

PRESENTING the Liam McCarthy Cup to Mick Mackey, at the conclusion of the 1936 All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final, Bob O'Keefe, Kilkenny born President of the G.A.A. said: "Gaelic of Limerick, I wish to congratulate you on this great victory, and to congratulate Mick Mackey, captain, on his magnificent team of hurlers. I congratulate them on writing the historic name of Limerick on the coveted roll of honour of Ireland's championship list. By their victory here to-day they have established the name of Limerick as the greatest hurling team of this year, and not only that but the greatest hurling combination of all time."

That this was not an individual opinion was demonstrated when "Green Flag," writing in the "Irish Press" the following morning said: "Youth, dash and strength were the steps by which the Shannonsiders climbed back to fame, and while Kilkenny fought gallantly the Limerickmen, as time went by, hurled with greater confidence and clan, and by their victory take rank as the greatest side of any time in the annals of the Gael."

"The crowd was the biggest ever to attend a sporting fixture of any description in this country, and exceeds by 4,644 the previous record for a hurling final, set up last year when Kilkenny and Limerick were also the contestants."

Writing in the "Evening Herald," "P.F." said: "Yesterday I looked at the greatest hurling team it has been my good fortune to see in a lifetime in the course of which I saw nearly all the great players of the game. We may not have the good fortune to see the likes of this magnificent Limerick team again. They were superb."

"An t-Iomanaidhe," writing in the "Kilkenny People," said: "The battle is lost and won. The All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final of 1936, forecast by common consent the greatest final in Gaelic history, is over. Rising to inspired heights, Shannonside brawn, muscle and physique flung itself into the fray with reckless abandon, a do or die effort that will live for all time in Gaelic history. The champions fell and the challengers went on to score the finest victory which has ever graced the Shannon's banks."

These all time groats of Limerick hurling lined out again last week—not on the green sward of Croke Park, but around the festive board, to welcome back to Limerick one of their number—full-back Tommy McCarthy, home for a short holiday, after over twenty years in exile.

Tommy's homecoming—a joyous event for all his former colleagues and his hosts of Gaelic admirers—was made unforgettable by the happy thought that prompted the get-together of the old timers to honour the notable occasion.

This was no cold, official reception. Far from it! Just a tribute from the men of 1936 and the years surrounding it to one of their very own. Organised by a trio of the great men of the halcyon days—Mick Mackey, Mick Kennedy and Ned Cregan, how it reflected the spirit of the entire team was demonstrated when one by one the great hurlers of that period responded to the call.

The grand Limerick team of all the talents—"the greatest hurling combination of all time"—had one remarkable attribute: they turned out for every engagement, big or small, championship, league or tournament, with the same admirable spirit, and if Limerick was billed to play a match—it mattered

not the trophy or the object—the full fifteen turned up for the fixture in all their glory and gave everything they had, to become one of the most popular teams in the land, from a spectator viewpoint.

That grand spirit was again in evidence at the Shannon Arms Hotel last Thursday night week. Lined up to greet their old comrades were those gallant hurlers—still fine specimens of Gaelic manhood despite the passage of quarter of a century—Tom Shinney (Fedamore), Ned Cregan (Newcastle West), Paddy Carroll (Effin), Mick Kennedy (Young Iceana), Micky Cross (Claughaun), Paddy Clohosey (Fedamore), Maurice Power (Old Pallas), Timmy Ryan (Ahane), Mick Ryan (Murroe), John Mackey (Ahane), Mick Mackey (Ahane), Jimmy Close (Ahane), Jacky O'Connell (Croom), Paddy McMahon (Kildimo), Davy Clohosey (Fedamore), Micky Fitzgibbon (Young Ireland), Pat Ryan (Murroe), Tommy Cooke (Knockaney), Micky Condon (Fedamore) and Mick Hickey (Ahane). Could they be induced to don the old colours again, one could hardly doubt but they would give an excellent account of themselves.

Along with the actual players we had a grand galaxy of figures closely associated with the team all through their years of greatness.

I have already said it was an unforgettable occasion—it was one, too, of deep emotion, and I saw many a tear unashamably wiped away as old friends gripped hands again, and old events were recalled with a relish that was unmistakable.

I heard Paddy Clohessy discuss with Very Rev. D. Rea, P.P. the rigourish of college hurling in the old days, and some memorable clashes between "Christians" and "Munchins" were the subject of a bit of lively banter.

Micky Cross confessed he was "at least ten years younger after this night of unalloyed joy," and the actions by which he illustrated his musical contribution to the evening's enjoyment demonstrated plainly enough that Micky retains much of the fine swing of his hurling days.

The Claughaun man was not by any means the only one of the old teams to render a good song. Timmy and Mick Ryan, Mick Kennedy, Paddy Clohessy, Paddy McMahon, Paddy Carroll, all contributed to this part of the programme, very capably compered by one of the great hurlers of a later period, Dermot Kelly, whose own rendering of "Dromcollogher" was a real gem. We had a stirring recitation from Very Rev. E. Canon Punch, P.P.; songs from Very Rev. D. Rea, P.P.; Rev. G. McNamee, Joe Duggan, Sean Guilteneane and a number of lady guests, to round off a memorable night.

