

# The Pioneer Days Of Official Open Face Coursing In County Limerick

**T**HE County Limerick Coursing Club, which has sponsored so many successful Irish Cup meetings at Clounanna, has had a fairly long and certainly a very honourable history. It had a comparatively humble beginning a little over 54 years ago, but if the men by whom it was launched were few in numbers they made up for any drawbacks in that respect by their own enthusiasm and driving force. It is a sad and regrettable fact that not one of the moving spirits of the initial effort lives to tell the story or read its telling.

## BEGAN IN 1898.

The Club owes its beginning to a small meeting of "doggie men" held in Rathkeale, in July, 1898. The proceedings at that little gathering led to the formation of "The County Limerick Coursing Club." Under the auspices of the new body an open coursing meeting was held at Mellon on the 9th and 10th of November of the same year. This initial fixture was fairly well supported. With one or two exceptions, however, the list of nominators was confined to the counties of Limerick and Kerry. The Club in its first year consisted of 34 members and 36 honorary members, and the statement of accounts for the year showed a credit balance of £6 12s. 7d.

## FIRST OFFICIALS.

The first officials were J. D. Moylan, Newcastle West, Chairman; Robert Cussen, Newcastle West, Treasurer; and Philip J. O'Sullivan, Limerick, Hon. Secretary. These three put an enormous amount of unselfish work and sincerity into the affairs of the Club and as time



The Cup, Purse and Plate Trophies at last year's Irish Cup Coursing at Clounanna.

weather conditions." It added that "the accounts for the year show a credit balance of £27 19s. 5d., an eminently satisfactory result."

Even at that early stage in its career the County Limerick Coursing Club had established a reputation for doing things well. Referring to the 1899 meeting, for instance, *The Stable and Kennel*, a prominent sporting journal of the time, said:—"No other open meeting in the Southern Province has been worked up to such a level of success and importance."

## NO SMALL TRIBUTE.

This was no small tribute and it foreshadowed the wonderful success that has attended the Club's efforts and activities all down the years since. For several years the Club's fixtures were held annually at Mellon but later they were transferred to Clounanna, admittedly by far the finest and best equipped coursing venue in Ireland. The Irish Cup meeting has grown to wonderfully big dimensions in all-round importance and the reunion every year is from almost every standpoint an improvement on the preceding one.

## SPLENDID HELPERS.

No one man or group of men can be credited exclusively with the remarkable growth and success of the County Limerick Coursing Club and its great annual "Blue Riband" fixture at Clounanna. The three original officers mentioned were towers of strength and the source of immense inspiration. As the years went by they got splendid helpers, who were as indefatigable and enthusiastic as themselves. Amongst them may be mentioned John Fitzgibbon, Askeaton; J. J. Quaid, former Secretary of Limerick County Council; E. J. Prendergast, Limerick; Mick O'Shaughnessy, Bruff; William Gleeson, Fedamore; "Sten" Matthews, Limerick; Tom Hayes, Callow; E. J. Riordan, Limerick; Stephen Moore, Ballinacarriga; John Costello, Newcastle West; Martin Griffin, Limerick; George Hare, Limerick; James Clarke and William O'Sullivan, Ballyunion, and a host of others whose names for the moment escape the memory of the writer.

## SOLE LIMERICK SURVIVOR.

Of those mentioned above, the sole Limerick survivor is Mr. E. J. Prendergast, who, it is gratifying to

"Phil" O'Sullivan was in his time as hon. secretary a wonderfully successful organiser. Under the pen-name "Philogopholus" he wrote much both in prose and verse by way of propaganda for the Club and its objectives. The late Stephen Moore, N.T., Ballinacarriga, may, however, be regarded as the poet laureate of coursing in Co. Limerick, for he was a regular contributor of poems to the *Limerick Leader* in praise of the sport and in furtherance of its interests.

## GRAND BUNCH OF SPORTSMEN.

The local coursing men of those days were a grand bunch of sportsmen. There was a wonderful bond of friendship and affection between them. They were great storytellers, masters of quick repartee, and were never happier than when playing jokes on or spinning yarns against each other. The many stories told of those 'pioneer days and the adventures and incidents associated with early coursing activities would in themselves make a big and very readable volume.

