

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

CAPPAMORE district has been a stronghold of hurling right from the start of the G.A.A. We have learned already in this series of the part played by representatives of the district in helping Kilmone to bring to Limerick its first All-Ireland hurling crown.

This week we meet another Cappamore man who gathered All-Ireland glory with Limerick, playing altogether in three finals, of which two were won—1918 and 1921.

The 1918 success, coming after a lapse of twenty-one years, was a very welcome one by Shannonside.

Born in the parish of Cappamore on November 11th, 1894, Willie Ryan grew up with a great hurling spell in his native district, their senior hurling county success of 1904 being the culmination of several years of glory in the Limerick premier hurling arena.

At fifteen, the future All-Ireland star lined out at Limerick Markets Field for his club, Cappamore, against Loughgur in the championship. The date was August 22nd, 1909, and so opened a hurling career that was to bring glory to Cappamore, to Limerick and to Ireland until the account closed with a substantial credit balance twenty-one years later, on April 13th, 1930, when he figured with Cappamore against Croom in the 1929 senior county final.

And now, the great hurler of other days lives on in his sons, for Willie has two boys — Liam and Seamus — who have already distinguished themselves with St. Flannah's and are almost certain to be seen wearing a Limerick jersey this season.

ATHLETE OF NOTE.

Willie, who for more years than he can remember was captain of every Cappamore team both hurling and football, was also a promising athlete in his early days—the events he specialised in being the 220, 440 and 880 yards flat.

Records of the period during which he participated are not anything like comprehensive, many of the meetings not being reported at all. However, I find that he won the "440" and was second in the "220" at Caherdavin Open meeting. At the Markets Field, at a meeting under County Board G.A.A. auspices, he won the 380 yards open event and helped the Cappamore team to victory in the relay race. A little later that season, he dead-heated in the "880" for first place at Annacarty Open Sports. Second in the 440 yards at Doon, he won the 28lbs. at Glenstal Castle Sports, the only mention I find of him starting with the weights.

Called to the Limerick County colours in 1914 he played with the Shannonside fifteen until his retirement from inter-county competition in 1928. During that period he won everything it was possible for a hurler to win at the time, and crowned a great career when he lined out with the Ireland team that beat America in the International Hurling Championship final at the 1924 Tailteann Games. Three other Limerick men also figured on that team — Jimmy Humphreys, who captained the side; Willie Gleeson and the late Davy Murnane. Garret Howard, then in Dublin, also played, and the other members were: Jim "Builder" Walsh (Killsenny), J. Kennedy, D. Ring (Cork); J. J. Hayes, J. D'Arcy, M. D'Arcy (Tipperary); T. Kelly (Laois); J. O'Mahony, goal; B. Gibbs, M. Derivan (Galway).

IN MUNSTER AND THOMOND SHIELD GAMES.

In addition to his All-Ireland medals, Willie won Munster Championship hurling laurels with Limerick in 1918, 1921 and 1923. He played in the Thomond Shield final of 1916, which Tipperary won, thus gaining possession of one of the most valuable trophies ever offered for hurling competition. When the Thomond series was resumed in 1920 Limerick won—a success they repeated in 1922, 1925 and 1928, besides figuring in the finals for 1924

1926 and 1927, in all of which the Cappamore man played.

In the home arena, he won the County senior hurling title with Claughaun in 1926, and the Intermediate Hurling Championship with Murroe in 1917. He captained the Cappamore team that was beaten by Roynes in the 1920 junior county final, and was also skipper of the Cappamore senior hurling side beaten by Young Irelands in the Murphy Cup of 1919.

His brother, James, played for Cappamore in nearly all their matches, and figured with the County team in Munster Championship ties during 1917. Secretary of the Cappamore Hurling Club for twenty years, he was Secretary of the Coursing Club for a decade. Willie also took a keen interest in the "coogs." He always kept a few greyhounds and was lucky enough to win several stakes at coursing and track meetings with them. He, too, took a leading part in organising the Cappamore coursing meetings for many seasons.

VIEWS ON TRAINING.

When I asked Willie how he trained he answered: "I was always very fit and never knew what it was to get done up in a match. I never smoked nor drank. In farming you don't require a lot of training for games as you are always fairly fit from the work on the farm. All you require is a few sprints to tune you up, and food is very important. Also you require to be quite fresh. Many a man and team are ruined from too strenuous training in a short space of time. If you aren't fresh going into any game all the training in the world is no good to you. In my opinion there is no training as good for hurling as handball playing."

Willie regards Arthur Donnelly, Boherlahan, and John Joe Hayes, Ehoerlahan, as the best players he met, "very hard men to play on, and, of course, you never get anything soft from any Tipperary man." He rates the Munster final of 1918, at Cork, against Tipperary, as the greatest and hardest match of his hurling career.

Asked his opinion of present day players, Willie had this to say: "I think the present day players are very good considering the time they give to games nowadays. You have dance halls, picture houses and a hundred other amusements and I suppose it is hardly fair to expect young people to give all their spare time to games with so many other attractions to distract them. In my young days there were no bicycles, motor cars or picture houses. You went to the Cross Roads and gave the day either hurling, kicking football or playing handball, or took part in a few races. I think it would be hard to expect the youth of to-day to be as fit or as hard as we were."

REFEREE AT AN EARLY AGE.

