

Paddy O'Donoghue Of Young Ireland And London

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

HALF a century actively engaged on work for the G.A.A. is the record of Limerick born Paddy O'Donoghue, who was one of the leading men behind the scenes in the great triumph of the London G.A.A. at Wembley last Whit.

Paddy has seen the G.A.A. in England grow from a very tiny group of enthusiasts to the powerful organisation of to-day, owning its own playing pitches, fine pavilions and now about to embark on the project of a central G.A.A. headquarters in the heart of London—a meeting place where Gaels can foregather when playing field activities are not possible.

The start of G.A.A. activities in London dates back to the closing years of the last century, and soon some powerful sides came into existence mainly as a result of a big influx of Irish workers recruited for large scale road improvement projects in the English capital.

The Irish brought their games and their customs with them across the seas, and this applied to England as much as to the other countries where our exiles are to be located.

FIRST FLUSH OF GAELIC REVIVAL.

The men who crossed to London from 1895 onwards were caught in the first flush of the Gaelic revival, later to be almost quenched in the bitterness and despair of the Parnell Split. They were all big, powerful figures who were assured of plenty of work in the many road reconstruction schemes of the period.

By the year 1897 the influx of Irish hurlers and footballers had reached such dimensions that the formation of several clubs was possible. The first great rallying cry to the general body of London Irish went out, however, a year earlier—on Easter Monday, 1896, to be exact—and Limerick Gaels played a big part in its organisation.

The venue for the great hosting was Stamford Bridge, and contests in hurling, football and athletics attracted the first worthwhile come-together ever organised of the Irish in London and the surrounding areas.

FOOTBALL AND HURLING.

In football an Irish selection beat the pick of the London exiles 3-15 to 0-3. Larry Roche, a member of the Limerick team that won the All-Ireland title later that season, was included on the Irish football side.

The London hurlers were not able to muster a team at the period, so picked teams from Leinster and Munster made the trip to play the first of the inter-provincial contests. A great tussle it proved, which Munster won, 5-7 to 2-8. Six Limerickmen were on that victorious side: R. A. Gleeson (goal) and W. O'Dwyer of St. Michael's; P. Lee of Cappamore, and a Kilmallock trio—the great athlete, John Flanagan; T. Campion and D. Murphy.

SPORTS MEETING.

In the sports meeting which followed, John Flanagan broke two world's records, at throwing the 16 lb. hammer, with unlimited run and follow, 156 ft. 4 ins., and from the 9 ft. circle, 147 feet. He was also second to T. F. Kiely in the running long jump at 19 ft. 6 ins.

The enthusiasm this gathering evoked resulted in the formation of a London County Board and the organisation of County Championships, which created considerable interest at the time, marking the first extension of the G.A.A. beyond the seas, if we except the slight flutter caused by the venturesome "invasion" of America nine years earlier, which was written off as a failure by many but which was to bring forth plenty of fruit in after years.

FIRST LONDON COUNTY TITLES.

The first London County titles in hurling and football were organised in 1897 and the Ireland United team brought off a great double, which were, however, to prove their only successes in either grade.

The Emmets in hurling and the Hibernians in football brought off doubles in 1898 and 1899, by which period the games had got so strong in London that they sought and secured entry to the All-Ireland senior hurling and football title fights.

Strangely enough, it was in hurling the exiles mainly made their mark. In the five years they participated in the All-Ireland Senior Football Championship the best effort from a London side was made by the Hibernians in the 1903 final, in which they were beaten by the Tralee Mitchels of Kerry, 0-11 to 0-3, to give the "Kingdom" the first of their eighteen titles. Kerry were after playing Kildare three times before qualifying for the play-off with London—three matches which really made Gaelic football.

DESPERATE HARD LUCK.

