

No. 138—JOE ("TWAGER") O'GRADY Of Claughtaun

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

MEMORIES of a real glory spell in Claughtaun hurling history are recalled by mention of the name of Joe O'Grady—one of the most popular figures ever to don the horizontal bars of green and white.

Right from his schooldays, Joe graduated in hurling prowess to the Commercials junior side, fore-runner of the Claughtaun that won such hurling laurels in the dozen years from 1914 to 1926.

At nineteen, he figured with Commercials against Fedamore in a great drawn game for County junior honours—the city lads winning the re-play in decisive fashion—9-2 to 3-0.

Towards the close of 1913 the Claughtaun Club was re-formed and immediately jumped to the fore as a strong force in Limerick hurling.

They hit the highlights in the senior championship ties the following season, and in the semi-final opened a rivalry with another great city team of their day—Young Ireland, that was to illumine the pages of Limerick hurling story for a lengthy period.

Claughtaun beat Young Ireland 5-1 to 2-2 in that first great championship clash of the pair, whilst Castleconnell gained the verdict over Caherline, 10-3 to 2-1, so the stage was set for Claughtaun's first county final in senior hurling.

Played at the Markets Field on September 27th, 1914, the city men won easily: Claughtaun, 6-0; Castleconnell, 1-0. The game was refereed by Paddy Flaherty, of Rathkeale.

LINE OUT OF TEAMS.

"Twager" played in goal for Claughtaun on that occasion, the line out of both teams will be read with interest:

Claughtaun—Denis Maher (captain), Joe O'Grady (goal), Mick Rochford, P. Kelly, R. Browne, P. J. Daly, R. Hynes, Paddy Halvey, P. Ryan, W. Hynes, Paddy Campion, P. Penny, J. McGrath, J. O'Brien, M. Gleeson.

Castleconnell—John "Tyler" Mackey (captain), M. Rainsford (goal), P. Vaughan, E. Carroll, J. Leonard, T. Brennan, J. Keane, P. Herbert, M. Doherty, F. Rose, M. McCarthy, T. Mackey, J. Carroll, T. Joyce, M. Danaher.

The following year "Twager" was called to county colours and represented Limerick in the Munster junior championship, being goalkeeper on the side beaten by Tipperary in the semi-final, 2-1 to 1-2.

A place on the Limerick senior

team came the next year—Joe guarding the points in the Thomond Feis match against Clare, which the home lads won, 3-5 to 2-3. Other Claughtaun men in Shannonside colours that day were the late Dan Troy and Tom McGrath.

BRITISH BAN ON G.A.A. GAMES.

Following the Easter insurrection of 1916, the playing of Gaelic games was prohibited by edict of the British military forces occupying Ireland at the time. Many well-known Gaels were arrested and it was some months before normal field activities were possible once more.

The re-opening game at the Markets Field was in senior hurling, in a tournament to mark the C.B.S. centenary—Tipperary beating Limerick 5-2 to 3-3. Joe was goalkeeper for the home side, and a few Sundays later got his second County senior medal when Fedamore refused to travel to the Markets Field to play Claughtaun in the 1915 final, as they held that the venue was not a neutral one. The County Board awarded the title to Claughtaun and suspended Fedamore for twelve months.

Fedamore then joined up a rival organisation—the National Association of Gaelic Athletic Clubs—and entered the All-Ireland final of that Association, which was played at Wexford Park on December 10th, 1916, before a moderate attendance, resulting: Fedamore, 1-1; Castlebridge (Wexford), 0-1.

A GREAT GAME.

Claughtaun had a great game with Young Ireland in connection with the C.B.S. celebrations of the centenary of the Limerick schools—a draw at 3-3 all being a fitting result. The teams will be read with interest:—

Claughtaun—D. Maher (captain), J. O'Grady (goal), D. Troy, T. McGrath, T. Kelly, W. Penny, W. Hayes, M. Kelly, J. Harrington, M. Gleeson, M. Madden, W. Casey, M. Rochford, T. Humphries, W. Hayes.

Young Ireland—Tom Hayes (captain), J. Purcell (goal), W. Gleeson, P. Ryan, Bob Brown, John Ryan, Dan Ryan, P. McInerney, J. McInerney, J. Morrison, D. Lanigan, J. Moloney, J. Sheehan, M. Beville, A. Hogan.

STIRRING INCIDENTS.

A stirring incident, typical of the times, occurred at the semi-final of the 1916 County hurling championship decided at Pallas-

green and in which Claughtaun beat Bruff 4-1 to 2-0. Members of the R.I.C. (the British police force then operating in Ireland) attempted to force their way into the game without payment. For refusing to admit them, the Co. Secretary, James Ryan, was arrested. A prosecution followed. Mr. Ryan was defended by Mr. H. O'Brien Moran, solicitor, who produced at the trial confidential documents circulated amongst members of the R.I.C. The magistrates dismissed the case, but Messrs. Ryan and Moran were arrested and charged before a British Courtmartial in connection with the documents. Mr. Moran refused to disclose where he obtained these secret papers and was sentenced to six months imprisonment. Mr. Ryan got three months.

When the county final was eventually decided, Claughtaun beat Caherline, 8-3 to 2-1, with James Ryan the referee. The venue was Pallaskeeny. The Claughtaun line-out on that occasion was: Joe O'Grady (goal), Mick Rochford, Denis Maher, John Harrington, Dan Troy, Paddy Kelly, Paddy Halvey, P. Ryan, Willie Penny, Jack O'Brien, Jack Byrnes, P. Joe Daly, Paddy Campion, Tom McGrath, Mick Gleeson.

IN FIGHT FOR NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE.

The world was never too kind to Joe O'Grady, who was a typical example of the care-free, happy-go-lucky Gael of his time and generation. The big majority of the G.A.A. men of the stirring years when the might of a then great empire was being challenged, were thick in the fight for national independence, and Joe was no exception. He took a noble part in the struggle and spent a considerable period in British prisons as a result of his activities—the hardships thus endured contributing in no small degree to the undermining of a fine constitution and his untimely death at the early age of fifty-five.

A successful net minder for many years, it was as a more than useful forward that he really made his name with Claughtaun and Limerick in the early half of the 'twenties, figuring on the county side that fought the 1923 All-Ireland final with Galway and again looming prominent on the Claughtaun team of all the talents that won county senior hurling honours once more in 1926, and many other trophies, too.

A CLUBMAN TO HIS FINGER-TIPS.

A clubman to his finger-tips, one of the staunchest members ever to don the popular Claughtaun jersey, "Twager" occupied a place all his own in the affections of Limerick Gaeldom and shared in no uncertain measure in glorious happenings of those never to be forgotten times, when club hurling reached a peak never experienced since.

Fond of a drink—it was cheap then—and of good company, Joe was a born storyteller, who could recount in a way all his own all great games in which he participated and the many fine players he encountered in a dozen years of top class hurling. But he never talked of his own part or the gallant displays he gave.

And when his hurling days were over, "Twager" remained the steadfast Gael, ever loyal to the proud traditions of the G.A.A. and ever anxious to spread the hurling game he loved amongst the youth of his district.

DIED IN EXILE.

Joe O'Grady died in exile and the Gaels of Limerick paid a great tribute to his memory when they decided to bring his body home for burial. The funeral was a fitting send-off to one who was a great Gael, a true Irishman and a loyal and loving comrade.

July 1955