Willie Ryan refereed many matches, both County Championship and tournament ties. Firm in his rulings, this was demonstrated at a very early stage in his career. In fact he was a little over twenty when he was entrusted with the charge of a game at Caherconlish in which Castleconnell were playing. The match was very close, and in those days "Tyler" Mackey was a famous hard but fairly honest hurler and he had the other team so upset that they gathered around the referee threatening that if he didn't put "Tyler" to the side line they would not continue the game. Willie told them he would do no such thing so they left the field, and he awarded the game to Castleconnell.

Willie has very definite views on the place Limerick should hold in hurling ranks. When I asked him if he considered the standard of play as good now as it was in his day he answered: "I don't think there is much difference. The hurling may not be as hard, and the players don't seem to get as much length into their strokes. I think there was more dash in the play in our time—anyway we were more

determined and put more heart into our hurling. I think Limerick a very unlucky County as far as the winning of All-Irelands is concerned. Our team, with any bit of good fortune, should have won at least six All-Irelands, and then again, the 1932 to 1940 team should have gathered six more. The 1910 to 1912 team were certainly worth two, if not more, so, instead of being fourth on the list of All-Ireland Championship winners Limerick should be away out in front."

He is not satisfied that the present Limerick senior players have the enthusiasm required to win games. The idea of so many members crying off a selected team appeals him and he said to me: "If I had anything to do with the present Limerick team I would cast the bulk of them and pick and train a young team and in a few years Limerick would be back again at the top. We have just as good material as any County but there is no determination to win in the present side or to even make a fight for it."

EXCITING INCIDENT RECALLED.

One of the most exciting incidents in his hurling days is recalled in this story of a trip to Cork for a Munster Championship tie during the "troubled times."

"We were playing Tipperary in Cork for the Munster Championship, and as there were no trains the County Board arranged for a bus, then available in Bruff, to make the journey. This semi-bus or charabanc, as it was called, carried about thirty-five people; and the four wheels were shod with solid rubber tyres. I and I suppose all the rest of the players, had to cycle to Limerick to meet the bus. We left Limerick at 2 p.m. on the Saturday. Halted at every military post on the way down, we were all searched and questioned about twenty times between Limerick and Cork, both by soldiers and Black and Tans. However, we got over that part alright, but worse was to follow. One of the tyres began to loosen off its wheel with the result that it was about 9.30 p.m. when we reached Cork. It was raining hard at the time and the streets were very slippery. We had arranged to stay at the Victoria Hotel in Patrick Street, which then had a veranda nearly fifty feet long, extending right out the sidewalk to the edge of the road. It was completely covered in glass and supported with metal pillars. About two hundred people were under it sheltering from the rain, many of them awaiting the arrival of the Limerick team. When the driver attempted to pull up the bus skidded, hit the pillars and there was a frightful crash that must have been heard for miles as the whole roof, glass, iron and metal came tumbling down. It was miraculous that nobody was hurt, and all the occupants of the bus escaped although the side of the vehicle was all battered in. What saved us, I think, was that we were all standing singing at the time. Anyway, we beat Tipperary the next day, and went on to beat Dublin in the All-Ireland final of that year."

REMARKABLE SETS OF BROTHERS.

Dealing with the Cappamore of his hurling days, Willie told me that Mick Bourke, creamery manager, was one of the best back men ever to play for Cappamore, and he always took a leading part in the running of the club. "We had remarkable sets of brothers playing for Cappamore," he continued. "We had the McCarthys—James, John, Pat, Michael and Willie—all first-class hurlers. Then we had Martin and Jack Cooke from Murroe, both of whom played inter-county; Joe and Billy Dunlea, also from Murroe. Billy was one of the greatest artists ever to play on a team. Paddy Ryan ("Henry") was another great Murroe stalwart who played with Cappamore. We also had some splendid local players who gave sterling service — Peter Carbery, Mick Merrick, Pat Bourke

and the old reliable, Denis Conolly, who made all the hurleys for the team. I think Pat Butler, of Kyle, was one of the best all-round players ever to represent Cappamore, or Limerick for that matter—a fearless man who would face anything. Then we had the Mulcany quartette of brothers—John, Pat, Willie and Denny, all great men, and the Dillon brothers—Pat, Mick and Joan, all fine players. Jim Lane was a great back man in his day—his four sons starred in after years with the Club. The four O'Malleys were all splendid players and two more sets of brothers, too, come to my mind—Denis and William Ryan and Denis and Jack Ryan. And, of course, we cannot forget another of the old Kilmone All-Ireland "helpers"—Sean Hynes. We had some great tussles for the championship with Claughaun, Young Irelands and Fedamore and although those teams were then in their heyday they always found it hard to beat teams sent out by Cappamore. I think we were the only team to make Claughaun go all out in the days of their glory. Claughaun were a grand team of hard hitting hurlers, and what a glorious club spirit they always displayed."

STILL TAKING ACTIVE INTEREST.

The grand old hurling star of thirty or more years ago still takes an active interest in the games of the Gael and rarely misses an important contest anywhere. His last memory of olden days will serve as a fitting conclusion to this story: "We nearly always travelled by Lynch's long car to the matches, with two, three and sometimes four horses to pull us, and often there would be from twenty to thirty other cars following on behind, and everybody singing and joining in the chorus. We thought nothing of driving the twenty miles to Kilmallock in those days. They were grand old times. But alas, those days of the jarvey and long car are gone but are we anything the better of all the fast travel nowadays? The days of the fun and laughter are gone, and we are the poorer for that."

No 78—Rev. William Casey, of Abbeyfeale.