

No. 190—Anthony Mackey of Castleconnell

ANTHONY MACKEY was son of the late Michael Mackey, one of the pillars of the G.A.A. in its early days by Shannonside, and one of five brothers, all of them hurlers in the best traditions of old Castleconnell.

On another occasion I hope to have the opportunity of recalling the part one of these brothers — John, better known on Gaelic fields as "Tyler," played in the Limerick G.A.A. story of almost half a century ago. I have already dealt with the deeds of one of Tyler's sons—the renowned Mick Mackey, in the events of a later era.

To Anthony fell the task of bridging for the Mackey family the gap between Tyler and his sons, as far as hurling fields were concerned.

Anthony came into the picture as "Tyler" was moving out, and fifteen years later he was still very much in the limelight as nephews Mick and John began to hit the hurling limelight with both Ahane and Limerick.

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST-CLASS HURLING.

His introduction to first-class hurling came in unexpected and dramatic fashion. Castleconnell selection were fixed to play

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

Midleton (Cork) in a Munster Championship tie at Limerick Markets Field, on July 8th, 1917, and M. Doherty cried off the home side at the interval through injury. Anthony, a schoolboy and only fifteen at the time, was called to fill the vacancy and performed right manfully in a very fast and exciting game which Limerick won, 5-8 to 7-1. His brother, Michael, also played in that match.

The following season he was picked to play against Clare but did not travel, and lost the opportunity of an All Ireland medal at sixteen, as Limerick won the Blue Riband that season.

His first important club match was at Nenagh the Sunday following the Midleton game, when he helped Castleconnell against the famous Toomevara Greyhounds in a tournament in aid of the Gaelic League, which the Tipperarymen win, 5-2 to 1-4.

PLAYED AGAINST A KILKENNY SELECTION.

A few weeks later he travelled with Castleconnell to Waterford to play a Kilkenny selection in a match in connection with the Gaelic League Oireachtas, being held that year in Waterford. Mr. Eoin Mac Neill threw in the ball for what proved a fast and exciting game which the Noresiders won, 1-5 to 1-3.

Castleconnell beat Ballybrown in the opening round of the 1918 Senior Hurling Championship, but were themselves beaten by the then prominent Cloughaun team in the next round, played at Cappamore.

Troubled times followed and as the War of Independence reached its height the playing fields were deserted. One of the last appearances of the old Castleconnell Club was an act of defiance to the British.

In July, 1918, the British Government issued a proclamation prohibiting Gaelic games except under permit from the occupying forces.

"GAELIC SUNDAY."

The Central Council, at a meeting on July 20th, instructed all clubs to defy the ban, and declared August 4th a "Gaelic Sunday," on which date matches were to be organised for every field under Gaelic control throughout Ireland.

Fifteen hundred games were arranged in mass defiance of the British proclamation—and all passed without incident, illustrating the solidarity of the G.A.A. in the struggle against the British.

When the invaders were driven out efforts were made to revive the Castleconnell Club, but did not meet much success. When failure was eventually admitted Anthony and his brother Michael threw in their lot with Cloughaun, in whose colours we find them on August 16th, 1925, when Cloughaun beat their old rivals, Young Ireland, 6-2 to 3-1, in the East Limerick Senior Hurling Final after an exciting struggle.

The city lads were beaten by Newcastle West, 2-6 to 2-4 in the County semi-final, after a stirring

game, in which the teams were neck and neck all the hour.

CLAUGHAUN IN 1926.

Cloughaun opened 1926 determined it was to be their year. In every outing they displayed fine hurling ability, and commenced the winning sequence by collecting a splendid set of gold medals from old rivals, Young Ireland, in a hard fought Tournament final.

With hard won victories over Sarsfields, Croom and Young Ireland they took the trophies in the Fort Etna Tournament before starting off on the championship road.

Their first obstacle was Fedamore, and after one of the dourest and most determined struggles ever waged for the championship crown the city men won, 3-4 to 2-5.

A month later Kilfinane were overcome 4-3 to 3-2, after a very determined battle.

New attendance records were set for the meeting with Young Ireland, which proved vigorous, determined and brilliant, providing a thrilling finish in which Cloughaun triumphed, 2-6 to 1-6.

"A TERRIFIC MATCH."

Records were broken once more when Cloughaun and Newcastle West lined out at Croom in the County final. It was a terrific match for threequarters of the hour when Cloughaun, playing with perfect balance, took advantage of a defensive error by their opponents to force the goal that mattered — a long shot from Anthony Mackey letting Joe O'Grady through for this vital score. It was easy after that, Cloughaun winning 5-3 to 1-4.

That was without doubt the greatest team ever to wear the horizontal bars of green and white. It included All-Ireland medal holders in Jimmy Humphreys, Willie Ryan, Tom McGrath, Joe O'Grady, Dan Troy and Mickey Cross, with the other players almost equally well known:—Anthony Mackey, Jimmy Hannon, Mick King, Johnny Murphy, Pa Joe Daly, Joe Byrnes, P. Shanny, M. Mulcahy and E. Daly.

THE SCATTER CAME ALL TOO SOON.

Unfortunately, the scatter came all too soon. The final was played on October 17th, 1926, and on November 10th following, Johnny Murphy met with a fatal accident at Limerick Docks, where he was employed.

The last great victory of that fine Cloughaun combination came at Croom on May 8th, 1927, when they beat Toomevara, 5-5 to 4-2, for a set of gold medals.

On May 22nd three members of the team, E. Daly, M. Mulcahy and James Condon, sailed for America, and when Cloughaun lined out on Whit Sunday, June 5th, in the Croom Gold Medal Tournament, Newcastle West reversed the championship verdict, and won, 5-2 to 4-2.

At Rathluirc, a week later, they lost in the local tournament to St. Finbarrs (Cork), 4-5 to 2-1.

The championship crown went on August 28th, 1927, when Young Ireland beat them at the Market's Field, 3-7 to 1-4. Anthony Mackey did not play in this game, but was back in Cloughaun colours on September 2nd, 1928, when they were beaten by Fedamore, 3-3 to 1-1, in the Ozanam Cup and medals final. He was again on the team beaten six weeks later by Young Ireland, 5-3 to 3-1, for a set of gold medals.

AHANE CLUB LAUNCHED.

That was the last occasion Anthony wore the green and white of Cloughaun. The Ahane Club had been launched—the call of the home team was insistent—and the Castleconnell man played no small part in helping to build Ahane to the big force it proved in after years.

Success did not come easily or too soon, and it was 1931 before Ahane first put their inscription on the Limerick championship Cup they were to win so often in after years.

Young Ireland regained the trophy the following year, the last occasion the well known and popular colours of blue and gold were entwined around the trophy they had won oftener than any other club prior to the advent of Ahane.

For four further seasons Anthony Mackey helped Ahane to championship renown, and when he retired just twenty years ago this season, the Castleconnell man carried with him to the sideline the admiration and respect of all Limerick Gaeldom.