It was a treat to hear "Phil" O'Sullivan and William of the same name from Ballyunion regaling their listeners with humorous quips and stories in which each tried to out rival the other.

## A GOOD STORY.

William, by the way, used tell a good story of how he first got into touch with George Hare, whom he did not know or had not even heard of up to then. One day he was in Limerick and wanted to see Phil O'Sullivan, but he didn't know where the latter had his office. Strolling along Upper Cecil Street he noticed the name "G. Hare" over a shop. He went in and asked the first person he met, who happened to be George Hare, if he knew Phil O'Sullivan, the solicitor, and where his office was. When answered in the affirmative William explained: "Why I came in at all to enquire was that I knew damn well that every hare in or near Limerick should know Phil O'Sullivan." After a few more remarks between the two, George, put on his hat and accompanied William to Phil's office. Phil put on his hat, too, and it would not be difficult to guess the sort of establishment they were in before many minutes exchanging pleasantries! Phil's immediate successors in the secretaryship of the Coursing

laid by their predecessors. Prominent among them was the late T. F. Ryan, for many years Limerick County Surveyor. "Tom" Ryan displayed unflinching zeal and energy in the development of Clounanna and the Irish Cup coursing, and the present-day greatness of both certainly owes much to his exertions. Those who co-operated with him and helped otherwise also deserve honourable mention but considerations of space preclude a full enumeration of their names and activities.

## THE PAST AND THE PRESENT.

The tendency is always strong to throw an undue halo over the past, and to do so in a way that almost belittles the present. Those who had any acquaintance of the facts, however, will have no hesitation in agreeing that those who laid the foundations and did the early building of the Irish Coursing Club and its fixtures were truly great workers, and as sincere, sociable, unselfish, and well-meaning men as it would be possible to meet anywhere. To say this is by no means to detract from the immense credit due to those now in charge of the Coursing Club and its annual meetings. These men are splendid workers, who are in every respect worthy of the high traditions of their great predecessors. Sufficient tribute to their work and worth is the unexampled success they have been making year after year of the great annual hosting at Clounanna.

## THIS YEAR'S FIXTURE.

The Irish Cup coursing this year, by the way, will be held earlier than ever. It will take place on November 19th, 20th and 21st, these early dates being fixed because of



Mr. E. J. Prendergast, the sole survivor of a grand bunch of sportsmen.

tidal conditions. To recall the memories of the past in this connection should serve to add some zest to the anticipation of the coming great fixture.

The present President of the Club is Lord Adare and the Chairman, Mr. Roger O'Sullivan, solicitor, while the hard-working and very capable Honorary Secretary and Treasurer is Mr. Joe O'Donnell.

## He Must Turn Up Or Else

Remarking that if defendant did not turn up at the next sitting he would be fined £20 and put off the read, Justice C. S. Kenny, at Newcastle West Court on Friday, adjourned for a week the case in which Cornelius Hanley, 179 St. Brendan Park, Tralee, was charged with the alleged dangerous driving of a lorry at Gortboy in June last. The prosecution was a sequel to an

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The late Philip J. O'Sullivan, first Honorary Secretary of the County Limerick Coursing Club, a position he continued to fill with great ability and success for many years.

went on they got able co-operation from men equally active and earnest in the furtherance of the Club and its objects.

Progress was not slow in coming, as is shown by the fact that for the second annual meeting at Mellon, and which was held on 28th and 29th of November, 1899, the entries totalled 56 as against 30 the first year. At this second fixture leading kennels in Kilkenny, Offaly, Galway, Kerry, Waterford, Cork, Clare and Limerick, were represented.

## ANNUAL REPORT.

The first annual report of the Club was presented in April, 1900, and it pointed out that "the Committee are glad to be able to chronicle a distinct success in your endeavours to revive coursing in this county." In reference to the second fixture, that of 1899, the report stated that "class was well represented in the three stakes and capital trials were witnessed under the most favourable