The London lads were in desperate hard luck not to have captured the All-Ireland Senior Hurling title at the first effort. In one of the greatest finals ever staged at Croke Park—then Jones's Road—they were leading Tipperary six points to five with only two minutes play remaining. The crowd were wildly excited as every Tipperary attack broke before the rock-like defence of a great exile side, in which Kilfinane's Sean, Og Hanley played a heroic part.

Tipperary had a last chance when a London back who had hurled magnificently all through accidentally touched the ball on the ground right in front of his goal. The entire Tipperary team moved down to the attack, and as the free was taken a concerted rush carried everything before it to the net for the goal which deprived the exiles of a history-making event.

STRONGER THAN EVER THE NEXT YEAR.

The London Irish returned stronger than ever the following year and left no doubt anywhere concerning their superiority when they beat Cork 1-5 to 0-4 in another unforgettable final.

The hurlers made their last senior All-Ireland appearance in 1903, and although the footballers were again at Jones's Road on October 1st, 1909, to play Dublin Geraldines for the 1908 title, the decline had set in and a drop in the influx of Irish emigrants resulted in many clubs going out of existence.

Still the organisation continued strong in the English Metropolis, and with the uprise of the Gaelic League and the development of the Home Rule movement, G.A.A. clubs became the centre of Irish activities, attracting many figures later prominent in cultural and political fields to their ranks.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR.

The first great World War brought many activities to a standstill and sports fixtures were amongst the first affected. The G.A.A., however, battled on, and despite a further big decline in the number of clubs the Championship competitions for 1914 and 1915 were fought to a conclusion.

Some of the best workers in London G.A.A. ranks crossed to Ireland to participate in the Insurrection of 1916, and their loss eventually resulted in the close down of all activity.

When other sports resumed in 1919, the War of Independence was just getting into its stride in Ireland, and with many members of the G.A.A. on both sides of the Irish Channel very much implicated there was no question of the resumption of hurling and football in England.

PART PLAYED BY PADDY O'DONOGHUE.

It was into such a picture Paddy O'Donoghue stepped in 1922, to play from the commencement a leading part in the revival of Irish games in London and Britain generally. His earlier career in Limerick Gaelic circles and his arrival in London will be amongst the matters dealt with in next week's article in this series.

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EXACTLY half a century ago, Paddy O'Donoghue, at the age of eighteen, opened his account with the Gaelic Athletic Association, when he joined the Limerick Young Ireland Club, then a powerful force in Shannonside hurling.

From the commencement Paddy threw himself heart and soul into every aspect of club work, and the shrewd Young Ireland mentors soon came to appreciate his organising abilities, for he was representing the Club on the County Board almost as soon as he donned the familiar colours to do battle for Young Ireland in the Junior Hurling Championship, then in its infancy, for the G.A.A. only had one grade — the senior — for the first score years of its existence.

ST. MICHAEL'S TEMPERANCE.

As a member of St. Michael's Temperance Society, Paddy felt it keenly that this famed organisation which figured so gloriously in the early days of the G.A.A., no longer boasted the great hurling and football clubs which left such an impress on the Limerick championship records of the 'eighties. He made strenuous efforts to revive the old spirit and reorganise the teams on the lines of the glory ones of the past.

His efforts met with a certain share of success and on a memorable occasion at the Fair Green a grand total of sixty-eight players turned up from the Temperance Society in response to his call. They played one of the strangest hurling matches of modern times—a thirty-four aside game—but the enthusiasm was not of the lasting type and St. Michael's faded out of the Gaelic picture after an all too brief re-appearance.

DIFFICULT DAYS.

The early days of Paddy's G.A.A. membership were difficult ones for an Ireland still smarting under the effects of the Parnell Split, and it is his opinion that the G.A.A. and to the Christian Brothers must go much of the credit for having kept nationality alive during a period when many other influences were at work tending in the reverse direction.

