach carrying bullions of gold.

The last few miles of our journey seemed to grow longer, the seconds ticked even faster. Each pothole hurt not only our posteriors as frayed tempers snapped with each toppled poise. Ned Ryan, who was known as 'The Curser', hurled maledictions on the lorry, the roads and the driver. He, in turn, blamed 'the bunch of magpies' he had taken aboard.

We arrived in Dublin's city centre with four instead of six wheels intact. There was a frantic scramble off the lorry and a mad rush to the 'Park'. One man, who had taken an extra pint jumped on a tram. It was going to the wrong park. He later said he listened to the match on the radio in the comfort of a pub near the Phoenix Park. Another, less fortunate, caught his trouser turn-up on the lorry, struck his head on the pavement and spent the evening in Jervis Street Hospital. He got seven stitches.

With a companion, who knew the way, I ran like hell to the grounds. We arrived panting brandishing our banner. It was half-time. The attendant let us in for half-price; we had to jump over the stile. The match restarted. Breathless though we were, we opened

our throats and let out the roar 'Come on Limerick'.

Nearby spectators jumped with shock. There had been a lull in play. They said we brought the excitement back. The result was in doubt until the final whistle. It was a draw. I was relieved. The excitement of that match was instantly replaced with the anticipation of the replay.

Flat tyres were not a feature of the journey home but, rain and sudden gusts of wind were. We huddled together. Outbursts of song took our minds off the drips and trickles. Our chorus rose to a grand crescendo when we reached home. It was after midnight. Neighbours spilled out to hear our account of the day.

Over our midnight feast of cold meat, bread and butter and pots of tea, we filled them in on the long journey and the match. The Dublin team had had a father and son playing; the father was in goal. But it was the deeds of Mick Mackey, Paddy Clohessy, Paddy Scanlon and Mick Cross that brought the smiles to their faces and the shrill of excitement to our voices.

Our dreams of going to the replay never materialised. Sweeney just shook his head when he surveyed his tyres. Instead, we listened to it on the best radio in the neighbourhood. And Limerick won next time round!