

THE NAME IS O'DWYER

Introduced by Francis O'Dwyer

The surname "O'Dwyer" is well known in Grange Parish, as it is in many surrounding parishes and localities, even nationally and internationally, in the case of one of the clan, Major John Gerard O'Dwyer. One has only to mention Ireland's fight for freedom, athletics, GAA, horsemanship, or the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association,



John O'Keefe, Catherine O'Dwyer, John O'Dwyer, Paddy Daly, Matthew O'Dwyer.

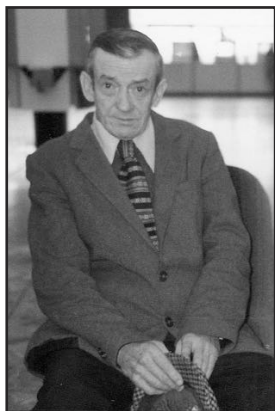
to bring to mind immediately, a member of the local O'Dwyer family. What follows is a collection of tributes to a number of O'Dwyer personalities who lived over the years and accounts of some who are living today. The tributes and accounts are of varying length, owing to the availabil-

ity of recorded historical facts and reliable recollection. The primary sources with regard to the tribute to each "O'Dwyer" are acknowledged. I am a proud member of the O'Dwyer clan and it is an honour for me to introduce this article.

I believe that the name "O'Dwyer" is synonymous with Rahin for about three hundred years. They came from the Barony of Kilnamanagh, a part of Tipperary situated between Emly and Cashel. However, I can only trace back to the mid-1800s for my own branch



Hanora O'Dwyer nee O'Dea at the turn of the twentieth century.



Donie O'Dwyer, Rahin.

of the family. My great-great-grandfather, Daniel John O'Dwyer married Hanora O'Dea from Bulgaden in the mid-1860s. They had five children, one girl and four boys. Ellen was born on 14th January 1866; John D, my great grandfather, was born on 29th January 1868, Matthew on 17th May 1870, Daniel on 28th January 1872 and Patrick on 10th June 1874. John D's son, Daniel (1898-1980), was my grandfather and his son, Pat, is my father. Mary Kate O'Dwyer Gallagher, who wrote some of the accounts that follow, is my aunt.

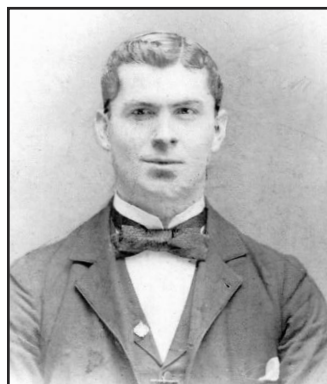
Of my great-great-grandfather's children, Ellen and Daniel never married. Matthew married Myria Kinnane of Crean, who died at a young age and he later married Myria's cousin, Madge Carey, from Árdpatrick, and they had two children, Donie and Angela. Patrick, who worked as a steward for Count De Salis, married Johanna Russell from Lough Gur, who also worked at Lough Gur House for the Count. They hadn't any children but Johanna's nephew, David Russell, came to live with them. He later married May O'Regan from Ballyagran. They had one daughter, Joan, who married Denis O'Connor of Meanus, and she is now the principal teacher at Scoil Dean Cussen, Bruff.

So, the first six accounts that follow relate to a direct line from my great-great grandfather, Daniel John O'Dwyer. The final two accounts relate to another line of the O'Dwyer family – Major John G (Ged) O'Dwyer and his son, John O'Dwyer of “The Hurlers”.

John D O'Dwyer 1868-1940 (by Seán Gallagher, MLCC – 2005)

John D O'Dwyer was a farmer from Rahin, Grange, Co Limerick. He was born on 29th January 1868. In his younger days, he worked briefly as a monitor in Grange National School. John immigrated to Philadelphia, where he was a noted athlete and played hurling with a team known as “The Limerick Guards”. In the USA, he met and married Catherine Tierney of Ballyagran. They returned to live in Grange in the 1890s and had one son, Dan, born in 1898, who went on to become a noted athlete also.

Although a member of what was referred to as the Sinn Fein Council, elected in 1920, John D O'Dwyer was actually a member of the Labour Party. He became a member of the County Council that year because of an agreement entered into by



John D O'Dwyer Rahin MLCC.

these two political parties on the Croom RDC, of which he was a member. Labour had a strong representation on the RDC, and Sinn Fein feared that the party might not secure the chairmanship. An inter-party arrangement was arrived at whereby Sinn Fein secured the chairmanship for their member, Sean Clifford, and John D O'Dwyer was nominated to represent the RDC on the County Council. Sean Clifford went on to sit on the County Council between 1922 and 1924, arising from other circumstances.

John D O'Dwyer retained his seat in the 1925 elections when he ran for the Labour Party. He was defeated in the local elections of 1928. It seems, at that stage; he was a member of Cumann na nGaedheal, having attended a meeting in Grange, in June 1926, to set up a branch of the party there.

While a member of the Council, John appears to have adopted a moderate stance on national political issues and had a good relationship with the Republican members of the Council. For example, in September 1924, he was the only pro-treaty Councillor to sign an address of welcome from the Council to Eamon de Valera, on his visit to Limerick.

John D O'Dwyer died on 6th January 1940 and is buried with his wife, Catherine, in Tullybrackey graveyard.

