

THE Kilfinny in which Mick Neville grew up as a youth was a great stronghold of hurling with a tradition dating back to the early days of the Gaelic Athletic Association. The Kilfinny Hurling Club had been in the front rank right through the formative years of the new organisation, and local history tells of some strenuous tussles for the Championship against great teams from Ballingarry, Castleconnell, Young Ireland, South Liberties and other well-known sides that flourished then. During those hectic years, too, the district had the honour of a number of their players being selected on the county team, and the deeds of David Ahern, Edward Hartigan, Michael Kelly, J. Hickey and J. Morrissey are still recalled when some of the exciting games of the period, in which Limerick figured, are under discussion. In the annals of Kilfinny hurling reference is also found to the outstanding achievements of men like the Shanahan brothers, Michael O'Brien and Edward O'Reilly.

That was the background to Mick Neville's hurling career—the tradition and the glory that helped to develop the young mind to an appreciation of the worth of the native game.

Although Mick went to Dublin whilst still very young, he carried with him the love of the hurling, and after a short time there he found his way into the ranks of what was even then a great club, the far-famed Faughs, which has made such Gaelic history down along the years in Metropolitan, Leinster and All-Ireland arenas.

FINE BODY OF LADS.

Mostly comprised of grocers' assistants, the Faughs were a fine body of lads, enthusiasts all, who devoted what little spare time they had in those days of long hours and little recreation to training for the games that had to be played at hours to suit their convenience.

Mick immediately got his place on the Faughs junior team, although then only fifteen years old, and, two seasons later, was out in Dublin colours in the Leinster Junior Championship, being selected by the County title-holders, Rathmines, for his first inter-county appearance.

That Metropolitan team went to the Leinster final, in which they drew with Kilkenny, only to lose to the Noreiders in the re-play. Some prominent players who figured with Mick in that campaign included P. Kennedy, brother of the famous Sean of Wexford fame, and Gerry Boland, now Minister of Justice, whose late father and brother, Harry, both held the position of Chairman of the Dublin County Board, G.A.A.

FIRST SENIOR SUBSTITUTE AT SIXTEEN.

The Faughs were quick also to recognise the Kilfinny lad's hurling capabilities and, at sixteen, he was first substitute on their senior team which won the Dublin Senior Hurling Championship. Players, however, did not retire as readily then as they do now, and one had to be very seriously injured before leaving the pitch, with the result that Mick had no game in the 1910 Senior Championship series but got his medal nevertheless.

He was on the first fifteen the next year and they again won the premier title of Liffeside, emphasising their superiority by taking also the Senior Hurling League title. Five further seasons—1914, 1915, 1920, 1921 and 1922—he helped Faughs to success in the Metropolitan Championship, besides capturing the Senior League laurels in eight different seasons.

His first senior inter-county game was against an American touring team who played Dublin towards the end of 1911, I think. By 1913 he had become an automatic selection on all Liffeside senior strings, and from then until he returned to his native Limerick in 1922 the full forward position could be considered the exclusive preserve of Mick Neville.

HELPED TO WIN FOUR LEINSTER TITLES.

With Dublin he won four Leinster titles—1917, 1919, 1920 and 1921; and they won the All-Ireland titles in 1917 and 1920. Team mates in the winning of the Blue Ribands included fellow Limerickmen Dr. John Ryan and Martin Hayes; and other well-known hurlers in Dr. Tommy Daly, Sean Hyde, Frank Burke, Bob Mockler, Tommy Moore, Ned Tobin, Bob Doherty, "Builder" Walsh and John Joe Callanan.

The Liffesiders were at the top of their hurling power during those years and played many matches all over the country, winning several tournaments, the most important of which were the Croke Cup in 1916 and the National Aid Tournament in 1918.

Mick was full forward on the Dublin team that lost to his native Limerick in the 1921 All-Ireland final. Two years later, he helped Limerick to victory—in his favourite full forward berth—in the 1923 Munster Championship and figured on the Shannonside fifteen that lost to Galway in the All-Ireland final of that season. With Limerick he also won Thomond Feis honours, and helped in tournament successes achieved by the green and white from 1923 to 1925.

CLASHED AGAINST GREAT TEAMS.

The Kilfinny hurling star clashed against all the grand teams of the Metropolitan arena, including some long since only happy memories. Likewise, too, more than a few of the hurlers that graced many a sward then have crossed the Great

Mick often re-visits Liffeside to renew old friendships and recall some of the triumphs of former days. Accompanying him on one such Easter visit, I found that he came across many things that sent his thoughts back at both a na-smainte—the road of reflection—to the days of his youth and to scenes and events long past and almost forgotten.