The green and white hurling colours of Limerick draped the tables at the dinner, and some of the fine cups won by the team during the years from 1932 to 1938 were on display.

The memorable events and great clubs of the period were commemorated in the menu, which aroused much favourable comment. It is worth studying—Jubilee Fruit Cake, Young Ireland Vegetable Soup, Consomme St. Patrick, Mayonnaise of Croom Salmon, Roast Ahane Chicken, Bread Sauce, Killinane, Baked Claughaun Ham, Emerald Green Peas and White Collars of Cauliflower, Leaguers Roast and Champions Creame, Sweet Fedamore Trifle, Newcastle Fruit Salad, New York Coffee, Cappamore Cheese and Feenagh Biscuits.

Four toasts were honoured—"Eire," proposed by Ned Cregan, who presided at the dinner; "The G.A.A.," proposed by Very Rev. E. Canon Punch, and responded to by Jacky O'Connell; "The Limerick Team," proposed by Tim Humphries, the reply coming from Mick Mackey, and "Our Guests," introduced by Timmy Ryan and answered by Tom McCarthy.

The Kilfinane man was deeply moved and when he rose to reply to this final motion he was overcome with emotion. He said, simply: "The memory of this night will live with me forever. Words cannot come to adequately express my gratitude. A thousand thanks to all of you."

From all quarters they rallied to this most enjoyable function—Dave Clohosey crossed the water to attend; Maurice Power and his charming wife drove the long journey from Trim; the others were nearer home, but all gave earnest of their desire to honour one who had come back—the hero of many a great hurling encounter—Tommy McCarthy of Kilfinane, who, too, like many of the other players present, had his good wife on this occasion to add colour and charm to what was certainly one of the most colourful occasions in the long history of Limerick Gaeldom.

In relating the story of Tommy McCarthy's hurling prowess, I hope to give, in succeeding issues, some memories of the great Limerick team that made hurling history for Shannonside in the great days.

Tommy McCarthy Of Kilfinane

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

SHORTLY after the formation of the G.A.A., the Gaels of Kilfinane formed a hurling club. So numerous were the applications for membership, the promoters were forced to hold a series of trial matches from which to select their twenty-one best men for the first team. The players chosen were: John Downes, who was appointed Captain; Dan Downes, Mick Downes, Tom Wallace, Tom Linnane, John Roche, Bryan Ryan, Patrick Pigott, Jerry Coomey, Michael Brazill, Patrick Connery, F. Dunworth, M. O'Shaughnessy, John McDonald, Denis Carey, Dan Shanahan, J. Ahern, Jack Sullivan, Thomas Riordan, William Quinn and Patrick Leahy.

To the brothers Downes may be given the honour of the organisation and they were ably assisted by the brothers Michael and Tom Finn—father and uncle, respectively, of the two All-Ireland players, Mick and Jack Finn. Patrick Thornhill, a well-known merchant in the town, gave substantial financial aid, as in later years did Thomas P. McCarthy, father of the subject of our sketch, Tommy McCarthy. The first officers of the club were Michael Carey, President, and Patrick McCarthy, who combined the posts of Treasurer and Secretary.

A monster tournament inaugurated the birth of hurling, with the meeting of Ballyhea and Stakers in the Course Field. The first match played by the "Emmets," the name by which the Kilfinane team was known, was against Gormanstown, from which they came out successful. During the following two years they played several games and gained three cups, winning at Ballyorgan, Bulgaden and Elton. In addition, they won a fine set of medals at Ballylanders, playing semi-final and final on the same day.

These lads trained earnestly and, in addition to some fine bouts of hurling, they indulged in a variety of athletic events each evening, the principal exponents including Dan Shanahan, Jack and Mick Connery, Denis Carey and a host of others, who helped to emblazon the name of Kilfinane on the front page of Ireland's athletic story.

A signal honour was conferred on the parish in 1888 when four members were selected by the G.A.A. for the giant undertaking of the infant Association—the athletic and hurling "invasion" of America, an event that spread Irish athletic influence across the Atlantic. The Kilfinane men on that courageous venture were Dan Shanahan, Jack McCarthy and the brothers Mick and Jack Connery.

The "Parnell Split" almost wrecked the G.A.A., but the youthful Association weathered the storm and played a leading part a short time later in healing the differences; as it did again on a later date, following the disastrous Civil War of 1922.

In common with most clubs, the Kilfinane team disbanded following the County Final of 1890, which they lost on a re-play to South Liberties. Four years later the club was revived and Kilfinane commenced building the team that won the great All-Ireland double of Championship and Croke Cup in 1897.

In January, 1896, Kilfinane figured in a memorable game at Charleville with Ballyhea, who were Cork County Champions at the period, and the Limerick lads lost by a solitary point. From that evening until July, 1902, over six years later, they enjoyed an unbeaten record—a remarkable achievement!