Dan O'Dwyer 1898-1980 (by Michael Weekes)

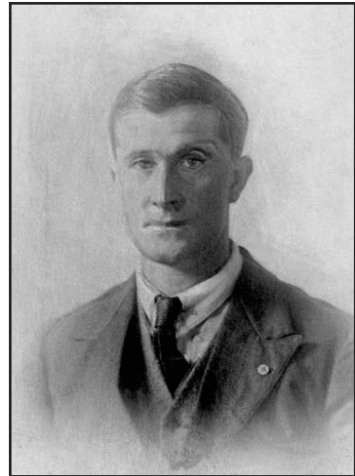
Most of what follows has been taken from the writings by S Ó Ceallaigh in the *Limerick Leader*.

Dan O'Dwyer of Rahin, Grange was the son of John D O'Dwyer, whose story has been told immediately above. Athleticism and sporting acumen were in John's blood, a gift that Dan inherited in spades. Dan was born in 1898.

While Dan was endowed with natural ability, he could have thanked a popular and esteemed national school teacher, Mr JP Connolly, who organised sports meetings, donkey racing and friendly hurling matches for his pupils, as well as providing constant encouragement. It is of interest to recall that the teacher owned a great donkey, which was usually ridden at the time by a youth, JG O'Dwyer – well known in later years as Major O'Dwyer, of the Irish Army Jumping team. Major O'Dwyer's story is told later in this article.

The Grange district boasted many great sporting figures in the first decade of the twentieth century; amongst them, Egan Clancy, Ned Treacy, Mick Bourke, Jack Clancy, WJ Gleeson, Con Scanlon, Jack Clifford and Dan O'Dwyer.

Dan was twelve years old when he lined up at a sports meeting in Holycross,



Dan O'Dwyer of Rahin.

held on 16th August 1910 and carried off his first prize by winning the youth race. He repeated this achievement the following year at the same venue. Some half a dozen years later, Holycross was the venue again, when Dan, a fully-fledged novice, had his first victory in the 220 yards novice event. Shortly afterwards, he attended a similar meeting in Bruff and collected two “seconds”, having been beaten by M Moloney, Ballycampion, in the “hundred” and by WJ Daly, Emly, in the “two-twenty”.

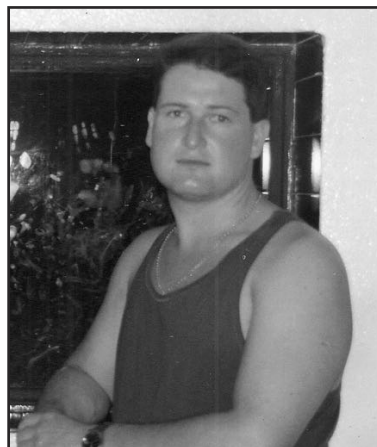
1918 was a great season for the Rahin lad. He ‘swept the boards’ at Killeely, winning four events: the 100 yards, 200 yards, 440 yards races and the long jump. He gave an encore performance at Balliniscala, winning the same quartet of events. Later that season, he won the 100 yards and 200 yards races at three successive appearances at Banogue, Newtownshandrum and Ballysheedy; the 100 yards race at Dromin; the 100 yards and 440 yards races at Darnstown; and the 100 yards and 300 yards races at a second Killeely meeting.

The following year, 1919, brought further success for Dan, as he continued his winning ways. He won the 100 yards, 200 yards and long jump events at no less than four meetings, at Elton, Knockainey, Killeely and Balliniscala; as well as the 100 yards and 220 yards races at Kilmallock.

Despite his successes, training presented a challenge for Dan. He was obliged to train on his own, owing to a lack of stimulating competition in his own locality, or even a keen athlete with an interest in the sport. He trained by cantering alone for about an hour in the evenings, varying this with long walks on other occasions. By way of preparation for the long jump event, he did a share of jumping across wide trenches and bog holes.

Towards the close of the 1919 season, Dan was satisfied that he had nothing else to win in novice ranks – no new laurels to gain, and so, was contemplating retirement from the track. It was then that an athletic-looking man approached him, spoke about Dan’s novice career, stressing that he had gained all of the renown possible in the novice grade and suggested that Dan should join GAA ranks and compete at the bigger meetings.

The man who approached Dan was no other than that “flyer of the tracks” – JJ Keyes, who, when O’Dwyer agreed, entered him for all of his favourite events at the Caherdavin meeting, held on 20th September 1919. The result was a triple win for Dan in the 100 yards, 220 yards and 440 yards races. Second in each of



Brian Gallagher, grandson of Dan O’Dwyer, athlete of the day at FCJ Bruff, 1983

those races was that great Limerick City runner, Martin Lawlor. This meeting brought the season to a close.

Dan was off to a bright and early start in 1920 when he travelled to Cork for the famous “Drapers’ Sports” at the Mardyke Grounds, where he won the 100 yards and 220 yards events. His big achievement of the new season came a short time afterwards at



Andy Fitzgerald, great grandson of Dan O'Dwyer with trophies won in 2003 at Ballygowan sports day (personality of the day)

Castlecomer, Co Kilkenny, where he won the 100 yards, 220 yards, 440 yards and long jump events – a similar quartet that he won in his novice years. Competing that day were such noted runners as JL Nolan of Rathcoole, Dublin, the Leinster champion and Bill Shanahan of Thurles, a great runner in later years. There were thirty-six starters in the 100 yards race. Dan was closely watching JL Nolan and Shanahan during the event final and felt he had them beaten, when a one-armed runner, AJ Nolan of Abbeyleix, made a plucky challenge and gave Dan the race of his life.

