

## No. 178—MICK KELLY of Kilfinny

MICK KELLY, as a young lad, witnessed the first games organised under the rules of the infant G.A.A. in his native district.

He remembers the pre-G.A.A. days and has vivid recollections of the Faction Fights that were such an ugly feature of Irish life at the time.

He once told me how he witnessed one, a very mild affair he was told, at a fair in Rathkeale, and he feels sure he will never forget it. It was terrible. He remembers the police intervening, and then both sides turned on the R.I.C. and the slaughter did not finish until the streets were crammed with people lying around badly injured.

### CAUSE OF DISCIPLINE.

One of the great fears of many, when the G.A.A. was formed, was that the revival of inter-parish rivalry would get the faction fighting going again.

It had right the opposite effect, however, for the discipline and self-control of the games helped to wipe out entirely the bitterness of the factions.

Mick Kelly left his native Kilfinny before he was twenty years old to take up a teaching appointment at Artane Industrial School, Dublin.

He was not long in the Metropolis before his interest in the G.A.A. brought him in contact with some of the leading figures in the movement. In a short time he was in the thick of Gaelic affairs, and with Paddy Devlin and Jim McCoy Mick helped to establish the old "Celtic" Hurling Club, for long afterwards one of the leading clubs in Dublin.

This Club was composed almost exclusively of workingmen—the best of them natives of hurling counties—Wexford, Kilkenny, Cork, Limerick and Galway in the main. Wages were small at the time; yet there was never any

difficulty in getting a team together for a friendly invasion—near or far. Nor was an idle member, willing to travel, ever left behind.

### ARRANGING MATCHES.

The usual process of arranging a match was simple. One of the members was in touch with his native place. The home team wanted a match—they were less frequent then than now; or there was a church being built or a national project needing funds—memorials were the vogue in and around the centenary year of 1798. Caring little about the object, which could never be other than commendable, the date was fixed and the rest followed without a hitch.

Travelling was much more of an adventure then than it is now. There were no graded teams, no secondary championships, and none of the provision now considered essential for the comfort of Gaelic travellers. The railway

### By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

companies made no pretence of catering for such plebian traffic.

Amongst the most painful of Mick's recollections is a journey from New Ross by the night train in one of the notorious "cattle trucks," for which the Dublin, Wicklow and Wexford line was then unashamed. That train almost stopped when anyone asked it. Anyway it reached Harcourt Street—panting and weary—between one and two o'clock on a Monday morning. These were the discomforts inseparable from excursions in these days. Nobody minded them then. The high spirit of indifference to material things with which these pioneers always set out, made light of inconvenience and carried them to their destination through the rigours of the day and home again, eager for the next foray into some

other stronghold of Gaelic Ireland.

### BORE THEIR OWN EXPENSES.

"I confess I cannot now imagine how the finances of such expeditions were managed," Mick told me. "Visiting teams bore their own expenses. We were, of course, entertained in hospitable, if homely fashion. Rough meat sandwiches and a barrel of beer, often of local brew, supplied in a tent or half empty barn, were all we ever expected or wanted. Sometimes, of course, if it was a real tournament match, we would have a sit down repast in some modest hostelry, and then, as often as not, half our crowd would have found more congenial havens for themselves. We were good mixers in those days and made ourselves at home wherever we went. The result of the match did not matter a rap; in fact, we were so used to defeat that an occasional victory upset us."

Mick Kelly played for Dublin in the All-Ireland Hurling Final of 1894. Raparees had the selection and he had the unique distinction of being the only player outside their own club that the Raparees picked for the Blue Riband decider. If Mick was used to defeat certainly nothing happened in that final to upset him. The game was played in famed old Clontarf Park, on March 24th, 1894, and the renowned Blackrock of Cork beat the Dublin men, 5-20 to 2-0—the largest winning score, I think, ever recorded in an All-Ireland Final.

That was a great Cork team, that included many names long prominent in Leaside hurling—S. and D. Hayes, P. and D. Coughlan, M. Murphy, J. Cashman, J. Kidney, J. Delea, J. Kelleher, J. Norberg, J. Young and W. O'Connell. Admirers of Blackrock will remember the part these families and their descendants have played in the hurling history of a great parish.

### INTENSE INTEREST IN THE GAME.

"Though probably one of the weakest clubs—from the playing point of view—in the Capital, we had always an intense interest in the game for its own sake and traditions. This spirit was sustained by ardent enthusiasts and by close contact with leading figures in the Gaelic movement of the day," Mick told me. "The founder of the G.A.A., veteran Gael, Michael Cusack, was a close personal friend, an honorary member of the Club and constant mentor. Tadgh O'Mahony, 'the Roscarbery steam engine,' wrote us up with unblushing flattery in the 'Nation' of that day. Paddy Sutton, of hurling and athletic fame, was an unfailing friend. Pat Tobin, at the time prominent in the Association, was our President for a term. 'Big Jim' Fitzgerald—friend of all hurlers, those from the Leaside especially—threw in his lot with us after the dispersal of the Raparees, and brought invaluable field recruits in poor Syl Pidgeon and 'Moon' McCabe. These, and more I cannot recall without an effort of memory, maintained the Gaelic morale of the Club. If they could not make hurling champions of us, they made us itinerant champions of hurling."

### LONG SINCE DEAD.

"All of those I have mentioned are long since dead and also, alas, the bulk of the rank and file who made up the playing strength of the Club. At one time or another we had men from every hurling county in Ireland and from as many more counties as well.

"Although I have said success was a luxury experience with us, we took ourselves very seriously at times. These were the most enjoyable periods of our career. Mounting ambition imposed a restraint that was irksome. We only recovered our spirits after a sound beating."

Mick Kelly will conclude his interesting story of early G.A.A. days next week when he will tell of a visit to Scotland to play the Cowal Club in a shinty game.

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