This picture gives an idea of the huge crowd that turned out for Mick Mackey's funeral - the cortege was three miles long

Mackey's send-off was fitting for a true hero

■ Thousands paid their respects and authorities on the game underlined his greatness

Then&Now

with Tom Aherne

MICK MACKEY'S work life was in the Electricity Supply Board where he spent 47 years, as a van driver *with the company at Ardnacrusha, County Clare.*

He also spent five years, as a member of the National Irish Army during the Emergency. He played for both the Seventh Brigade and the Southern Command teams, providing great entertainment for people during these difficult years. Mick who was 5'8" in height played 42 times for Limerick from 1929 to 1947 and his favourite position was centre forward.

Mick was married to Kathleen Kitty Kennedy (1914–2003) and the couple had five children, Paddy, Michael, Greg, Audrey and Ruth. In declining health for some years, Mackey suffered a series of strokes towards the end of his life, and he died on September 13, 1982.

T'was a sad day in September in the year of eighty two
This giant of our national game met with his maker true
So farewell to you Mick Mackey as you cross the great divide
Where hurlers of those happy days will gather by your side.

Thousands of hurling fans young and old, filed past the coffin of Mackey at the Regional Hospital, as the great Limerick hurler went before his beloved public for the last time. For well over two hours, the hurling stars of yesteryear and today, public and business figures and ordinary hurling fans paid their last respects.

He was dressed in the Ahane blazer and GAA tie, while his coffin was draped in the Ahane and Limerick jerseys.

Many of his teammates converged on the hospital to pay their final respects and contemporaries arrived from across the country. Among the teammates were brother John Mackey, Jackie Power, Jackie O'Connell, Timmy Ryan, Paddy McMahon, Paddy Carroll, Derry McCarthy, Garrett Howard, Tommy Cooke, Mick Hickey and Pat Ryan, as well as the stars of the 1973 team, Pat Hartigan, Eamon Cregan and Liam O'Donoghue.

The cortege was three miles long as it made its way to Castleconnell where it was met by the Ahane club, who escorted the hearse to the Church.

Fr John Cooney, parish priest, headed the clergy awaiting the remains. He said that Mick Mackey had returned to his home parish where he had learned his hurling skills, that later led to him gaining ever increasing success in the Gaelic fields of Ireland.

The chief celebrant at the funeral Mass was Rev Liam Kelly also a championship winning hurler with Ahane. In his homily he recalled that Mick always had close links with the Church and was proud of the fact, that he travelled all over the country with Ahane, playing tournament matches, for the local churches.

He said to me once, I suppose we should have a fair chance of getting into Heaven, after playing all those matches, as we never turned down any request.

The Bishop of Limerick Most Rev Jeremiah Newman, presided and he read the concluding prayers. A guard of honour of former hurling colleagues with Ahane, and Limerick flanked the coffin, whilst underage members of the Ahane Club carried the many beautiful floral tributes.

Paddy Buggy, president of the GAA, delivered the graveside oration, as the public bid their final farewell to the iron muscled Trojan, from beside the whispering falls of Doonass.

The following is a short extract from the oration: It is with sadness we gather here this morning to mourn the passing of Mick Mackey. There is a bond of friendship between all hurlers, and hurling people everywhere, and this great gathering is further evidence of the great affection, that we hold in this country for our outstanding hurlers.

As a hurler on the 40 yards mark Munster's pride and Limerick's glory Mick Mackey had no equal as he was the greatest centre forward of all time.

For a combination of skill and power, brains and strength he had no peer, and those of us who had the privilege of seeing him play can still visualise Mick in full flight, ball hopping on hurley on one of his famous solo runs.

Mick's broad grin on our hurling fields, was a sign of the enjoyment he got from the physical contact, from participation in our greatest field game. He was a crowd pleaser, he loved the roar of the crowd and his every move would have the crowd humming.

While we here today are saddened by his passing I am sure that there is great joy up above, with the team mates and opponents, he had rejoined with many a yarn being swopped and many a bout of play or game being replayed.

Mick was always happiest when in the company of hurling folk, and after his career ended he took to the administration, to help in every way possible with the promotion of our games.

He was a member of the Munster Council for over 32 years, and Limerick will be the poorer for his passing.

Two years after his death, Mackey received the ultimate honour during the GAA's centenary year, in 1984 when he was chosen at centre-forward on the Hurling Team of the Century.

He retained that position on the Hurling Team of the Millennium in 2000.

In 1988 the main covered stand in the Gaelic Grounds in Limerick was named the Mackey Stand in his honour, while the main playing field of the Ahane club is named Mackey Park.

This is a tribute to the entire Mackey family for their contribution to the game. In 2013 a bronze statue in memory of Mick Mackey was unveiled in his native Castleconnell.

Around the same time the Munster Council turned down a Limerick motion, to name the province's senior hurling trophy in honour of Mackey.