The Kilkenny trip was an exciting one for Dan. In those difficult times, the British Government, whose armed forces occupied the whole of Ireland, ordained that a permit should be obtained from the RIC by all those wishing to travel any distance. Needless to say, GAA members did not agree with such formalities and Dan didn't obtain permission for the journey. His travelling kit consisted merely of a pair of shoes and running togs, wrapped up in a copy of the *Limerick Leader* newspaper, with his name “Daniel O'Dwyer” written on it. He travelled by train to Ballyragget and brought his bicycle along; he cycled the remainder of the journey to 'Comer.

The surname “O'Dwyer” was not a very popular one with the British authorities; consequently Dan was under surveillance while he was overnight in Castlecomer. He learned the reason for this on the following day. NH O'Dwyer, a prominent member of the Rebel forces, was spending a lot of time in Kilkenny on IRA matters, closely monitored by the authorities. Thus, the similar surname held by Dan provoked interest from the authorities.

At the County Board Sports, held on 13th August 1920 at the Markets Field in Limerick, Jim Keyes won the 100 yards race, and Dan was second. Dan won the 220 yards and the long-jump. Keyes did not run in the 220 yards, but Dan ran to his [Keyes] instructions. Two days later, Dan won the 100 yards and 220 yards races at Gort. Charlie Holland, second in the 100 yards, later became a bishop of the foreign missions field. About September time, at Oatfield in Co Clare, a very small meeting owing to Black-and-Tan activity, Dan won the 100 yards and long jump events.

In May of the following year, 1921, the Limerick Championships were held at Kilmallock. However, owing to the troubled times, the gathering of athletes was small. Dan won the 100 yards, 220 yards and 440 yards championships of Limerick. Later on, a big meeting was held at Kilmallock, at which W Clumsor of Doneraile won the 100 yards race, and Dan was second. Dan won the 220 yards race, and Jimmy Thompson of Limerick City was second.

At O'Callaghan's Mills in Co Clare, Martin Lawlor won the 100 yards race, and Dan was second, winning the 440 yards race. He finished that season, winning the 100 yards, 220 yards and 440 yards races at Caherdavin.

In 1922, Dan met with an accident which put him out of action for a good period. The new Irish Army held a sports meeting at Nenagh in September, at which he ran competitively for the last time. He was leading the '100' when he fell, and Jimmy Johnson went on to win. He won the long jump and the 440 yards race. Dan remained for a week at the barracks with Colonel Liam Fraher and Major JG O'Dwyer.

Dan acknowledged that Jim Keyes was the best runner that he ever saw. An enduring friendship grew out of his first meeting with Keyes on that fateful evening. The running shoes worn by Dan under GAA rules were those owned by OD Coll of Bruree. Dan returned the shoes to him, shortly before Coll's all too early death. Dan usually travelled by bicycle or by train to the sports meetings at which he competed. He sometimes travelled with that grand old City Gael, MA Lawlor, whose motor car was among the scarce vehicles of that time.

Dan died on 27th December 1980 and is buried with his wife, Bridget, in the graveyard at Grange Church.

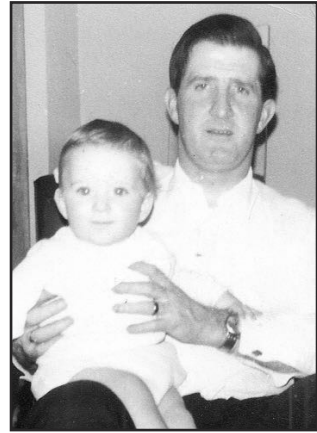
Brian Gallagher, Dan's grandson and great-grandson of John D O'Dwyer, also exhibited athletic prowess when he took the best overall male athlete title at the FCJ Sports at Bruff in May 1985. He also won medals and trophies at county level for both field and track events. Andy Fitzgerald, nephew of Brian and great-grandson of Dan O'Dwyer, also showed great athleticism when awarded "Personality of the Day" at Ballygowan, Newcastlewest, in June 2003, where he either won or received a medal in the seven events in which he competed.



Cup won by Dan O'Dwyer for athletics in 1922.

John Gerard O'Dwyer 1934-1991 (by Gerard O'Dwyer)

The oldest in the family of Bridget and Daniel O'Dwyer, John Gerard was born on 18th June 1934. Together with his siblings Mick, Mary and Pat he had a very happy childhood while growing up in Rahin. He attended Grange National School and on finishing there he went to the Christian Brothers Secondary School in Sexton Street, Limerick. Learning came easy to him, and while he worked briefly for the Rural Electrification Scheme, he then trained as a psychiatric nurse. On completion of his training, he was appointed to the staff of St Joseph's Hospital, Limerick. He was later promoted to Nursing Officer and was appointed to the Acute Unit-5B, University Hospital, Dooradoyle, where he remained until his retirement in July 1991.



John O'Dwyer with his son Gerard.

In his earlier school years and young adulthood, he showed a keen interest in athletics which was not really surprising considering the many athletic achievements of his father. He won several 100 and 220 yards races as well as long-jump and high-jump events. He did a lot of his adult training under the watchful eye of the late Denis Canon Browne in Donoughmore (*an article on Canon Browne is to be found elsewhere in this book*). As there was no athletics club in his own parish at that time, John lost interest and enthusiasm in athletics. However, a number of years later he trained the Bruff, Grange and Meanus athletes for the Community Games. Assisted by Sean Blake of Meanus, they worked tirelessly for the benefit of the young athletes.