That night we were in the hospitable home of another grand hurler, Johnny Ryan—made famous by a remark of a noted Dubliner following a great "All Ireland"—"That championship was won by Johnny Ryan and fourteen Faughs men."

But Johnny was missing from the Collegians selection that secured the 1917 title, an absence that for long was a source of regret by the big open-hearted Gael.

The discussion turned to the preparation for the great games in which that grand Dublin side participated during glorious and inspiring days in Irish history.

EMPLOYERS' ATTITUDE.

Metropolitan employers, even in the licensed grocery trade which benefits considerably from the influx of visitors for the big games, took no interest in Gaelic matches and it was consequently impossible for a member of their staffs to get any time off for training.

In his early years in Dublin, Mick found that any of the players could not take their hurleys or togs into their place of employment and each club had to employ a bag man who would take out all this equipment for the various participants to the Park—the players contributing a few pence every Sunday to pay for this service.

Mick found it difficult to get away for inter-county matches on Sundays, and on more than one occasion the Chairman and Secretary of the County Board had to intercede in order to get him released for an important engagement. On another occasion he returned to business after playing a hard championship game in Croke Park. He had a patch of sticking plaster over one eye and when the boss saw it, he ordered him out from behind the counter.

In view of this attitude it will be understood how difficult it was to get any worth-while training done, particularly as their spare time was oftentimes curtailed to short intervals on Sundays.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF TRAINING.

The Games of the Gael were, as we have seen, frowned on in high places, and in these days of specialised training it is a tonic to learn of the enthusiasm and earnestness that induced Mick Neville and three of his comrades, when facing a big game, to make arrangements with the U.C.D. authorities for the use of their grounds at Terenure.

Rushing away immediately after the shops closed they usually caught the ten-past-ten tram Terenurewards, and then followed 90 minutes hard training, capped by a four-miles walk home about midnight, as all the trams were off the streets by then, and all that after a hard day's work.

Mick actually trained in Trinity College for one All-Ireland final. The Sunday fare was varied with a fifteen mile walk after six p.m. through the Phoenix Park to Ash-town, and back the road.

The men that controlled Dublin Gaelic affairs then, as always, were patriots and Gaels, and on the Liffeside fifteen that travelled to Thurles on that fateful Easter Sunday of 1916 there were some significant gaps, including the late Harry Boland, a Gael to his finger tips, who was detained in the capital on urgent work in connection with the insurrection then imminent. And Willie Connolly, one of the first to fall in that gallant bid against the military might of England, had played the previous Sunday in a Dublin County Championship tie.

PEARSE AND CON COLBERT.

Patrick H. Pearse himself was Vice-Chairman of the Leinster Colleges Council of the G.A.A., whilst another victim of British savagry after the fight was the young Athea Gael—Con Colbert, who has given his name to a prominent Metropolitan club.

All Mick's interest was centered in hurling, for which he always had a great love. Have what you like, but hurling to the minds of hundreds of thousands is the grandest game of them all as a fast moving spectacle of skill and manly endeavour.

Mick Neville, great hurler that he was, feels that there is too much stopping and lifting and trying solos in present-day play. This means slowing up the play, instead of fast, strong ground hurling and doubling on the balls which can be so effective when practised by those who have made themselves expert. This, he holds, is particularly desirable from the half-forwards, who could contribute very appreciably to the success of their team by fast ground work and combination which, he says, is sadly lacking nowadays among the forwards, each looking, altogether too much, for their own score.

OTHER GREAT HURLERS.

I cannot leave Mick Neville's spell with the Liffeside boys without recalling some of the grand hurlers with or against whom he oft lined up. He rates the late Jack Rochford, of Kilkenny, as one of the cleverest full backs he met and holds, too, in high regard the great defensive work of Conny Sheehan, of Cork Redmonds, and Sean Kennedy, of Wexford. We

mates in the winning of the two blue ribands with Dublin, so here are some of the others: Paddy Kennefick, Harry Boland, Jim Cleary, Brendan Considine, Joe Phelan, Jim Clune (Dublin); Sim Walton, Dick Grace, Dan Kennedy, Matt Gargan, John Roberts, Matty Power (Kilkenny); the Finlays and Bob O'Keefe (Laois); P. Mackey, Bob Lambert, Tom Mernagh (Wexford); Johnny Leahy, Willie Dwyer, Paddy Leahy, Hugh Shelley, Stephen Hackett, J. O'Meara, Joe Fitzpatrick (Tipperary); Tim Nagle, Sean Og Murphy, Eudie Coughlan, Mick Murphy, "Marie" O'Connell, "Sailor" Grey and "Danix" Ring (Cork).

