

# No. 193—MICHAEL MADIGAN of Rathkeale

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

**T**HE unexpected passing of Mick Madigan, in the fulness of years, has robbed Limerick Gaelic of one of its most notable figures.

He died as he lived, close to the Gaelic Field, for no man kept nearer in touch all the long years with the games of the Gael than the popular Rathkeale figure, whose first introduction to our native pastimes came in 1892—eight short years after the foundation of the G.A.A., when he was a Mass server in Rathkeale church.

### CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH G.A.A. DEVELOPMENT.

During the sixty odd years which have passed to Gaelic history since Mick has been closely associated with the ups and downs of the G.A.A. in Limerick, and, in fact, all over the country, and could tell better than most men of the fight the G.A.A. had to get established, the enemies encountered, the difficulties overcome. He could speak of tried and true friends who successfully countered every effort to break the G.A.A. and could recall incidents to demonstrate in no uncertain manner the big part the Association played for Faith and Fatherland at a period when to be a Gael was almost tantamount to being a Felon, and when British guns and British spies did their damnest to squelch "the Gaelic thing," as they were wont to call it.

### A VERITABLE MINE OF INFORMATION.

I have known Mick Madigan more years than I would care to admit, and I can say in all truth that never did he fail me whenever I found it necessary to contact him in connection with any aspect of past G.A.A. administration or play. He was a veritable mine of information on a vast field of Gaelic endeavour and could unearth details that should be completely buried in the misty past of six decades.

I could not pass Rathkeale without seeing Mick, and he rarely came to the city without contacting me.

Deeply conscious of the part the G.A.A. should play in Irish life, he regularly stressed the importance of clubs and boards being leaders of thought in the parishes and counties.

### EFFECTIVE AFTER-DINNER ENTERTAINER.

Keenly interested in the social side, he was a regular visitor to the G.A.A. functions arranged in honour of team successes and other events. He invariably patronised the City Board annual distribution of trophies and dinner in the years this interesting event took place, and never failed to provide an entertaining interlude for the attendance.

Full of humour, his stories always proved most popular, and he generally wound up with a recitation—usually one of his own composition.

Perhaps one of the greatest Gaelic functions ever held in Limerick was the banquet at Cruise's Hotel to commemorate the victory of the Limerick hurlers in winning the Jubilee All Ireland Hurling Championship—the year 1934.

### A Collector Of Souvenirs.

In the Press report of that big event we read: 'It was pleasant to meet Bill Sheahan of Rathkeale, who had been through much of the fight with true Gaelic enthusiasm and zeal, and with him the unbending figure, with the laughing eye, of Mick Madigan loomed up—hailing one with a decisive kindness he alone can exercise.'

"These two veterans figured in a very pleasant incident later in the evening. Mick Madigan in presenting to the Mayor of Limerick (Councillor P. F. Quinlan) a flag taken from Croke Park on the occasion of the final, asked that it be treasured in the City as a souvenir of the Jubilee year, and mentioned that he had many such mementos, including some earth from Parnell's grave, a bit of the rope with which the great Father Casey's coffin was lowered to its last resting place, and the flag that registered the last goals in the 1918 final. Mick mentioned his pleasure at having sat beside the great Sean O'Kennedy, full-back of the Wexford 1918 selection, on the occasion of the 1934 final.

"Accompanying the flag was a document inscribed as follows:—'G.A.A., 1934 All Ireland Golden Jubilee Final. This flag was taken from Croke Park as a souvenir and is proudly and gladly presented to the Mayor of Limerick by two Gaels of the olden days—Mick Mad-

igan and Bill Sheahan. Ever keep the flag as a fond and treasured city heirloom. It will ever be an inspiring emblem to the rising generation of Gaels when we are all dead and gone.'

"The Mayor, in accepting the presentation, said he felt very keenly the honour paid to him and would always treasure the token as a memento of a glorious episode in Limerick's G.A.A. history. He hoped its possession would make the spirit of that evening live on in his successors."

After the presentation Mick Madigan treated the company to a recitation specially composed for the occasion.

### THE FLAG OF THE G.A.A.

All flags may change and alter  
Political and national policies may likewise—

But there is one flag and one policy

That knows of no vicissitude,  
And that is the flag and policy of the G.A.A.

Hoisted and unfurled in 1884,  
By Archbishop Croke, Michael Cusack and Maurice Davin,  
After fifty long years it still waves  
unconquered and triumphant.

All flags may fade and fall,  
But there is one that never will,  
And that is one we stand beneath here to-night.