Another organisation to which he was very dedicated was The Pioneer Total

Abstinence Association. He was a founder member of the Bruff Branch of the organisation, Grange being represented by John and his uncle Richard O'Donnell. Bruff was quite a vibrant branch; however, over the years the numbers dropped, and the branch was disbanded.

Amongst John's other interests was the Volkswagen Beetle car model and a great love of dogs. Over the years, he owned various makes and colours of the "Beetle".



Gerard and Adrian O'Dwyer (John's sons) at Bruff National School.

His many dogs included Sandy – a brown boxer dog, Rex his collie and Max his wirehaired terrier. John married Peggy Lynch of Rathmore, Manister in 1960. Sadly, she suffered ill health and died in 1966. In August 1970, he married Nancy Leahy of Elton, who also nursed at St Joseph's Hospital. They lived with their three children, Gerard and twins Adrian and Dermot in Rahin.

On his retirement, he undertook voluntary work, including fundraising for St Martin's in Cork, and he was also involved with the PTAA Réadóirí competitions. It was while judging at a Réadóirí competition at Athlacca Parish Hall on 1st December 1991 that John, my father, died suddenly, sending shock waves through the parish and bringing devastation to our family. His retirement was to be confined to months rather than years, and John was called to his eternal reward at the young age of 57. He is laid to rest in Grange Churchyard.

Solas Na Flaitheas ar A Anam.

Mick O'Dwyer (by Pauline O'Dwyer Murphy)

The second eldest in the family of Bridget and Daniel was born on July 31st, 1936. The midwife at that time was Nurse Duggan, who lived in Grange Village in the house where his brother, Pat, now lives. He went to Grange National School, and what he enjoyed most there was training for the sports days that were held annually in Bruff. A number of other schools outside the parish also competed at these events – schools such as Knockainey, Dromin and Athlacca. There was always great rivalry between the schools, but they were very happy and enjoyable days. He remembers one year in particular when he won five events: 100 yards, 220 yards, long jump, high jump and relay race – that was a happy day for him.

Robert Donworth of Knockainey and Tim Cranley of Dromin are names he remembers from those days as both were very good athletes, and there was always a rivalry between them all. When he became older, Mick often travelled to sports meetings with Danny Condon of Drominycarra, who was one of only a few who had transport. He had an old van, and they travelled to places such as Dromkeen and event venues in Clare and Galway. Mick won a few events at those meetings but there was no athletic club in the parish, and he lost interest. His next encounter with running was when, as a parent, he took part in many "Father's Day Races" on Caherconlish National School Sports Days. This was where his children attended school. He won a good number of those races but proclaimed that he was getting older at this time!



Mick O'Dwyer on his First Communion Day in Grange 1943 with his brother John.

Mick hurred for a while with Bruff and Camogue Rovers. Having finished school, he worked for a period with Mrs O'Donoghue, Caherguillamore and that was a great introduction to working life as she was one of the nicest people you could hope to meet. He later worked at Reardon's Pub in Holycross for three years. His time there was also a very happy experience. Mrs Reardon came from Upperchurch in County Tipperary, and she was a lovely person, kind and appreciative of both workers and customers alike.

However, many of Mick's friends had emigrated, so in 1956 he decided he would go to Oxford – his neighbour and friend, Sam Bourke, was already there. He got a job straight away with Pressed Steel Motor Manufacturing Company. There were a lot of Irish people working there at that time. It was in Oxford that he met Ann Betson from Tullamore, and they got married in Dangan, Co Offaly in August 1963. They decided then that they would stay in Ireland, and he got a job at Shannon Foundry in Limerick. He stayed there for about a year and then got a job with IAWS and stayed with them for 12 years. While with this group, Mick was seconded to work with Glanbia, Avonmore; Smithwicks in Kilkenny; and North Kerry Co-op in Listowel. When IAWS ceased trading, he worked for Short Stainless Steel Fabrications and was involved with the making of the cross on the roof of St John's Cathedral. His name and those of four work colleagues are etched on the cross.



Mick O'Dwyer with his daughters, Michelle, Caroline and Pauline.

Mick later worked with Macro Engineering and for Pat Casey at Munster Car Parts from where he had to retire due to ill health. Mick always had an interest in greyhounds, and while living in Oxford he had a greyhound called "Our Town Minor" which he bought from Mick Potter of Bruree. He had a few wins with that dog and his more recent success was with a dog called "Stone Park Crash" who won a good number of races here in Ireland and came third in an English Derby final. He still has two dogs and goes to a lot of coursing meetings at Clonmel, Abbeydorney and other venues. He has four children: one boy – Darren, and three girls – Pauline, Caroline and Michelle. They are all living locally, so his children and grandchildren are constant visitors, which he enjoys greatly. Ann and Mick go to the odd bingo game, and life is good for them, thank God. Hopefully, they

will have many more happy and healthy years in their home in Clough na Dromin in Caherconlish.

Mary O'Dwyer Gallagher (told by Mary, herself)

Christened Mary Catherine, I was often called Mary Kate or indeed Kate Mary and in later years, Mary Gal. I was comfortable with all versions. I am the only surviving girl in the family. My sister, Helena, was born in December 1940 but, sadly, she died three months later in March 1941. She is buried in Tullybrackey Graveyard with my grandparents. I was born on 24th January 1939. I had an idyllic childhood growing up in Rahin with my siblings, parents and paternal grandmother.