HIS LAST ALL-IRELAND LINE-OUT.

Mick's last All-Ireland line-out was with his native Limerick. The opposition was Galway, who won their only hurling blue riband that memorable evening at Croke Park. The other members of the Garryowen fifteen on that occasion will be remembered by the old timers—Paddy McInerney (captain), Jack Hanley (goal), poor Dave Murnane and "Twager" O'Grady (God rest the pair of them!); Willie Hough, Denny Lanigan, Bill Gleeson, Jimmy Humphries, John Joe Kinnane, Jack Keane, Tom McGrath, Micky Cross, Bob McConkey and Micky Fitzgibbon.

Mere mention of the names is sufficient to loose a flood of memories of great games and men and the grand, grand days that are gone forever.

Returning to his native Kilfinny, where he established a successful business, Mick did valuable organising work reviving the local club, which had been out of existence for many years, and figured in not a few great tussles with the home side in hectic championship duels.

Their first tie for senior honours was in 1923 against a much-fancied Ballingarry team, whom they defeated, and also Templeglantine, to reach the Western final against Newcastle West. This was a great encounter, which Newcastle West won in the closing minutes by the narrowest of margins. The Kilfinny team on that occasion was drawn from:—M. O'Brien (captain), P. O'Brien, M. Naughton, E. Reilly, J. Byrnes, J. Guilteneane, R. Shine, J. Shine, M. Neville, D. Bourke, J. Benson, M. Morrissey, J. Doyle, B. O'Farrell, T. Aherne, T. Shanahan, J. Shanahan and M. Shanahan.

TEAM AGAIN IN WESTERN FINAL.

Strengthened by the inclusion of T. Neville, J. Neville and J. O'Farrell the team in 1924, by victories over Broadford and Knockaderry, again entered the West Limerick final—their opponents this time being Croom, who were lucky to escape with level scoring, but won on the re-play. Kilfinny made amends for this defeat by completely outclassing Croom (then county champions) in the Granagh Tournament final a short time later. 1925 and 1926 saw Kilfinny again figuring in the Western final, to fail on each occasion by a narrow margin.

The year following saw Newcastle West an insurmountable obstacle, but in 1929 Kilfinny, in a famous encounter at Adare, succeeded in disposing of the 1928 champions of the West, Rathkeale, only to fail after a drawn game against Kilmeeedy. This was the last great Kilfinny bid for the Western honours so long denied them; they were decidedly unlucky in not capturing the coveted title on many occasions. They are a sporting lot, however, and the victory that is bound to come may be their lot this year when some of the prominent players of the other end of the parish, Croagh, have thrown in their lot for a great bid for the success that will be a popular one, indeed, when it comes.

A SUCCESSFUL REFEREE.

When his hurling days were over, Mick Neville proved a successful referee, and handled, in 1927, perhaps three of the greatest and most keenly fought ties in the history of the premier Limerick title. I refer to the marathon struggle between Fedamore and Young Irelands—won by the former after three hours desperate hurling—with only a solitary point separating the teams—and a split second more would have nullified that, for Young Irelands were sailing the equaliser between the uprights the third day when the long whistle beat as gallant a blue and gold side as ever fought a championship encounter. The city lads came back better than ever the next season and reaped the reward so narrowly denied them in that year of Limerick hurling glory—1927.

HECTIC DAYS.

They were hectic hurling days surely—amassing memories by Maigues that will be recounted and recalled with pride by many a fireside and crossroads whilst that generation of Gaeldom thrives.

For a score of years Mick Neville was Chancellor of the West Limerick G.A.A. Exchequer, and no more popular or competent Gael ever held that post. Also a member of the County Selection, Appeals and Finance Committees for almost quarter of a century, few Gaels have given such service to the cause. Then songs of the famed Faughs and Kilfinny Gael appeared on the horizon and but for a higher calling it is certain they would have carved for themselves hurling careers as varied and attractive as their father did in caman days long since no more.

No. 77—Willie Ryan of Canna-