

## No. 140—JOHN POWER of Ballingarry

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

LAST week we honoured the memory of the captain of the first team to win Munster and All-Ireland honours for Limerick.

Now let us meet eighty-one years old John Power of Ballingarry, who witnessed all the great games of the 1897 championship, and can recall most of the big figures of early G.A.A. days in West Limerick.

Born on May 13th, 1874, he was only a young lad when football was first played in his district shortly after the founding of the G.A.A. His earliest memory is of a famous match between Dromin and Feenagh. The ball was tossed up between the players at Crossbar Cross and under the old rules it was then each man to his own district, with half the countryside playing.

Bob Coll, the famous athlete, led the Dromin lads and the most renowned of the Feenagh men were Morty Lynch, Tom and Mick Geary.

All in his area played football at that early period and the usual custom was to challenge one another to a match, either side of the road. The most prominent of these players were Bill Power, who died a few years ago in America; Bill Keating, Ballynoe; Johnny O'Brien, Ballinaha; Tom Kilbride, Knockfierna; Johnny Munton, Mick Neligan, Kilatel, and John Ronin, Derryclough.

Bowling was also a popular pastime in the district at the time, and John Power still has two of the iron balls they used roll along the road then.

In the athletic revival, Pat Dore of Kilatel was a very fine performer at the long jump and is, I am glad to learn, still hale and hearty.

### THE GRANAGH DAVITTS.

John Power played with the Granagh Davitts not very long after the G.A.A. was established. Named after one of our greatest patriots and a patron of the G.A.A., they usually carried a flag with a photograph of Michael Davitt thereon. On one memorable occasion Davitt himself walked with it through the town of Rathkeale. Other notable players in that team included John Lynch, Ballyealon, who captained the side; Paddy Conway, Ballyvologue; David Hartigan, Coolrus; Mick Enright, Granagh, and Jack Sheehan, Ballinleenagh.

This team won the 1890 competition under the Father Sheehy County Board, defeating St. Michael's of Limerick in the final, played at Newcastle West. Famous city players in that decider included "Gibbe" O'Dwyer and Long Billie Connors. John Power and Mick Enright are now the only two survivors of that great occasion.

John Power later joined the Ballingarry team, under Captain Con O'Keeffe, and played some notable hurling games with them—one particular match in Limerick against Caherline standing out in his memory.

### ANOTHER SPLENDID TEAM.

Another splendid team of this period was Kilfinny and John Power has pleasant memories of some of the games they hurled, in particular a meeting at Croom for the championship, which was played for an hour and a half in order to get a decision. Spencer Lyons was the referee that day.

They walked to most of their matches in those days, but for the really long distances side cars were procured.

John, besides being a fine player, was also a keen follower of the games and travelled long distances to see Limerick play. His most memorable journey was for the All-Ireland final of 1897 at Tipperary town, on a raw winter's day.

Ballingarry interest in the game was very keen, with a few members of the home club helping Kilfinane on the occasion, so John Power and a number of companions set off for the venue, despite the lateness of the season.

Their journey was well repaid by a great and exciting game in which the Ballingarry representatives were very prominent. Jack Reidy manned the goals in more than capable fashion and Paddy Buskin of Croom proved a great full back. Sean Og Hanley led some grand movements, whilst Cathrell, Flood and Hynes were others to impress.

### GREAT AND DECISIVE GOAL.

Nearing the end of a really exciting tussle the Kilkenny lads were two points ahead, when a great puck-out by Reidy reached his club mate, Cathrell, who, without allowing the ball to touch the ground, scored a great and decisive goal that put Limerick in the lead, and ensured that first great victory in the All-Ireland honours race.

The Ballingarry trainer in those early days was the late John Kelly, N.T., a noted athlete, who was afterwards County Board Chairman for a number of years, and a lifelong worker in the cause of athletics.

The players cut all their own hurleys, fashioning them from the ash tree to the individual liking. And the good players in the locality, in addition to the All-Ireland men, included Ned Hartigan and Michael Kelly, of Kilfinny. In later years two brothers-in-law of John Power—Paddy and Jim O'Grady—figured prominently with the Ballingarry team which won Limerick county senior hurling honours in 1911.

### JOHN POWER'S FATHER.

William Power, father of our subject, lived to the great age of ninety-seven, passing from this life on December 8th, 1929. He actually played hurling in the Ballingarry district years before the Famine, the "hurley" of that time being merely furze roots roughly shaped. After the Famine, football was the popular sport, and, of course, the players always favoured their bare feet.

When I asked him what he thought of present-day players, John Power said he considered they were not as strong or as powerful as the men of his day. They were unable to puck as far as the older players despite the fact that the ball now was much lighter. The old veteran, who has followed hurling for almost seventy years, thinks there is not enough overhead play in the present game. He also feels that club spirit is not up to the old standard when a player was prepared to give everything he had for the honour of the parish.

### OLD GAME HAD A THRILL IN EVERY STROKE.

John also feels that the games are not as good now as in the past. He put it briefly: "You have no real excitement these days. The old game had a thrill in every stroke and it took grit and stamina to come on top."

The old hurler and footballer, who could recall every great game in which Limerick figured, rates Paddy Buskin of Croom the best hurler of his era. But in his summing up of a lifetime as a player or spectator he said: "I would choose Micky Cross of Cloughaun as the most scientific hurler I have ever known, and it is rather a pity the young players would not try and learn his art of good ground hurling which was so characteristic of him."

John's son, Paddy, upheld the family traditions in later years and figured successfully as full back for Granagh-Ballingarry for a time—having a few great tussles with Paddy McMahon, when the Kildimo man was hitting the All-Ireland limelight.

John Power's other sporting interests were coursing and horse racing. He rarely missed a 29th of June meeting at the old popular Barronstown venue or later at Limerick Junction, and was one of the founders, and secretary for five years, of the Ballingarry

-Granagh Coursing Club. Others associated with him in the local coursing activities included George Purcell, Jerry Cahill, Jack O'Keeffe, Dick Chawke, and John Bennett. Two of his dogs: "Gift of the Gab" and "Brave Show," were very successful.

A very popular man with all classes, he was fond of good clothes and held the reputation for many years of being one of the best dressed men in the whole country. Chairman of the Board of Guardians in Croom for a lengthy spell, he was a staunch supporter of the great Irish leader, Charles Stewart Parnell.

A man well versed in many subjects, he was a regular contributor for many years to "John O' London's Weekly" and the "Limerick Leader," under the pen name, "Faugh a Ballagh."

His legion friends will be glad to hear of his well-being—a great link with the earliest days of Limerick hurling glory.