I suppose the first great sadness in my life was when my grandmother died. She was a wonderful person. Originally Catherine Tierney from Ballyagran, she



Bridget O'Dwyer, Rahin (Mary's mother).

met and married my grandfather, John D O'Dwyer, in Philadelphia, USA. She had a profound influence on our lives and would always seek to instil in us an understanding of moral values and the difference between right and wrong. Neighbours and family members repeatedly called for her advice on various issues, and it was on those occasions that we would be dispatched for 100 buckets of water from either the well or the pump – kept out of the way for as long as was needed!.

She had been a cook for a Presbyterian Minister and his family in Philadelphia. When she was getting married, they gave her a present of a Bible which I still have. She was a wonderful cook, and her culinary skills were invaluable when food was rationed at the end of World War II. I remember her making carrot tea, grating carrots and putting them in the bastible over the open fire. I don't know what else was added but the end product would also be given to neighbours to mix with the small allowance of tea available through the Ration Book Coupons which were in use at that time. This mixture would prolong the meagre allowance of tea allocated to each family. My grandmother and I shared a big black wrought iron bed with feather mattress and pillows, and I always felt very secure listening to her words of wisdom. I never slept in the bed again after she died.

My cousin, Angela O'Dwyer, who was more like a sister to me as she, like me, was an only girl, died in May 1966 from tuberculosis which was the plague of the country at that time. That was another great sadness for me.

I went to Grange National School where I was taught by Mrs Alice Power, Mrs Rita O'Donnell and Mr Tom Lynch. On occasions, we would have Alice Green (later Alice Punch) from Cahirgillamore as a substitute teacher. She was scarcely much older than we were, and we loved her.

I then went to secondary school to the FCJ Convent in Bruff where I did the Intermediate Certificate. I went to the Presentation Convent in Hospital for my fifth and sixth years where I did the Leaving Certificate in 1957. The journey to this school was eight miles each way and my good friend, Marjorie Moroney, and I would meet each morning at Mrs O'Brien's in Holycross and then make our way to Hospital. I remember one evening when my bicycle was punctured,



Mary O'Dwyer on her First Communion Day in 1946.

and it would have cost one shilling to get it repaired in Hospital – one shilling I didn't have – so there was no option but to walk home. Needless to say, Margie walked with me. Almost sixty years later, we are still friends and meet up fairly often to recall and reminisce on those happy days.

After my Leaving Certificate examinations in 1957, my heart was set on training to be a primary school teacher but as one had to be able to sing in order to qualify for training, the option was not open to me, despite excellent academic results. Financial circumstances dictated that I could not attend university to qualify as a secondary school teacher. There was no “free education” in those days. I did substitute teaching for Mrs Lynch at Lough Gur School for a number of months and then decided to join my brother, Mick, in Oxford. The plan was that I would work and then apply for a college place in London. However, there is a saying “you can't put an old head on young shoulders” and college never materialised.

I worked for a number of years for Barclays Bank. Subsequently, I got married and had four children: Joan, John, Miriam and Brian and we travelled quite a lot, living in Germany for approximately seven years and in Singapore for three years, before returning again to England. It was while living in Singapore, a beautiful island, that I first encountered cable cars and had my first trip on one to the island of Sentosa. While the children loved it, I was absolutely petrified. It was also while living there

that I travelled through Malaysia on one of the old type trains which had armed guards on board. It was fascinating to see the natives in Singapore and Malaysia climbing the coconut trees and tapping the rubber trees. The experience that is indelibly imprinted on my memory from that era was a visit to the island of Penang, a beautiful island north of Malaysia. On this island were lavish hotels for the rich and famous, but as we were in



Mary Gallagher with her children, John, Joan, Miriam and Brian on the occasion of her graduation from UCC.

neither category, we stayed in an Australian hostel. The island was one of the most fascinating places I had ever seen – I will always remember going to Mass there in a small white church which had open archways rather than windows, secured at night time by wrought iron gates which were folded back during daylight. Through these archways, I looked at the azure blue of the South China Sea, which made me feel that I surely was as near to Heaven as one could hope to be.

Despite much travelling, the return to one's roots is the destiny of many, and so it was in 1978, I found myself back in Rahin again. Back to a changed Ireland I must admit, but still it was home. I worked for a number of years, both in voluntary and paid capacities, as a Literacy and Numeracy Tutor with County Limerick VEC, having trained through Waterford Institute of Technology. I absolutely loved that work and was sad when the time came to retire.

As I said at the outset, my first great sadness was the day that my grandmother died. Well, the day that my world really fell apart was the day that my grandson, Andrew, died in an accident at Holycross soccer field. The passage of time helps one to cope, but that is as good as it gets. So, I have one grandchild in Heaven and seven on earth, and I love them all dearly.

I thank God for my family, my friends, my neighbours and for all who helped to compile this book. It was always a very dear wish of mine that all our local knowledge would be recorded for posterity. A wealth of local knowledge, held by past generations, has been lost through the decades by not having been recorded. Hopefully this book will be enjoyed by many generations to come, long after those of us who struggled to put it together have left this world behind.

