

Con is one of a select few Limerick men who won an All-Ireland minor medal

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DOON GAA Club gave a respectful guard of honour after the funeral Mass of Con O'Connell, whose hurling career in their red and white colours spanned an incredible four decades.

Large crowds attended the removal and Mass of the 77-year-old on Friday and Saturday. Con passed away peacefully, surrounded by his loving family in St Camillus' Hospital on Wednesday, January 2 following an illness bravely borne. Con would have turned 78 this Thursday.

Con is a Doon man through and through - a son of Mick O'Connell, Cooga and Margaret Hayes, Liscaugh. Born in 1941, Con was one of five with Paddy, Tess, Josie and Mary. He grew up with a hurl in his hand and was gifted with it.

In 1956, he was a member of the St Fintan's CBS' Rice cup team that won the competition for the first time in the school's history. In 1957, Con was called up to the Limerick minor hurling panel aged 16, and the following year the county won only its second ever All-Ireland minor championship. The Treaty only has three titles in its history.

Donal Anderson, chairman of the Dún Bleisce Historical and Literary Society, said Con was a corner back in Limerick's great win in 1958.

"He became the third Doon man to win an All-Ireland minor medal after Willie Deere and Con Birrane in 1940. The full back line in 1958 was John McDonogh, St Patrick's, JJ Bresnihan, Hospital-Herbertstown and Con O'Connell, Doon. In 1959, he played in the Munster minor final when they were beaten by Tipperary in Cork. In 1960, he was also on the Limerick junior hurling panel," said Donal.

Con first came to prominence with the club winning an East minor championship in 1955 as a fourteen-year-old.

"He played five years for the club as a minor and in 1959 he captained the Doon team that won the county minor championship playing at midfield. This victory was a magnificent achievement at the time as Doon parish had been ravaged by emigration, especially to England, in the fifties.

"In tribute to Con's great leadership at the time local scribe Bill Crowe wrote, 'If ever a captain's part was played, 'twas surely played that day by gallant Connie O'Connell, who played and showed the way'.

"He was ever present with the ju-



A pioneer on and off the field: The late Con O'Connell, from Doon, on the far left, playing in Limerick's 1958 All-Ireland minor final win in Croke Park



'Absolute gentleman': Con O'Connell

nior team until he emigrated to London in 1964. He won East championships at junior level in 1961 and 1962 and East Junior league 1959, 1961 and 1962," said Donal.

Remarkably, Con became Doon

GAA Club chairman at just 20 years of age and again in 1962, 1963 and 1964.

He married Nora Ryan of Farnane, Cappamore, who also comes from good hurling stock. Six children followed - Michael, Fionnuala, Susanne, Anne, John and Therese. Michael is the father of last year's All-Ireland medal winner, Barry O'Connell. He cut short the team holiday in Cancun to return for the funeral of his grandfather. Barry came especially to the Doon All-Ireland homecoming in September due to his close family connections.

After emigrating to London in 1964, Con joined the Sean Treacys club where more success followed. It must have felt like home as seven Doon men were on the team - Jimmy and Pakie Hourigan, Peter Ryan Bawn, Michael Anderson,

Mossy and Mickie Dunne.

Con returned home to Doon in 1971 where he and Nora raised their family. He pulled back on the Doon jersey and won an East Junior cup in 1981 and Brian Butler cup medals in 1979, 1980, 1981, and 1982.

"In the 1981 victory he was team captain and also had the proud distinguish of playing in the club colours in four decades -1950s, 1960s, 1970, and 1980s. In his last year playing with the club in 1983 when he was 42 years of age, he had the privilege of playing in the Croagh-Kilfinny Junior hurling tournament with his son Michael," said Donal. Con also played his part off the field becoming club chairman again in 1982 and 1983.

Con worked locally as a self-employed builder, mainly slatted cattle sheds but he also con-

structed the community centre. He also bought a farm in Reenavanna where he pursued his love of farming. Alcohol never passed the lips of the lifelong pioneer.

John describes his dad as a "great father".

"He was a hard-working man and a great provider. He had a fantastic sense of humour and sense of mischief. He had that right up to the end. We have very fond memories," said John.

President of Doon GAA Club, Br James Dormer said Con was an "absolute gentleman".

"He was a quietly spoken man and very hard-working. He was a fine hurler in his day with Limerick at minor level and then with Doon. He was a very popular man in the parish and will be very sadly missed," said Br Dormer.

May he rest in peace.