

MEMORIES OF GRANGE AND PEOPLE

By Pat Clancy: Compiled from the Memoirs of John G Clancy (1914-1994)

In 1982, my uncle, John G (Jack) Clancy, who resided at Doneraile, County Cork, for many years, penned memories of his youth spent in Grange. He was affectionately known to the Clancy family and others, as Jack. Jack died on 6th January 1994 – aged 80 years. He spent fourteen years of his working life in the membership of An Garda Síochána up to his resignation in 1949. He served at several Garda Stations in the Waterford/Kilkenny Division. The following is, for the most part, taken from his written memoir.

John G (Jack) of Doneraile, brother to Egan of Lower Grange, Jim of Limerick and Bridie (Mrs Bill Madden, Upper Grange), was the oldest son of Paddy Clancy, the first Labour TD elected to Dáil Éireann to represent County Limerick following the Irish Civil War. Paddy was a brother of George (Seoirse) Clancy, Gaelic scholar, who, while serving as Mayor of Limerick, was murdered by forces of the British crown in 1921.

Jack recalled that his uncle, Egan Clancy (1889-1933), played on the neighbouring parish of Fedamore hurling teams up to his departure to the USA in 1915. He also represented his county, Limerick. Jack remembered his own hurling days with Fedamore, prior to leaving his native village for Dublin in 1934.

His uncle, Egan Clancy, continued to play the game of hurling in the USA, winning many honours and medals. He also wrote for *The Boston Irish News*. Early in 1933, he became paralysed following the removal of a stomach tumour. He attributed this to an injury sustained during a hurling game between Limerick and Cork at The Mardyke (Cork), a year before his departure to the USA. He died on March 28th, 1933.

Jack's Uncle Egan's wife was Agnes (nee Browne) of Wexford descent, whom he met and married in the USA. Agnes visited Grange in July 1935 and remained in Ireland for over six months. Egan had requested Agnes to visit his father and other family members.

While in Grange, Agnes paid special attention to the young Egan, Jack's brother and later father of Pat, Mary and Ned Clancy. Before Agnes left to return to the USA, she left with young Egan, over forty medals and tie pins, won by or awarded

to her husband. Jack recalled that these trophies were amongst the most beautiful he had ever seen, in particular, a *Cardinal Gold Tie Pin*. She also left him a gold tie pin, constructed to show a pair of crossed hurleys with a ball in the middle.

It was said, according to Jack, that his Uncle Egan was the hurler who introduced the 'solo run', with the ball on the hurley, long before the days of Christy Ring. Jack mentioned Mick Mackey (Ahane) as well, a famous Limerick hurler. Understandably, while acknowledging the greatness of both Ring and Mackey, he lauded his fellow county man in particular.

Jack recalled that Fr Patrick O'Neill, Parish Priest of Bruff, later to become Bishop of Limerick, was a well-known athlete in his younger days, being a champion hurdler. At that time, the O'Neill family resided at what has been the home of Tony Barry and his family for many years. Jim Donnelly, one of the greatest pipers in



Jack (John G) Clancy crafting a new hurley from a piece of ash tree.

Munster, lived in Grange Village. When Jim died, his pipes transferred to the Keane family in Limerick City, who themselves were accomplished and well-known pipers. A family named Moriarty, who were renowned surgeons in their time, lived in a 'V' shaped house in the village, and family members are interred in the graveyard at Grange Church. (Mary Kate Normoyle resided at the said house for many years). A great tobacco business family, Spillanes from Limerick City, are also resting in the same churchyard, he recalled.

Jack mentioned that the Behan family, renowned for song, music and dance, were no longer to be found in the locality. Jack remembered Maurice Behan, Postman, who lived close to where he (Jack) was born and reared. One day, Maurice died suddenly after returning home from his post round in the locality. Maurice was expert at playing the wooden flute – people travelled many miles to hear him. When Jack knew Maurice, he had

fourteen or fifteen musical instruments of different notations, and he was an expert in each one. Maurice would be found seated on a large stone outside the entrance to his home on most days from two o'clock in the afternoon until supper time, giving a un-dreamed-of musical exhibition. The Behan family were musical and a sister of Maurice was his equal, on the melodeon.

