

MIKE AND KITTY O'BRIEN OF LOWER GRANGE

By Minie (Michael) O'Brien

My parents, Mike and Kitty O'Brien, lived all of their married lives at "The Grove", Lower Grange. This particular area of Grange is officially known as "The Village of Sixmilebridge". The name apparently arises from the fact that the distance in miles from the Old Abbey—now in ruins—situated in this area, to the Cistercian Abbey in Manister is exactly six miles along the Camogue River bank.

Mike O'Brien was born on 29th November 1923 in Ballingoola, prior to moving to Grange – the oldest in the family of Ann and Stephen O'Brien. Sadly, while Mike was still quite young, his mother passed away, leaving his father to care for the children. Mike, being the oldest, took on the responsibility of caring for his siblings, Lily, John and Bridie, who was only eight years old at that sad time. He attended Grange National School where I am told that Mike was often asked to read for the class; such was his command of the English language. As was the norm in those days, only very few attended secondary school or progressed to third level education. There was no "free education" in those days, so when Mike reached the age of fourteen, he progressed to the 'University of Life'.

Initially, he worked with the farming community, and it was while working at Wilkinsons in Ballysally, Caherelly that he met and married the love of his life,



Mike O'Brien on his pony and cart – typical of olden times.

Kitty Keogh. Kitty's parents ran the post office there at that time. He later worked at Barrys in Shanabhalla, and for many years he managed a farm in Grange for Kitty Shinnors, whose husband, Jim, had died at a very young age, leaving her to provide for and educate their four young children.

He later worked at Banogue Creamery in Skule until its closure in 1981. He then worked

in the Mitchelstown Stores in Drombanna and on the closure of this branch, Mike was transferred to Ardnacrusha to work in the store there. This store was some considerable distance from his home, but this was no problem to Mike as, having acquired his treasured Honda motorbike, the distance was no object. He remained there until his retirement.

Mike and Kitty settled in Grange after they married and lived with Mike's father, Stephen. They had two sons, Pat and me, and from then on Kitty would always be affectionately referred to as "Mother". Both Kitty and Mike were very conscious of the importance of education, ensuring that having finished at national school, we progressed to second level and third level education. It was a great sense of pride for both parents when I secured employment with Limerick County Council and when my brother, Pat, started work with GWS.



Bridie Power (nee O'Brien), sister of Mike O'Brien.

If the saying "he rose at the crack of dawn" could be applied to anyone, it must surely be to Mike who was literally up every morning at that time. There was many a time when the local boys and girls returning from a dance in Bruff, Dromkeen or The Fog in Ballysimon met Mike on his way to the cows on his pony and cart. With the cows milked and milk delivered to the creamery, Mike would then start the 'day job'. Meanwhile, Kitty at home cared for us and also for Stephen in his later life. Among many of her chores was the preparation of the milk churns; these had to be scalded with boiling water and washed with soda – no chemicals to worry about in those healthy days.

It was while working in Caherelly that Mike joined the Ballybricken GAA hurling club, and he hurled with that team for a number of years. Mike always had a keen interest in sport, especially hurling, so it was little wonder then that we, his sons, played hurling and later golf. I had the honour of being Captain of Ballyneety Golf Club in 2003. It was also a great source of pride for Mike that his grandnephew, Brian Begley, played for the County Limerick hurling team of which Mike was an avid supporter.

Horses were another great interest of Mike's and when 'red tape' dictated that the joy of outdoor milking was to be replaced by clinical milking parlours, Mike sold off his cows and began to breed ponies and horses for show jumping and

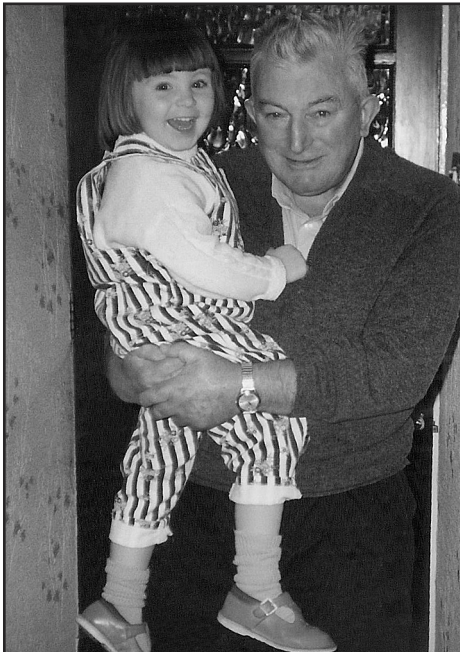
gymkhana events. He sold these on to others, and they were to bring many a rosette to several of their owners. One could always sense that another great source of pride for Mike was that throughout his adult life he was a member of the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association and was conferred with the Golden Pioneer Pin by the Bruff Branch of the organisation.

Mike and Kitty enjoyed their retirement for many years and spent many happy hours in their vegetable and flower gardens. Lilies were their speciality, and for many summers they kept the churches in Ballybricken and Grange supplied with these beautiful flowers. At Grange Church, their lilies complemented the beautiful array of flowers so lovingly provided by Moira Dillon all year round.

Sadly, Mike fell into bad health in the last couple of years of his life and died on 29th December 2008. His death left a huge void in our family. Kitty lived on in the home in Grange, to where she had come to live as a young bride in 1955, until her death on 6th March 2012. They are both laid to rest with Mike's parents, Ann and Stephen and his brother, John, in Grange Churchyard.



Kitty and Mike O'Brien outside their home.



Solas Na Blaitheas Orthú.

Mike O'Brien and granddaughter Marie.