Paddy continued his association with Limerick G.A.A. affairs through a stirring period. He recalls the stirring games which won for Shannonside the Munster titles of 1910 and 1911, and can still feel the sense of bitter disappointment caused by the unsatisfactory outcome of the blue riband decider of 1910, which Wexford won by a solitary point in a game in which some highly controversial scores were concerned. Still less satisfactory was the following year's All-Ireland final, in which Kilkenny were awarded a bloodless victory, after Limerick refused to play a re-fixed game anywhere except at the original venue, Cork Athletic Grounds.

DERIVED GREAT SATISFACTION.

In consequence of these setbacks, it was only natural that Paddy should have derived great satisfaction out of the first game in which he saw Limerick defeat a Leinster county—and the famed Noresiders at that.

Kilkenny were at the height of their glory when Limerick met them at Jones's Road in the Final for the Cardinal's medals. Paddy's memories of that great occasion are still vivid. Father Jack O'Donnell, who was a member of the Limerick team that day, left Paddy his boots and a bottle of lemonade as the latter took up his position on the then sideline, and on which there were no seats at the time.

The lemonade went up in the air and down on top of a spectator when Limerick scored their sec-

ond goal, and so excited did Paddy become afterwards that Father Jack had to walk to his hotel in his bare feet.

Paddy was representing St. Michael's on the County Board on the occasion of the County Convention at which Tom Hayes was elected County Secretary, and it was his vote and that of a colleague which proved the decisive ones in securing the position for the famed Young Ireland hurler, who is now one of the few surviving members of the County Board of that period.

FAMOUS FIGURES.

It was like reciting the litany of the famous figures of the G.A.A. arena to hear Paddy recall the men he was associated with in field and forum during the fourteen eventful years until he left for London in 1922. They included such well known names as Mick Bourke, P. J. Hayes, John Kelly, Johnny Sweeney, Charlie Holland, Paddy Meaney, "Dobber" Reilly, Con Fitzgerald, Jack Murphy, Jim Riordan, Jim Ryan, Andy Kelly, Jim Fitzgerald, John Malone, Jim Gleeson, and a host of others.

All of them have passed away, and only their memory remains, reminding those who remember them of the duty of acquainting a younger generation of Gaels of the debt they owe the old workers, who had to overcome obstacles unknown to-day in order to keep the Gaelic flag flying.

EARLY DAYS REMEMBERED.

Paddy remembers his early hurling days in Limerick vividly. He recalls playing at the old Corkanree grounds, redolent memories of the old Limerick Commercials and St. Michael's—a venue that played host to some great Gaelic teams in the fullsome years of the "twenty-one asides."

He remembers the opposition of the many to the spread of the games of the Gael, and can tell of times when one would be almost afraid to be seen with a hurley in the streets of their native Limerick.

A day came later when the carrying of the hurley was prohibited, when one invited a spell in a British prison for being seen with a caman, but that law had a very different effect from that intended by its makers. Suffice to say that the hurley was no longer hidden but was carried proudly as part of a nation's defiance of alien aggression.

MARKETS FIELD.

When Corkanree passed from the scene as a sports arena, Paddy was regularly to be seen at the Markets Field, which was the training headquarters of the Young Ireland Club for many years. The venue for Rugby on Saturdays, hurling on Sundays, the centre for some of the best athletic meetings of the halcyon days, as well as a popular site for carnivals and circuses, the Markets Field pitch was a much used one, which stood up remarkably well to the many calls on it.

How often the goalposts were moved is difficult to appreciate now. Half a dozen times or more in a week oftentimes, as the moods of hurling or rugby demanded—for the same pair of uprights served both games, being often used for a hectic Munster Rugby Cup-tie and a nerve shattering Munster Hurling Championship between the age old rivals, Cork and Tipperary, inside a twenty-four hours period.

PITCH SHARED.

There were other occasions when Young Ireland and Garryowen found themselves forced to share the pitch when each had an important game in the offing and had to get in their training, particularly in the period when the spell between the finish of work

and the fall of night left only a short time for practice.