As the first superstar of hurling, Mick Mackey came to be regarded as one of the greatest players of all-time even during his playing days.

P.D. Mehigan, a contemporary Gaelic games journalist and historian, said of him: A most elusive forward, and the greatest playboy than ever handled ash, son of the great Tyler, schoolboys love him, hurling fans admire him opposing backs fear him.

Ned Maher, the Tipperary goalkeeper of the 1890s said, "Mick Mackey was the greatest hurler ever and I saw them all."

Timmy Ryan Limerick's 1934 All Ireland captain described Mick as a terrific hurler, and his flamboyant style made him a magnetic crowd puller.

Dermot Kelly a member of the famous Limerick team that Mick trained to victory over Clare in the 1955 Munster final described him as a magical kind of man.

He recalled that day when Mick addressed the players at half time: "He got up on a table and spoke to us like I have never heard anyone speak since, and it was so moving we knew we had to win."

The golden era of Limerick hurling during Mick's time is but a distant memory and only one All Ireland senior title has been won (1973) since 1940.

The county could do with a few players of his quality at present as we mark his birthday this month. Mick was the Cuchulain of Limerick hurling and long may his memory live on, to lift the spirits of the Gaels of Shannonside.

So farewell to you Mick Mackey as you cross the great divide
Where hurlers of those happy days will gather by your side
And the stalwart men from Fedamore, Ahane, and sweet Adare,
Will all line up to welcome you the hurling cavalier.

Women unw to settle witl man in his 5

JohnB.Kean

OUT IN THE OPEN

I WOULD like to serve notice upon bachelors everywhere who may have it in their heads to come calling on me during the remainder of the summer and for the duration of the autumn.

I recognise the distress that prompts such journeys, but for the past few weeks I am sorely addled by great numbers of wife-seeking unfortunates, so much so, that my time is no longer my own.

Therefore, it is my painful duty to inform all those honest men who have no women that it is not presently in my power to ease the situation.

Last Friday, without prior notice of any kind, a carload of gentlemen arrived all the ways from Galway.

They numbered five, and of the five, only one was unmarried. It was in relation to this man's problem that the journey was made.

He was aged 55, and because his mother passed away shortly after St Patrick's Day of this year, he is now free to settle down and get married, having as assets a house of his own, a 25-acre farm and £500 in the post office.

"You need more than that to get a wife," I said.

"I have all it takes," he told me. I didn't doubt him but I told him as politely as I could that there was nothing I could do for him.

"Go," I said, "and visit Patrick Ahern of Glensharrold in Carrigkerry. He is your only hope of salvation."

On Friday night I was again visited by a party from Charleville.

The spokesman was a woman and the man for whom she wanted a wife was her brother.

Again the mother had recently died and he was anxious to settle down. He was outside in the car and too shy to come in, so would I come out and have a look at him and see what I could do for him.

"I haven't a notion of it," I told her, "let him come in if he wants to see me!"

After a lot of persuasion, he came in. He had little to say for himself but in the bar at the time were a couple of attractive girls wearing mini skirts.

The bachelor from Charleville couldn't take his eyes off the girls.

Confidently, he turned over to me.

"There's a score in it for yourself," he whispered, "if you can get one of those for me."

I told the girls what transpired and they screeched out with laughter 'till they had to hold their sides.

The Charleville bachelor left in a huff, followed by the sister and her five children, who had come along for the ride.

From now until the last chestnut has fallen, and the salmon start to spawn, I will have these lonely bachelors calling on me.

As the winter approaches, the desire for female companionship of a permanent nature becomes overwhelming. One can read it in their faces.

Unless they are successful before the end of autumn, they will have to endure another winter without the whisper of a woman's voice to wake them in the mornings, or the swish of skirts to remind them that they are not alone anymore.

As I have said repeatedly, it is fine for those who have women of their own.

To them it's a bit of a joke, but for those who have no one to darn a sock or pat a pillow, it is far from being funny.

However, I must stress the fact that there is nothing whatsoever I can do. I have no women or knowledge of women who are willing to settle down with bachelors over fifty.

From Llannelly, in Wales, comes one of the best. It is inscribed on a headstone erected to a wife: "This spot's the sweetest I've seen in my life, For it raises my flowers and covers my wife."

It's tough but it's reall only "all going through life as the old woman said whe she was carried away by th flood.

Maybe the women ar there but, if they are, the are not showing them selves.

Epitaphs

SOME TIME AGO, as result of reading an article mine in the Limerick Leade concerning choice epitaph in Glin and other grav yards, an Irish-America writer by the name of Joh Thomas O'Connor compile a book of epitaphs, whic will be published shortly i the United States.

"It was," he writes, "aft reading your epitaphs in th Limerick Leader, which m sister gave to me, that I d cided to compile the book epitaphs."

Very kindly, Mr O'Conn sent a copy. From Llannell in Wales, comes one of t best. It is inscribed on