

No. 163—MICK QUAIDE of Ballingarry

(By Seamus O'Ceallaigh)

THE old hurlers are steadily passing, and it was with a great shock I learned of the death of that great Ballingarry Gael, Mick Quaide, which sad event occurred during the Christmas holiday period.

I heard with regret of Mick's serious illness on Christmas Eve, but felt confident that a splendid constitution and a fine frame, that carried no superfluous flesh, would bring him through the critical period successfully. It was not to be, however, and with Mick's death I lost another of the dear friends that light the road along the Gaelic years.

It is more summers than I would care to admit since I first met Mick Quaide, then nearing the end of a fine hurling career, but still fit and youthful enough to play many a stiff handball rubber against some of the best ballplayers that Limerick City and County then boasted.

RECOLLECTIONS.

I spent many happy hours in Mick's company, and recall some unforgettable days and nights of the long ago, occasions of hearty and genial handball gatherings, when the Quaide household often entertained a whole household following a couple of memorable rubbers in the local ballcourt, then in its heyday.

And it brings back those recollections all the more poignantly to learn that the week before his fatal illness Mick was host to another handball gathering that included members of the St. Munchin's Club from the city, flushed with a record-breaking county championship run of victories that may never be equalled.

Many of the carefree company of thirty years ago are, alas, no more, and I recall particularly such lovable and well-known figures as the great maestro, John Joe Bowles, a handballer without peer, who often graced the Ballingarry scene; Jacky Ryan, "the little man with the big boots," as Tom Soye once dubbed him; John Joe Airey, Jim McCarthy and Paddy O'Sullivan—to name only those that come readily to mind—may God be good to them all!

AS HURLING VENUE.

Ballingarry was not as prominent as of old in the hurling scene during recent years and the "Garden Town" also passed out of favour as the venue of important matches with the growth of the better equipped venues in other nearby centres.

It was Mick Quaide who usually provided the field for the big hurling games, and he had it in great trim for the last match I attended there, the 1948 junior hurling final between Rathkeale and Bruree, which brought a huge hosting to the town. That final was played a few days before Christmas, and with the holiday spirit in the air we recaptured much of the conviviality and glamour of the olden days as we sat around Mick's homely hearth well into the "wee small hours" recalling incidents, events and figures that have left their mark on Gaeldom.

BUOYANT SPIRIT.

There was no more buoyant, spirited or entertaining companion than Mick Quaide, and that trait he carried with him to the grave. His best friend told me at the graveside that Mick was never in better form than last autumn at Lisdoonvarna; and he saw, as was his wont, all the important games of the hurling year. But despite the high spirits, his was ever a quiet, unobtrusive presence, which won the hearts of all sorts and conditions of men by the charm of a bright, sunny and genial nature.

Although my visits to Ballingarry were rare in recent years, Mick was a frequent visitor to the city. And he had more than a "few

words" on the many occasions we met. Everything was discussed, great games recalled, coming matches debated, old friends remembered, but never a word about his own prowess on the hurling field or in the handball court, not to speak of the part he, and other members of his family—and they were not all male folk either—played in the fight for national independence.

WELL EARNED TRIBUTE.

The tricolor which covered Mick's coffin was well earned in the hills of West Limerick in dark and dangerous days; and equally well did he deserve the hurley and jersey of old Ballingarry vintage, that loving hands placed over the national flag, as a guard of honour of old Ballingarry veteran wielders of the caman paid their last respects to one of the noblest of them all. Handball, too, laid its wreath by the presence of the Very Rev. W. J. Canon Carroll, President of the Munster Council, who knew firsthand Mick's worth.

As Mick grew to manhood hurling was strong in Ballingarry, and the feats of stalwarts like Captain Con O'Keefe, Jim and Pat O'Grady, Tom Keating, Jack Keefe, Jack Hourigan, Harry McDonnell, Tom Callaghan and Charley Connors roused his interest in the game. He was maturing as a player of much promise when a county final defeat upset the Ballingarry lads to such an extent that hurling in the parish died out for some years.

A REVIVAL.

Tradition, however, is not easily killed, and Mick Quaide was one of the leaders of a revival which had its beginnings in 1910, when victories over Castlemahon and Monagea fired enthusiasm once more, and an Intermediate team was entered for the championship.

Success crowned their efforts at the first attempt and the Intermediate county title was secured, a victory over Ardpatrick in the final, played at the Markets Field, on July 30th, 1911, being received with much enthusiasm throughout West Limerick. The members of the team were: T. Keating, captain; Jim and Pat O'Grady, P. Keating, P. Condon, Mick and Maurice Hourigan, C. O'Connor, Maurice Hourigan, Jack Kiely, Jack Burke, Jack Donoghue, Jim Cottrell, Dan Dunne (goal), D. Clancy. Sub., Jackie Hennessy.

These championship medals were the first ever won by a Ballingarry combination.

IN SENIOR RANKS.

In senior ranks the lads from the "Garden Town" continued their winning way. They first encountered Croom, powered by such fine hurlers as Mick Feely, the Mangan brothers and Jack O'Shea, and beat them, 4-2 to 3-2. Next on the list were the County champions, the renowned Young Ireland lads, but they, too, had to bend the knee, after a terrific struggle, before the all-conquering Western men.

Another city team, and a then very prominent one in hurling ranks, the Commercial, provided the next opposition, but they, too, were overcome and Ballingarry found themselves in the county final, with Fedamore as opponents.

This match was delayed for a considerable time, due to inter-county difficulties following the abandoned 1911 All-Ireland final between Limerick and Kilkenny, and it was September 29th, 1912, before the sides came to grips, Ballingarry winning in sterling fashion, 4-2 to 1-2. And the team was the exact same one as had won the Intermediate trophies.

THE 1913 FINAL.

Ballingarry again worked their way to the final of the 1913 senior county championship, and Fedamore were once more their opponents—reversing the verdict on this occasion. The holders were handicapped by the absence of one of their best players, Jim O'Grady, whose loss was sorely felt.

The junior All-Ireland championships were established about this period, and old time followers of the game often tell how Mick Quaide made his inter-county debut at Dungarvan, in the Limerick junior jersey, and so well did he figure on that occasion that he was called upon immediately for the senior game that followed, giving another fine display in this grade.

Mick Quaide continued an ornament to the game for many a day, and when he retired from the active arena he devoted much time and energy to propagating both hurling and handball. He was Vice-Chairman of the first County Handball Board under G.A.A. auspices, formed in Limerick, and also proved a very popular and efficient handball referee.

A VOID.

Mick's passing leaves a void in the Gaelic life of Ballingarry that will not readily be filled, and his legion friends have lost a loved figure they will not easily forget.

Go dtugaidh Dia trocaire ar a anam.