Training was often difficult in those days but to the credit of the lads of the time it was wholehearted and thorough. Paddy has particularly happy memories of the old days at the Markets Field—of the many training sessions with Young Ireland, the congenial company of such fine sports as Denny Lanigan, Bob McConkey, Tom Hayes, Mick Murphy, Paddy McInerney, John Collopy, Peter Coffey; the time spent discussing great games and players in the dressing rooms beneath the old stand; and then the many memorable matches and the fine exponents of both hurling and football to be seen regularly in action on the well worn but popular pitch.

Next week, we follow Paddy to exile, and conclude the story with an account of his great work to put the G.A.A. in Britain on a solid foundation..

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PADDY O'Donoghue left his native Limerick in that fateful year of Civil War, 1922, and although he has remained in London ever since it is a tribute to his work for our games that he is still almost as well known at Croke Park or the Limerick Gaelic Grounds as on the Gaelic playing fields of the great English metropolis.

Fintan Lalors were the big team in London when Paddy arrived there, but he joined the Brian Boru's — in memory of old Kin-cora, I suppose — a club that is now the oldest G.A.A. club in Britain. Right away the Borus recognised Paddy's worth and he became the club delegate on the London County Board.

LIFETIME OF WORK FOR G.A.A.

That early association with administrative affairs in London was to open a lifetime's work for the G.A.A. in Britain, for Paddy has filled almost every official position there. In fact, it is doubtful if any other man in Britain can boast such a wealth of experience of G.A.A. affairs in the Council Chamber.

In 1924 he filled the first of many official positions when he became Registrar of the London County Board, a position he held for three years.

A GOLDEN ERA.

He was County Board Vice-Chairman in 1936, when he agreed to take over the position of Secretary — to open a golden era for London, who crowned everything by winning both All-Ireland junior titles in 1938 — defeating Cork in London, to take hurling honours, and Leitrim at Croke Park, in football. Paddy has reason to be proud of those victories, for it was in the main his great organising work which made them possible.

He retired at the end of the 1939 season as London's Chief Executive Officer, but got little respite, for he was induced to accept the secretaryship of the Provincial Council of Britain in 1941, a position he held until he resigned in 1944, but was forced back into harness in 1946, and held there until 1951.

Paddy is still a member of the Provincial Council, as London representative, and on the County Board he retains an active interest as one of the leading members of the Finance Committee — a body which is doing giant work for our native games in England.

In the popular black and amber colours of the Brian Borus, Paddy won several London Championship and League medals and, in fact, every honour that the G.A.A. in London had to offer.

AS GOOD AS TWO MEN!

The Borus were very short of players when first he joined their ranks, and Paddy often tells of one of his earliest games in their colours, when they were unable to muster fifteen players and referees had strict instructions not to start a game unless full teams were present. On this occasion the Borus only had fourteen, but Paddy solved the problem for them by being the first man counted by the referee, and again number fifteen, as he slipped unnoticed to the other end of the line whilst the count was in progress.

STARTED THE SHAMROCKS CLUB.

Paddy won the championships of 1926 and 1929 with Brian Borus, and several League titles extending right into the middle 'thirties, when he retired from the playing fields in order to give more time to the administrative side of things.

Paddy made a remarkable comeback in 1943, when he helped Brians win another County Cham-

pionship title — an extraordinary achievement when we recall his first hurling appearance with the Limerick Young Ireland's away back in 1908.

Paddy started the Shamrocks Football Club in 1926, of which he is still Vice-Chairman, and the only founder member left. He has held some official post continually in this club since its inception. The Shamrocks won the London Senior Football League in the first year of their existence and again in 1927, 1928, 1930 and 1936. They won the championship four times—in 1928, 1931, 1932 and again last year. During the war years they had to amalgamate with the Taras, and this combination won the 1941 and 1942 Championships and Leagues.

When Paddy first arrived in London thirty-six years ago, there were only five clubs affiliated to the County Board, boasting nine teams—five football and four hurling.

Now the London County Board has eighty-seven affiliated clubs, composed of some two hundred and fifty teams, much more than many an Irish county.