If ever it bends or falters,  
The national and physical resources of the Gaels of Ireland

Will again uplift it,  
Their exiled brothers and sisters, planted God's world all over,

Will gladly and willingly help in its resurrection,

May it ever live on to inspire and imbibe us

With the national and patriotic feelings that ever it has imparted

In the trying and tumultuous periods of our long-waged and very chequered history,

My earnest wish here to-night is:

May God ever bless the sons of the Gael;

May he ever inspire them to keep the flag—

The great national insignia of our sires' pastime,

Untarnished, unchanged, untrammelled and unsullied.

# No. 193—MICK MADIGAN of Rathkeale (Continued)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

**M**ICK MADIGAN was only a very small lad when he first made contact with the games of the Gael. That would be sixty-four years ago—in the year 1892.

Rev. Gerald O'Connor was C.C. in Rathkeale at the period. A zealous priest, he played a very pronounced part in establishing the Rathkeale Temperance Society. Also keenly interested in youth, he founded a Gaelic football club for the altar boys attached to the local church.

Gaelic football was very popular in the district around Rathkeale at the period and the boys soon worked up great enthusiasm for the game. Their first efforts were with a small eight inch football which Father O'Connor procured, and with this Mick Madigan and his youthful colleagues had their first sample of the native football code.

## "A LIFE SENTENCE."

It was Mick's introduction to the Gaelic Athletic Association, and it proved a life sentence, for the Rathkeale youth was to continue through manhood and right into old age one of the most ardent and interested supporters the Association could boast anywhere.

Devotion to native games which was born that far off day, with the formation of the Mass Servers' Club, was actually a twin, for coupled with it was a Total Abstinence pledge which Father O'Connor administered to all his boys. Quite recently and very proudly Mick Madigan said to me: "That pledge none of us ever broke."

It would be impossible in a sketch of this nature to follow the development and progress of that club of such small but earnest beginnings. Suffice to say they reached such a state of perfection as to be only beaten a solitary point by Foynes the year the latter won the Limerick county title.

Prominent members of the team included the late Sean Finn and the late Jack Normovle, with Paddy Flaherty, later a well-known county hurler; Edwin Johnson and Bernard Tansey.

## THE ABRAHAM HURLING CLUB.

Mick spent eight years at football before he was induced by his lifelong friend, Bill Sheahan, to throw in his lot with the Abraham Hurling Club. This he did in 1901, and for ever afterwards continued an ardent devotee and ad-

mirer of hurling.

Mick Madigan treasured a photograph of the William Abraham team taken at Stonehall, August, 1890, exactly where the present parochial house stands. Included in the group were the following:—James O'Reilly, captain, now in Ballingarry; William Sheahan, Vice-Captain, still to the good in Rathkeale and now Honorary President of the West Limerick Board; Denis O'Kelly, Jeremiah Sheehan, John McKnight, Con Donoghue, Tom Donoghue, Danny Hayes, James Markham, William Dowling, Thomas Costelloe, Mickey ("Austin") Quin (Rathkeale), Thomas Glenny, Paddy Fitzgerald, Thomas Markham, Michael Guiry (Beechmount), Wm. Heffernan, Michael Hanrahan, John Hanrahan, John Connors, Thos. Condon (Ballyea), John Keating (The Line), Dick Keating (Kilcoleman). Other members of the team absent when the photo was taken were Jack Donoghue, noted for his long puck (and brother to Michael Donoghue of Ballysteen) and Paddy Frawley of Ballyea.

## OTHERS IN THE CLUB.

Others who were earlier prominently associated with the Abrahams included Paddy McNamara, the Holy Cross, William Goodwin, Thomas Langan, Mickey O'Donnell, Jacky Carthy and Maurice Gavin.

In the famous silver cup match at Tralee, Tom Coughlan of Pallaskenry, was selected by Rathkeale as a centre-field and played an outstanding part.

Rathkeale played some great games with the Curragh Home Rulers, captained by Pat McDonoghue and including such noted players as Thomas Hourigan, Tim Foley, Cowpark; Stephen Moore and Con Coughlan, Pallaskenry,

## BEST PLAYERS AND HARDEST WORKERS.

The best players Mick encountered during his period with the Abrahams were Mick Clifford of Ballyagan, J. Hynes of Cappamore, and the Kerry scoring machine, Michael Hurley.

Hardest workers for the G.A.A. in the difficult early days Mick would list as Willie Hough of Monegay; Pat Fitzsimons, Borrigone; Michael Nestor, Curraghchase; Larry and Dan McNamara, of Courtbrown; John Cahill of Kildimo; William Casey of Ballysteen, and Jack ("Michael") McMahon of Askeaton.