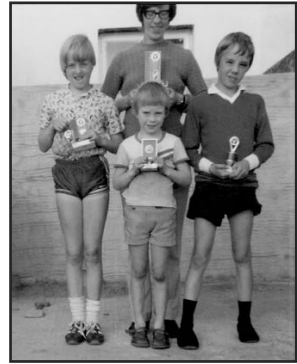
Patrick O'Dwyer (by Francis O'Dwyer)

Pat, the youngest member of the family of Dan and Bridget O'Dwyer was born on 5th August 1944. Nearly all were home births at that time and Nurse Lynch from Fedamore, who was the district nurse/midwife at the time, attended the birth, telling the other three children that she had got them a new baby brother! Innocent times! He had a very happy childhood growing up in Rahin and attended Grange National School. Being naturally left handed he was made to write with his right hand which he found extremely difficult, but this was common practice in schools at that time. Having finished national school, he worked at Ned Kennedy's farm in Rockbarton. Wages at that time were usually around £1 per week! Later he worked at Colonel Galloway's studfarm and then for a number of years with Roadstone. Pat had the urge to travel and went to England. Here he worked as a barman in the Feltham Hotel in Feltham, London. Working hours were long, frequently from 9 am to 2 am. After about a year, he went to work at the Guilford Hotel in Essex and later at the Royal Oak in Dagenham.

While home on holiday, Sunday nights were spent dancing in the 'Ballroom of Romance' in Dromkeen – his long-time friend, Dan Conway, would always accompany him. It was here that he met Helen Carew from Annacarty in County Tipperary. Love at first sight! So, that was the end of England. By this time, he had bought his first car for the princely sum of £80, a Ford Anglia, registration number BIU5. The car

provided transport for Pat and Dan to Dromkeen and other dancing venues. Pat and Helen married in 1969 (Dan was 'Best Man' at the wedding), and initially they lived in Rahin while a house that Pat had purchased in Grange Village was being renovated. It was at this house in the village that they made their home and reared three children: Rosaleen, John and Francis. Grandfather Dan (Pat's father) also lived there and was lovingly cared for by them up to his death in 1980, aged 82.

Some of Pat's interests over the years were gardening and dancing, and he could be heard on many an occasion giving a great rendition of some fine old songs at social functions and parties. Their children, now grown up and married, visit them regularly with their own children in tow (five grandsons and five



Rosaleen, Francis and John with their mother, Helen.



Patrick O'Dwyer, Rahin.

granddaughters). Pat and Helen still live contentedly in the house they first called home in 1970 and Please God, they will remain in their village home for many years to come and they are wished many more years of health and happiness.

Major John Gerard O'Dwyer – Horseman Supreme

Mostly, the following is extracted from an article titled “Major O’Dwyer – Horseman Supreme”, which was written by Sean Ó Ceallaigh and appeared in the *Limerick Leader* – “Great Sportsmen” in 1955.

John Gerard O’Dwyer was born at Rahin. He went to the local Grange National School and later to Bruff. Like so many young men in the district, he joined the Volunteers and in time became Officer Commanding the 3rd (Bruff) Battalion, and it might seem in the natural order of things that he should decide to become a full-time soldier and join the newly formed Irish Free State (Saorstát) Army and then it all began.



Major JG O’Dwyer (front left) with his mother, Mary, his brother, Nicholas and his sister, Daisy.

As a columnist in the *The Irish Field*, to mark his retirement in 1943, put it, “Each member of the Irish Army International Jumping team was a brilliant horseman and it is a tribute to Major O’Dwyer that he was acknowledged to be the best, not only by his opponents but by his colleagues as well”.

As leader of the great Irish team which remained in the forefront of International Competition almost since its inception in 1926, until it disbanded at the commencement of the Second World War in 1939, Major O’Dwyer and his colleagues not only made Ireland a country to be respected in international sport, but helped incalculably to further the Irish Bloodstock industry and indeed the fledgling economy as a whole.

The progressive decision of the Government to set up an Equestrian section in the army was ‘up his street’ as he had an abiding interest in horses from his childhood, and in fact the young Captain O’Dwyer was a member of the very first Irish Army team to take part in competition.

It was an awesome task to face international competition against long established teams, and countries with long tradition and considerably more capital to call on, but they bravely set out on the European Circuit – Brussels, Biarritz, Nice and Paris and further afield to New York, Boston and Toronto.



Major Ged O'Dwyer and his wife Bridie.

Then in 1932, riding 'Limerick Lace', O'Dwyer, now promoted Commandant and appointed O/C of the Army School of Equitation really 'arrived' on the international scene. He was acclaimed in the German Press after his great performance in Berlin. Not only did he leave the German riders (the indisputable forerunners of the time) in his trail, but he withstood all the pressures and 'stayed with' the experienced and accomplished French rider, Lieutenant De Costries, clearing no less than 24 difficult obstacles. They agreed to a tie for the first place after jumping off faultlessly no fewer than three times. It was the start of many brilliant achievements over the next seven years, including the distinction of being

the highest individual winner of all international competitors.

In 1935 alone, he had seven international 'firsts', which amounted to practically one at every major show and he followed in 1936 with 'The Blue Riband' – the King's (George V) Gold Cup (valued £500) at London's Olympia. As usual, he was riding 'Limerick Lace', then eleven years old. He holds the record of being the only man to have won outright (three in a row) the Swiss Grand Prix at Lucerne, a win achieved one of the years, from a field of no less than 90 entries. He also had 'firsts' in Paris, New York's Madison Square Garden, Toronto, Rome, Chicago, the list is endless. These were 'firsts' in the Major Competition at each respective show. This policy was furthered by Captain O'Dwyer and his team – to go for the Grand Prix as only this event was properly covered by the International Press of the time, and they saw the subsequent publicity as welcome boost to the emerging Ireland and the Irish horse.