REMARKABLE PROGRESS.

That is a remarkable achievement and reflects the wonderful strides made by the G.A.A. in Britain. It reflects the progress of Gaelic games and in marked degree demonstrates the part the G.A.A. is playing in keeping the exiles true to faith and fatherland.

Only recently this was brought home to me in rather striking manner. I met a friend home on holiday from Britain and remarked on a long stretch of sticking plaster over his right eye. "I got four stitches last Sunday evening following a stroke of a hurley in a London championship game," he volunteered.

My friend had never played much hurling to my knowledge in Ireland. He was educated in a Rugby playing college and remained an ardent enthusiast of that game until a professional appointment took him across the water.

He sensed my surprise, and made his position clear by adding: "I know you regard me as a Rugby devotee. That was all right at home, but it is different over here. You must be one thing or the other; I could not let the old country down, so it's hurling and Gaelic football now for me. I have not even seen a Rugby ball since I left Ireland."

Paddy O'Donoghue had a lot to do with the flourishing state of Gaelic games in London and in retrospect holds that, despite the fact that the bulk of day to day administrative work has increased through the years, the officers of to-day have not the same headaches as they were faced with in the pioneer days.

Coming from one who was up to his neck in the recent successful organisation of the great Wembley triumph this seemed strange, but Paddy was ready to back his views with plenty of facts.

"Between the years 1922 to 1930 we were forced to change our pitch every year," he said.

HAD TO FIGHT A HOSTILE PRESS.

A hostile Press was one of the toughest things they had to fight and the Association lost the Herne Hill Grounds because the newspapers misrepresented a row which occurred outside a publichouse one Sunday evening and gave the impression it happened at the grounds, which were a mile away. The papers refused to publish a correction. "It would ruin them," one newspaper proprietor said, but

his paper gave the County Board hand bills to distribute outside the churches containing a half apology.

Even on the occasion of the recent Wembley games, one paper said the following day that "thirty heads were broken." When challenged concerning this statement, they said it should have read "thirty hurleys were broken," but readers never got that correction, either.

The humble beginnings of the tours, the purchase of their own grounds and the successful organisation of the great Wembley venture will be amongst the matters dealt with in the concluding article next week.

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WITH the great triumph of Wembley so fresh in our minds it is difficult to realise the big uphill struggle to establish the Tours in the calendar of Gaelic sport in Britain.

Paddy recalls the visit of the Dublin Gaelic team during the 'twenties on a Bank Holiday when only three hundred people attended the game. The officers of the Board put up the players in their own homes, and later when Tipperary and Dublin came over for the first ever Bank Holiday inter-county game in Britain the crowd was not much bigger. The Association's finances were so low that they had to make a collection amongst the clubs to pay for the advance printing.

Paddy and his associates had faith, however, in the future and they crossed to Ireland the following Easter with what were then considered elaborate plans for a Whit Monday game. The Central Council were not enthusiastic about the project and only grudgingly agreed to allow teams travel after the London delegates had put their case very forcibly before the meeting. The period from Easter to Whit was a short one for organisation but the venture proved a great success.

The G.A.A. in Britain took a big step forward when the County Board bought the pitch at New Eltham. Only recently they capped that purchase by securing adjoining playing fields, which now provides three full sized Gaelic pitches and a magnificent pavilion. Work is now in progress on this fine property and with two pitches already in use, six games are being played there every Sunday. Shortly all three pitches will be available and nine games can be played on a Sunday afternoon. Thus for the one admission fee—the purchase of a programme costing two shillings, patrons will have their choice of nine games, and the use of the fine pavilion, where meals of tea, confectionery, bacon, egg or sandwiches are provided—this service showing a good profit to the Board since its inauguration. For the players there are six dressing rooms, with baths, for which hot and cold water are laid on.