## No. 193—MICK MADIGAN of Rathkeale (Concluded)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

ALL his lifetime Mick Madigan took a leading part in Rathkeale affairs, being elected a member of the then Town Council at the age of 19½, to become the youngest member of any local government body in the country at the time, another interesting feature being the fact that his father was also a member of the same Council.

Generally associated in most minds as an outstanding and tireless worker for the G.A.A., it must not be forgotten that his first great triumph came as Secretary of the local branch of the United Irish League.

In the fight against tyrannical landlordism the great Father Casey of Abbeyfeale launched a country wide campaign to prevent them hunting over the holdings of any land-owner.

The plan was not succeeding as well as anticipated and was actually on the point of being abandoned when Mick Madigan learned of the situation, and resolved that with the help of the G.A.A. the issue would be brought to a successful conclusion.

### BIG TRIAL OF STRENGTH.

The trial of strength was set for a meeting of the hunt arranged for Ballynoe. The Rathkeale men, led by Mick, set to work and, despite stern opposition, particularly from the R.I.C. Inspector and his men, the Gaels made a cordon around the Hunt members and defied them to proceed.

The operation was a complete success, so much so that in the space of a few weeks word reached the members of the League that all evicted tenants would be reinstated.

Mick was later Secretary of the first Irish Land League and Labour Association, which might be termed the foundation stone of the now mighty Irish Transport and General Workers' Union.

Other Secretaryships filled by Mick included the Town Tenants' Association, the Coursing Club, the Game Preservation Club, and, of course, the G.A.A.

In the early years of the century, when the County Board was in financial difficulties, he gave valuable assistance as Vice-Chairman. A little later, during a split in the ranks, he filled the post of Secretary to a small committee entrusted with the task of keeping things moving until better times dawned.

### POPULAR IN MUSICAL CIRCLES.

In the vocal and musical world he was very much at home, making many popular contributions to the social life of the town, always rendering his own composed recitations, songs, monologues and sketches.

When Bill Mulcahy left Rathkeale to become Dublin's leading operatic tenor, Mick replaced him as soloist in St. Mary's choir. He accompanied Christy Lynch for his first audition, and helped to set the former star Rathkeale goal-keeper on the road to musical fame.

### IN ATHLETIC FIELDS.

Mick's introduction to athletics was made in company with that splendid performer, J. J. Bresnahan. They travelled together to

Foynes, where the Castletown man won a sprint and weight event and Mick secured first in the half mile and second in the "440."

In three years on the track Mick won nineteen prizes in mile and half-mile events. In addition, he was a regular competitor at the Sunday evening sports, then such a popular feature in Rathkeale, and was ever open to take on any competitor for a half mile or mile event, in any of which he was never beaten. He also secured the award for half a dozen flapper cycling events in these evening contests.

### MEMORABLE CONTEST WITH PADDY RYAN.

An occasion that Mick always cherished was his meeting with the great Paddy Ryan of Pallas, a few weeks after the latter had made his first world's record with the hammer.

The Pallas man had also sent the hurling ball a record distance of 102 yards in a rise and strike competition.

The rise and strike had aroused great interest around this period, and the late Paddy Leahy, then handicapper, in an effort to regularise things got a 4½ oz. ball made, also a special hurley, which he carried to all his sports meetings.

These he introduced at Foynes for the first time, on a dead calm August evening, ideal for the event.

There were twenty-one competitors, including noted figures like Paddy Ryan, J. J. Bresnahan, Mick Creed, Paddy Flaherty and Mick Leahy—all boasting several wins to their credit for the event.

In a terrific contest in which the competitors finished within inches of each other, Mick won with a drive of 89 yards 3 ins. And from Paddy Ryan came a grand sporting gesture. He gave Mick the prize he had won for the hammer—the big event of the programme, and the Rathkeale man exchanged it for his own. Nothing could better illustrate the grand spirit of the olden arena.

A much appreciated action of the famous Leahy brothers was the presentation by them of a dozen of their best prizes as a free gift to Mick Madigan when he organised a big sports meeting for Rathkeale in 1910.

### A HAND IN EVERY PIE.

Few things escaped Mick's interest. A good public speaker, whenever he appeared as orator he always had kind words for labour's cause.

A keen gardener, he won prizes in open competition for some of his produce.

In the coursing world he had some notable successes, but in later years his favourite sport was harrier hunting. He maintained that every parish should boast a small pack in order to help in keeping followers in the pink as regards athletic fitness.

To the end he could be seen with hound and cocker crossing the fields of his native parish unimpeded by ditch or dyke.

His passing has left a void that will not be easily filled—a great light is quenched and Rathkeale and Limerick are the poorer. Solus siorruidhe na bhFlathas go bhfaighidh a anam!