Recalling that period some time ago, a veteran Kilfinane Gael said it was all the more wonderful because of the difficulties the players experienced in finding a field to train. "I saw the players hunted from field to field and actually saw them practice on the mountain," he said. "I remember another Sunday," he continued, "we went into the Parish Priest's field. In due time he came along in his four-wheeler and ordered us to clear out. The boys were stripped for a match at the time and only went to the other end of the field. His reverence had his field glasses up in order to discover who was there and finally he opened the gate and, driving in, picked up a coat and boots and drove off. They were returned that night and he was soon one of the best followers the team had, being always ready with a subscription to keep the game going."

The officers of the club during this record-breaking spell were: James Downes, President; T. Tobin and J. Reidy, Vice-Presidents; T. McCarthy, Treasurer, with M. Flynn and J. Tobin the Secretaries. The team won eleven sets of medals, including the All-Ireland and Munster Championship, the Croke Cup and two County Championships. Tommy Brazill, one of the victorious All-Ireland men, was

only eighteen years when he figured in the All-Ireland final. His father, Michael, was a member of Kilfinane's first hurling team, and both father and son played together in many great games.

Thomas P. McCarthy effected a complete re-organisation of the Kilfinane Club in 1905 and William Drake became Secretary, a position he held for ten years, when Leo O'Shaughnessy took over. It was under the guidance of the latter that our subject was first introduced to Kilfinane hurling.

1907 was a most successful year for the Kilfinane Club, during which they won the Doneraile Tournament final, an unforgettable game against Cork Sarsfields in the Fermoy Cup decider and a set of seventeen bicycles at Nenagh, defeating the Dublin Commercialists to take this fine trophy.

The same year, Tommy McCarthy was born, and when we encounter the next great Kilfinane glory spell the great old worker for Kilfinane hurling, Thomas P. McCarthy, had the great pleasure of seeing his own son playing a leading part in what was, unfortunately, the last outstanding period in the history of senior hurling in its once great stronghold.

In seven years they played sixty-three games and had some notable successes, including a set of hurleys won at Kildorrery; the Kilfinane Feis medals, secured against Kilmallock; recording victories over noted clubs, Redmonds (Cork), Shanballymore, Mallow, Newcastle West, Rathkeale, Buttevant, Fedamore, Ballyhea, Sarsfields, Bruree, Cloughaun, Hospital, Elton, Bruff, Cappamore, Charleville, Ballyorgan, Ardpatrick, Tipperary and Murroe.

There were no minor competitions in Tommy's young days, and he took his place with the men whilst still a lad of tender years. He was growing to manhood around the period when Mick Tobin erected the fine ballcourt down by the old mill, and Tommy soon became an ardent devotee of this grand game.

I was a regular visitor to Kilfinane in those exciting days, and remember the huge crowd that gathered there for the great Munster decider, in which the peerless Johnny Bowles had a terrific tussle with Gus Moriarty of Mallow. I met Tommy for the first time that hectic evening, and was to enjoy his company at handball gatherings for several seasons.

He was a first-class handballer—one of the best Kilfinane produced—and I remember a notable occasion, when partnered by Willie Harris, I think, he figured in a stirring tussle with Johnny Bowles and Jimmy Kirby—both holders of Munster Senior Championship medals at the time.

I remember the visit of a strong Kilfinane side to Hospital another day, and a great game between Tommy McCarthy and Willie Hannon against Stephen Gleeson and Tommy Shinney of Fedamore, which the latter won, 21-19, 12-21, 21-3. Tommy Meaney of Bruff was the referee, and the competition was in senior doubles-hard ball. Other Kilfinane lads who played in Hospital that evening were P. Callaghan, P. Ryan and P. O'Sullivan; with J. Fitzgerald one of the referees.

Two great Limerick hurlers of after years—Tommy McCarthy and Paddy Clohosey, were in opposition at Fedamore Ballcourt in late February, 1927, in a County Limerick Singles Soft Ball Championship tie, which the Kilfinane lads won, 21-18, 21-16, 21-15, 21-17. Bobby O'Sullivan, a great Kilfinane enthusiast of the period, refereed the second game at the same venue, in which Michael Real of Hospital beat Tommy Shinney of Fedamore.

Tommy's strongest bid for handball fame was in the junior doubles Hard Ball Championship of 1926, in which himself and Willie Hannon were runners-up to one of the best pair even to win the County crown—the present revered parish priest of Rathkeale—Very Rev. W. J. Canon Carroll, who has done trojan work for handball all down the years, and Danny Kelly of Ballingarry.

The day Tommy really crashed the hurling headlines for the first time was July 25th, 1926, when he played a stirring game for the Kilfinane team, beaten by what is generally rated the greatest team Cloughaun ever put on the field. The City lads were regarded by many as lucky winners that day, the scoreboard reading in their favour being, 4-3 to 3-2, after a game fit to rank with the epics of hurling. Tommy played on the great Joe ("Twager") O'Grady, then in his glorious heyday, on that occasion, and so well did he perform, that his display earned for him the distinction of donning the County jersey for the first time.