Many of these wins were achieved in the face of trying circumstances that scarcely exist nowadays: slow and often unsatisfactory means of travel and smaller arenas to those experienced at home; some were only 80 yards by 30 yards. He is quoted in a Press interview on his return from Rome in 1932 – "The greatest difficulty we found in the show was that the 'in' and 'out' fences were about a yard closer together than usual. We were not used to continual turning, and this very cramped space was very upsetting for the big Irish horses. The difficulties were compounded by the fact that the arrangement of the obstacles was not known until just before the event".

Perhaps, Major O'Dwyer's sweetest victories were at home. There must have been a great sense of achievement attached to captaining the Irish team

in their five in a row win, 1935 – 1939, in our Nations Cup for the massive Aga Khan Cup, and in the face of the stiffest competition each year from four or five top international teams. These wins captured the public imagination and, for the first time, show jumping began to interest ‘the man in the street’, and man, woman and child felt a part of this great Irish team. An illustration of this is that despite limited travel facilities, 44,000 people attended at the RDS on Aga Khan Cup day in 1937, whereas the crowd of 26,000 two years earlier, was thought to be huge.

A ‘Leader’ [*Limerick Leader*] writer in the newspaper the following day summed up the public reaction: “One of the most gratifying features of the magnificent Horse Show which closed today, was yesterday’s victory by our Military Jumping Team. Ballsbridge has been the scene of many fine spectacles in its time, but we can imagine no more impressive moment than that, when Commandant O’Dwyer, riding that prince of horses, ‘Limerick Lace’, sailed over the final obstacle of the world’s most difficult course, to give victory to his country and to make the Aga Khan Trophy the absolute property of the Free State Army”. “The greatest team to have represented any country”, said Captain Matteson of the American team. Still, despite all the victories, like the five out of seven they pocketed at a highly competitive Lucerne Show in 1934, to receive the Aga Khan Cup from President Douglas Hyde for the first time in 1932, must have been a particular highlight for him.

One cannot pay tribute to Gerald O’Dwyer without lauding his ever present partner, ‘Limerick Lace’. True, he did have a handful of successful rides on Oisín and Blarney Castle, but it was with Limerick Lace that he achieved fame. The horse’s background is a little obscure, but he has strong Bruff connections in that he was owned for a time by JP Hogan of Rathcannon who bought him as an unbroken three-year-old at some place near Roscrea. From humble beginnings, he came to be described as “the show jumper of the half century”. His record speaks for itself. Fifty-two wins, not to speak of placings, out of about 130 outings at international level, a record unequalled. And he captured the imagination of even the most disinterested. A magazine writer of the time put it like this, “Many people who are bored with show jumping, enthuse over Limerick Lace, for not only is he considered one of the best show jumpers in the world, but he is also an extremely good looking, quality horse. His best points perhaps, are his beautiful quarters and low, powerful hocks”. He continued in competition until 1940, and the subject of our profile retired from the army in 1943 and returned to farm near Limerick.

On his farm, Major O’Dwyer lived with his wife Bridie and sons John, Noel, Frank and Anthony. His sons, Noel and John, were renowned hockey players; Noel was one of Ireland’s greatest players, gaining a record number of caps making thirty-seven consecutive appearances. Ged was predeceased by his oldest son, John,

and by his wife, Bridie. Ged O'Dwyer died on 16th March 1996 and is laid to rest with his parents, wife and son, in his native Grange.

The Berlin Olympic Games – 1936

For the most part, the following is taken from writings by Denis O'Shaughnessy in *The Irish Times* – “An Irishman's Diary”.

In August 1936, an unsuspecting world watched fascinated as the Nazis set about showing off their Aryan supremacy with the staging of the XI Olympiad in Berlin. The Germans would show the world that a race, humiliated and down-trodden in the decades following their defeat in the Great War, was gloriously risen and that Teutonic pride and prowess was renewed.

Berlin was *en fête* for the great event, and many new sports buildings and attendant modern facilities put in place.



Major Ged O'Dwyer and his show-jumping teammates, Fred Ahern and Dan Corry with one of many trophies won.

Visitors were highly impressed with the new stadium, built in the style of the Coliseum in Rome. Herr Hitler, speaking at the opening ceremony, said “Germany willingly and gladly accepted the task of preparing the contests for the year, and in a manner which endeavours to be worthy of the great ideals and traditions of the Olympic Games, and hopes thereby to assist the ideal of strengthening the ties among the peoples, which is the basis of these Games”.

What the world at large did not know was that Hitler and the Nazis camouflaged their racist policies and put their anti-Semitic agenda on hold during the Olympics, cleverly bedazzling visiting

journalists and spectators with an image of a peaceful, tolerant Germany.

Two Limerick men attended the Olympics, one of whom was an anonymous contributor to the *Limerick Leader*, who afterwards wrote some very interesting but controversial impressions of the Games and Berlin, in general, in that newspaper. The other Limerick man attending was Bruff-born [Grange] Major Ged O'Dwyer. The reason for his presence at the games makes for very sad reading.

Following on the great exploits of hammer-thrower Pat O'Callaghan in Amsterdam (1928), and O'Callaghan again with hurdler, Bob Tisdall, in Los



Major O'Dwyer on Limerick Lace at the RDS.