In the 1920s and 1930s, according to Jack, long before *Ceoltóras* came into being, such Irish music was played in and around Grange, Lough Gur, Cahercorney and Ballybricken localities. Music sessions were regularly held at different houses in the parish and adjoining parishes, at which the finest Irish set dancers and musicians were in attendance. The house *Cheilidhe* went on until dawn. Jack recalled such homes, including those of Mrs Elizabeth Ryan, Old Road; Jack Fehily, Ballingoola Road and John Aherne on the New Line. West of the parish, Jack Mulqueen's home was visited periodically to ascertain how the dance was progressing.

The Clancy family operated a coach building and general carpentry business in the village, where a variety of coaches were assembled and polished. Wheel repairs and maintenance were also undertaken. Jack bemoaned the fact that the Clancy business no longer existed there.

Jack had memories of the handball alley, "one of the finest to be found anywhere", located close to what were the ruins of the former Clancy workshop. The alley was located within a short distance of the Camogue River or "Hurl River, as it was usually described". Said Jack, *I played in many a tournament [handball] in the same alley, whose banks and walls were packed to capacity, free of charge, on Sundays, with people from adjoining parishes enjoying the skills of the players, who were heart and soul, involved in the game.* Jack went on to recall his last tournament in 1933 when he partnered his uncle, also Jack. They played against the partnership of Johnny Flavin and Bill Madden ("now my brother-in-law") in the tournament final. The Clancy duo lost the final, *through my fault, as I tried to butt the ball, which instead, hit the alley floor first, thus leaving us the runners up.* The term "butt" in the game of handball is applied to the outcome achieved when a player hits the ball against the alley wall at a point just above the floor, and the ball rolls out along the floor of the alley, thus prohibiting an opponent from returning it.

The ball alley, as well as being a sports venue, was a social place where people convened to chat. Youngsters played handball earlier in the day as older men tended to play later, especially during the long summer evenings after the children had gone home. Monday evening was a great time for gossip when events of the weekend just gone were very topical. For example, there was great interest in finding out "who met who" and "who was with who" at the dances! Occasionally, John Harty, a well-known personality, produced his mouth-organ and played a few tunes. Happy times!

Jack recalled that the Clancy public house was no longer in operation but The Hamlet, once in the ownership of the Madden family, was still in operation. The forge, a lucrative business, run by the Madden family, remained a business in good order. The post office was being operated by the Bulfin family, cousins of the Clancy family of the locality.

Regarding the old forge, Jack recalled Michael Madden and his sons, carrying on their trade there. Jack, in his boyhood days, often visited the forge, and sitting on a tin bucket on the hob, listened to *Old Mike* singing the songs learned during his own youth. Mike was musically minded, with a great sense of humour as well. It was in the forge that Jack smoked his first cigarette, given to him by Mike, allegedly with the expectation that Jack would become ill after a “few pulls”, to Mike’s amusement. Jack didn’t become sick, became a smoker, but finally quit the habit in 1978. He acknowledged that Mike Madden, as he was known to the youth of the parish, was inspirational to the many who stormed his forge to listen to his songs. Mike was a sad loss when he died on 16th September 1955, at the ripe old age of 85 years.

As recalled by Jack, March to September was the “open coursing” season. Open coursing involved a hare, in its own environment, a wide open space, being pursued by a greyhound(s). During this time of year, it was the Sunday after-dinner routine for younger people to assemble with their elders and to then set out for the ‘Corcass’ lands of Ballycullane, facing the hill of Fedamore, in pursuit of hares. Jack named Mike Connolly, (owner of the farm at the time of the coursing, which in 1982, at the time of Jack’s writing, was owned by Willie Carmody), Jack O’Connell of Grange Hill and Jack O’Donovan of Grange Village, as being principals involved in organising the hare pursuits.

Jack O’Donovan was frequently the appointed “slipper” (the person holding two dogs, awaiting release). As soon as a hare was located – men, bush beaters and dogs, drew to a halt. The slipper then adjusted the straps attached to the hounds and, when he was ready, raised a hand by way of a signal to the nearest “beater” to raise the hare for the “course”. The beater then approached the hare who would instinctively spring up and run, usually heading in a southerly direction, with the released hounds in pursuit. As many as four runs would be accomplished in a day’s coursing, during which it was very unusual for a hare to be killed, such is the speed and agility of those glorious wild animals.

An old-timer, Owen Dillon, attended the coursing in good and bad weather with his dog, *Lough Dearg Boy*. Dick O’Donnell attended with a dog or two, as did the Flavin brothers, John and Tom. Tommy Ryan, known as *The Cuckoo* also attended and kept the crowd in good humour.