Plans for New Eltham envisage a grounds eventually capable of accommodating fifty thousand spectators but meantime this enterprising County Board have other irons in the fire and are presently negotiating the purchase of a splendid building in Central London, containing fifteen or sixteen rooms — to be used as a G.A.A. headquarters in the English Capital, something the Association at home cannot boast.

The foundation of Limerick hurling traditions in the advancement of the caman code on English playing fields might be said to have been laid by the great Sean Og Hanley of Kilfinane, one of the most notable of the men who won for Limerick its first All-Ireland crown.

Sean Og died in London and was buried there. The decline of G.A.A. influence and power set in around the period of his passing, and for long years he lay in an unmarked grave in Kensal Rise Cemetery.

With the gradual return of the Gael to his own in Britain, Limerick men determined on paying proper tribute to the great Sean Og, and at the suggestion of another great Limerick Gaelic worker, Alderman Denis O'Dwyer, it was decided to erect a fitting monument over his grave. This

was a project into which Paddy O'Donoghue threw his fine organising abilities, and as one of the oldest Shannonside Gaels actively associated all the years with G.A.A. work it must have been a real pleasure for him to attend the recent unveiling ceremony, which made doubly memorable the great Whit week-end, highlighted by the unparalleled success of the courageous Wembley venture.

When the London County Board first announced their intention of playing the two games at Wembley on Whit Saturday there were many who doubted the wisdom of the move and feared that it would result in a big financial loss.

The guarantees which had to be given in order to secure the use of the grounds were heavy, but the County Board tackled the project with real energy and enthusiasm and launched the greatest advertising campaign ever attempted in England for a Gaelic sporting fixture.

The idea of Irish games in England's greatest stadium gripped the imagination of sport lovers, and Irishmen all over Britain prepared for the trip to the matches, which although only friendly fixtures, aroused unprecedented interest.

The organisers had to withstand a few shocks before congratulating themselves on the wonderful success achieved. The clashing of the American Tour arrangements with the plans for the Kilkenny trip was the first obstacle to be successfully surmounted but a big English transport strike was a different proposition and was well outside the capabilities of this great body of London Gaels to settle.

Although they failed to do anything about the strike they did something more surprising still. They got a bumper crowd in spite of it, and made a striking impression on everyone that attended that unforgettable programme.

Englishmen, who maybe came to see the Irish fighting, got a lesson in sportsmanship and good manners that they will never forget. Even the most biased of the English newspapers were forced to admit that it was one of the best day's sport ever offered at Wembley.

Paddy O'Donoghue was responsible for the timing, and many reports paid tribute to the split-second accuracy in this regard. Punctuality was the keynote of the entire programme, setting a headline that even the great Wembley Organisation could not improve on.

The crowd exceeded all expectations in the prevailing circumstances, and the overall picture is of a resounding triumph, which proved a big financial success and the greatest advertisement Gaelic games ever got outside Ireland.

Lord Ellibank, Vice-Chairman of Wembley Stadium was visibly impressed by what he saw and was amazed at the huge attendance. He expressed the opinion that but for the bus strike the crowd would pack the Stadium.

At the subsequent dinner to the team held in the Stadium Restaurant, Lord Ellibank paid a spontaneous tribute to the spectators and players, and said the occasion would rank as one of the greatest in the history of the Stadium. He was loud in his praises of the Artane Boys' Band, who left a deep and abiding impression on all those who were privileged to hear and see them. In inviting the Gaels back to Wembley for further hurling and football exhibitions, he promised that the Stadium authorities would do their best to extend the

pitch to provide a regulation-sized playing space.

The prestige of the G.A.A. both in Ireland and England was considerably enhanced by the success of the Wembley games, which succeeded in achieving two main objectives—the unity of our exiles under the attractive banner of our games and in proving that our players are second to none in athletic prowess, manliness and honourable conduct.

The G.A.A. clubs and their activities have been the strongest single factor in keeping our people true to faith and fatherland, and to men like Paddy O'Donoghue in great measure must go the credit for this noble work. Long may he flourish!