Angeles (1932), the nation looked forward to the Berlin Olympics with great expectations. Since the revival of the Olympics in Greece in 1896, Ireland had produced many great champions, but nearly all under the aegis of the 'Stars and Stripes'. Now, our fledgling State was producing our own home-based champions and Berlin beckoned brightly.

It was not to be. Politics intervened. At the time, the NACAI (National Athletics and Cycling Association of Ireland) legislated for athletes, both north and south, with outstanding success it must be said, O'Callaghan's and Tisdall's achievements being the highlights. Following these great accomplishments, the ugly head of "partition" was unfortunately raised, and the NACAI arrangement was contested by the British. The International Federation found in their favour. Negotiations between the Federation and the NACAI broke down, which led to the Irish Association being debarred from competing abroad. The Irish team was withdrawn from Berlin.

At least it was thought that the all-conquering Irish Army equestrian team would be immune from the split, and would carry the flag in Berlin, but again politics intervened, and they were also precluded. Ironically, the 1930s was a glorious year of international show-jumping for Ireland, the Army team being almost invincible, sweeping the boards all over Europe. In 1937, they won the Aga Khan Cup outright after winning three in a row at the Dublin Horse Show. Their stars were Major Ged O'Dwyer, and his wonder horse, "Limerick Lace", one of the most feared jumping combinations of that era.

The team were in their prime coming up to the Berlin Olympics, 6/4 was the price quoted in European equestrian circles for Ireland to win the team event in Berlin, and O'Dwyer and teammate Ahern were expected to dominate the individual event.

Even though it is not officially recorded, Taoiseach Éamon De Valera, with his uncompromising stance on "partition", was said to have given his imprimatur to the blanket withdrawal. Disbelief was the lot of O'Dwyer and his teammates. All the work and struggle leading up to the great dream of Olympic glory lay shattered.

To rub salt into the wounds, O'Dwyer was now informed that he was to travel to the Berlin Olympics as a non-participating emissary. This decision was made to appease the Germans and to remove any illusion that the Irish team was withdrawn for idealistic reasons such as abhorrence of fascism.

O'Dwyer, a former O/C 3rd East Limerick Battalion of the IRA, who took part in many dangerous engagements with the enemy during the War of Independence, attended the Olympic events in full uniform of an Irish Officer. Walking the course, he reckoned that, at worst, the Irish would have incurred sixteen, maybe twenty faults. In the event, Germany won the gold with forty-four faults, Holland was placed second with fifty-one and Portugal picked up the bronze medals with a total of fifty-six faults.

For O'Dwyer, this was heartbreak as the Germans won the gold without even jumping well, and the Dutch, who had never finished ahead of the Irish team in any Nations Cup in the previous four years, picked up the silver medals. In the individual contest, any of the Irish team was well capable of lifting the gold, and O'Dwyer and team-mate Ahern particularly would have been extremely fancied.

The vexed issue of the withdrawal was to continue to haunt the team members ever afterwards. According to historian Tom Toomey in his book, *Forgotten Dreams*, O'Dwyer thought strongly of tendering his resignation but was persuaded by Colonel O'Carroll to stay on. The hurt remained for many years, and O'Dwyer eventually resigned from the army.

O'Dwyer stated that as a group, or even individually, they never discussed the matter. The hurt feelings and bitter disappointment were too great. No word of apology or explanation was ever received, and there is no record of any kind in Army equestrian records of the team being withdrawn.

Another to lose out on what in all probability would have been another gold medal in Berlin was hammer-thrower, Pat O'Callaghan, who remained loyal to the NACAI. The year after the Berlin Olympics (he had attended as a spectator), he broke the world record at Fermoy by seven feet. Politics again, it was not ratified on the world stage.

John O'Dwyer – "The Hurlers" (by Mary Gallagher)

John was the oldest of the four sons of Major JG O'Dwyer and his wife, Bridie – formerly O'Brien from Fermoy. He grew up with his siblings, Noel, Frank and Anthony at Ballyclough House, Ballysimon, to where his parents relocated on his father's retirement from the Irish Army. They initially lived for a short period at "Roseneath", Mill Road, Corbally, prior to purchasing the farm in Ballyclough.

He attended the Crescent College in Dooradoyle. In his younger days, he was an accomplished hockey player with Catholic Institute Club and he was a founder member of the Landsdowne Hockey Club. In 1961, he played full-forward on the Monaleen team that won the County Junior Hurling final of that year. In later years, he was an official of the club.

He was married to Joan Neville, an Aer Lingus hostess, who was from Mulgrave Street, Limerick. They lived for a short while in Grange and then bought "The Hurlers" public house in Castletroy where he and Joan reared their seven children: Ged, Nollaig, Siobhan, Kevin, Michael, Niamh and Anthony.

From 1967 to 1971 he was a Fine Gael member of Limerick County Council. He then resigned his seat due to his disagreement with his Party's attitude to the Northern Ireland question, on which he felt a more advanced nationalist line should have been adopted by Fine Gael. He was a distant cousin of John D O'Dwyer, who was a member of Limerick County Council from 1920 to 1928.

John died all too young on 4th September 1979 and is buried in Grange Cemetery with his parents, John G and Bridie, grandparents, John N and Bridget and great grandparents, Nicholas and Mary.

Solas na bFlaitheas ar a ánam dílis.



John O'Dwyer –
The Hurlers (son of
Major J G),
Member of Limerick
County Council.

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