

No. 150—JOHN MALONE Of South Liberties

(By Seamus O'Ceallaigh)

JOHN MALONE, of Dooradoyle, was first captain of the South Liberties hurling club and held that position for six of the most eventful years in the long existence of the Club, the foundation of which dates to the very early days of the G.A.A.

Born exactly a hundred years ago (he died in 1934), Jack was from his early manhood probably more closely associated with hurling than any other person of his age and time.

Long before the founding of the G.A.A. an ancient type of hurling was practised in the district, and games were played at Loughmore more than four score years ago, under olden rules, that attracted big crowds and widespread interest.

These gatherings were on the decline as Jack Malone grew to manhood, but he soon took a kindly interest in the hurling code and with a few other enthusiasts kept the sparks alive that were later fanned to such bright life when the founding of the G.A.A. sent the clarion call throughout the land.

AN ALL-DAY CONTEST.

The first-known contest in which Jack participated was a challenge between North Cork and the lads from the Southern Liberties of Limerick City. It was an all-in affair, with the game set in motion on the commons of Rathkeale early one Sunday morning.

The great struggle waged all day, and only finished when falling light made further play impossible. The Limerick lads had their opponents on the outskirts of Adare by that time and were declared winners.

This success attracted such numbers to the playing of the game in the district that it was found possible shortly afterwards to play a match between selected teams from the area—one side, under John Fitzgerald, of Rosbrien, facing another, led by Michael Sheedy of Ballysheedy, for what proved a most exciting tussle. This pair called to their respective sides, alternately, man for man, and with equal numbers, and rough and ready rules, a great battle was the outcome. It is not recorded which side won but the enthusiasm generated on the occasion helped to keep hurling very much alive in the area.

STARTING OF G.A.A. CLUBS.

With the founding of the G.A.A. and the enactment of proper rules clubs sprang up everywhere. Around Newtown, Clarina, the famous old Phan of Campaign Club had its headquarters, from which Jack Malone, and many more from his neighbourhood, formed their own club, named the "Shamrocks." In the city, the leading club was St. Michael's drawn from members of the St. Michael's Temperance Society.

St. Michaels and Shamrocks played the first game under modern rules, when they lined out at Rosbrien, the result being a draw. Jack Malone was the Shamrocks' cul baife that day. The replay took place in the Island

Field, where Shamrocks proved victorious by the only goal of the game.

Shamrocks were then challenged by a team called Kincora, and the game was played at Ballina, Co. Tipperary, where the home side proved victorious. A return match took place at Rosbrien, where the result was unchanged. That contest aroused remarkable interest and enthusiasm and clubs soon sprang up all over the city, some twenty being affiliated in a short time.

THE SOUTH LIBERTIES.

Shamrocks suffered in the formation of the new combinations—and lost Jack Malone and seven other players to the South Liberties Club, which soon found a place amongst the leading teams in the County.

The "Liberties" had the distinction of representing Limerick against Cork in what was the first real inter-County game under G.A.A. rules. Played in Limerick, it was a runaway success for the home side. Prominent with the Shannonsiders on that occasion were two then regarded as regular "speed merchants"—Johnny Coll and John Hales.

Although the old time nurling ball was almost double the weight of a present day sliotar the participants then got remarkable distance to their strokes. In one particular competition at the Markets Field, for rising and striking the ball, Jack Rahilly, of the South Liberties, struck the missile the full length of the field, plus the adjoining roadway, and it was picked up in the old Garryowen Brewery yard, which then occupied the opposite side of the road. And it is on record that captain Jack Malone, on another occasion, put a ball from the goal he defended right over the goal line at the other end.

TOUGH AND THRILLING ENCOUNTER.

One of the toughest and most thrilling encounters ever fought on a Limerick Gaelic field was the 1888 County final, decided at Croom on May 15th, 1888. Back play was superb on that memorable occasion, and the ball scarcely crossed the end lines during the hour until about eight minutes from the final whistle, when Con Sheehan of the "Liberties" struck a high ball out of reach of the Murroe backmen, which was a point and the only score made in sixty minutes unforgettable hurling.

Jack Malone captained the "Liberties" in five County finals. They lost the 1887 decider to Murroe, won the next three—against Murroe, Caherline and Kilfinane respectively; and lost number five, Treaty proving their masters, at Loughmore. They beat Caherline, 1-2 to 0-3, to win their second title—the exact score by which they were themselves beaten in the first County final, when Murroe triumphed 1-2 to 0-3 and one forfeit point. In 1890, the final was almost an exact replica of the 1888 struggle for supremacy, with South Liberties taking their third title with the only score of the game—a point.

THE PARNELL SPLIT.

Things political were in a bad way in Ireland during 1891, and the Parnell split did considerable damage to the G.A.A., still struggling to establish itself in all the corners of the country. Many famous clubs were disbanded and those remaining were only able to carry on with the aid of members of some of the clubs that had gone out of existence.

South Liberties had a very changed side, when they lined out against Treaty, and the old champions went out, 2-1 to 1-0—never to win the premier county crown again.

But although the "Liberties" dropped from the senior picture, the old club remained steadfast in its loyalty to the G.A.A., and now boasts an association with that organisation that very few clubs can claim.

Jack Malone had much to do with so securely laying the foundations that have brought forth such rich reward since. Always keen on encouraging the youth, he recruited them to the junior team belonging to the club and did everything possible for their welfare and progress.

TUG-O-WAR SPORT.

Another sport in which Jack excelled was tug o' war, and he figured in many great contests against the teams then scattered over many parts of the County. In this, too, Liberties were prominent, and many honours came to them.

In the administrative affairs of the Association Jack took a prominent part, and it is a tribute to his interest and worth that when a second generation of the Liberties took the field, he was one of the delegates representing them on the County Board.

In the national life of his time, Jack Malone, too, took a prominent part. He was Chairman of the local branch of the National League for many years, and helped in having many evicted tenants restored to their holdings.

UNIVERSALLY ADMIRE.

Jack was physically a splendid type of manhood, with amiable disposition and sublime characteristics. He possessed a charm which made him universally admired but it must not be taken that his peaceful and quiet disposition indicated timidity where occasion arose. One such incident is often recalled by some of his old time friends. During the course of a rather heated debate at a County G.A.A. Convention one of the delegates offered to fight the best man in the South Liberties. Jack was instantly on his feet, and in dignified tones he replied: "I happen to be the only member of the South Liberties present and I accept your challenge."

FRIENDSHIP RESTORED.

Malone was grimly determined; the challenger was not quick to notice the change from the quiet, harmless looking man of other occasions, and quickly apologised. Friendship was immediately restored, as was usual in those days, when the heat arising from spirited and sporting conflict was soon forgotten and the passage of time only helped to ripen the friendship of old acquaintance, which can never be forgotten.