

# Paddy O'Meara - Lorrha Hurling Veteran

by Seamus J. King

Paddy O'Meara is probably the oldest living hurler to play for Lorrha and Dorrha. He's not quite sure of when he played his first game with the club but believes it may have been about 1945. There was no team at the time in the parish but Fr. Cleary, who was a curate in Terryglass at the time and had developed a good juvenile team, came to Mick Cronin for a challenge game. A makeshift team was put together with Paddy on it and his younger brother, Sean, in goals, and the game was played in Ballinderry. Lorrha were no match for Terryglass and were beaten back to Carigahorig. Fr. Cleary gave them a talk afterwards in the course of which he said that the only one of the opposition he would have picked was the goalkeeper! This didn't go down very well with the older fellows on the team.

At a later stage a juvenile team was formed and Lorrha played in the under-15 rural championship. They played Borrisokane in Ms Grub's field beside the river on the road between Carrigahorig and Fortmoy Cross, and Lorrha won.

There was no hurling field in the parish at the time. Not until the 1970s, when the club purchased a little over five acres in Moatfield for £650, a purchase in which Paddy was very much involved as club secretary. In fact he became one of the five trustees appointed at the time and remained one for forty-one years, Prior to that various fields were used on a temporary basis, most notably at Blakefield and the Pike. Other fields used at different times were Jim Moylan's field near Kilcarron, Reddan's of Cullagh, Danny Neills, Goosie Island (O'Meara's of Curraghera), which may have been the venue for the county trial for the North Tipperary team to play South Galway in the first inter-county game at the Phoenix Park in 1886. There were two Pat O'Mearas on the team, one of whom one was the grandfather of Paddy's.

Paddy played his first adult hurling about 1947, when he lined out with the Lorrha juniors. Hurling was booming at the time with no fewer than thirty-five teams affiliating in the North Tipperary junior championship that year. He progressed to senior level in the early 'fifties and had the misfortune to do his cartilage in the second round of the North championship against Kilruane MacDonaghs at Borrisokane. There was little treatment for this injury at the time and the operation was expensive. The North Board and the Lorrha club agreed to fund the operation but Paddy heard of a player who had the operation done and it was a failure. As a result he didn't get it done and it was to cause him endless trouble for the remainder of his playing days.

He continued to play, did a lot of training and played wingback on the very successful team that won the North senior hurling final in 1956. The team went on to lose to Thurles Sarsfields in the county final. Paddy even lined out on the junior football team that lost to Newport in the North semi-final. The promise of a bright future was shattered in the North semi-final against Eire Óg in the 1957 championship, when Lorrha were beaten by 4-9 to 0-2, which was a terrible anti-climax after been North champions the year before. Paddy played corner-back that day. The poor result continued in 1958, when Lorrha went down badly to Borrisokane and Roscrea, with Paddy at corner-back. Because of his knee he didn't play in 1959, and almost decided to give up hurling.

## Transfer to Knockshegowna

Instead he made a major decision to transfer to Knockshegowna. Having been born in Ballingarry, he had connections in the club



Lorrha North SH Champions 1966

Back row, left to right: Jim Lane, Liam King, Wilsy Morris, Mick Liffey, Paddy Madden, Sean O'Meara, Paddy O'Meara, Michael Doyle, Jim Ryan.

Front row, left to right: Gerry Moylan, Peter Hogan, Johnny O'Meara, Noel Lane (capt.), Michael Gleeson, Michael O'Meara (L).

P.S. Michael: Will you ask Shane Brophy about the last two players in the back row. I'm a bit unsure. Seamus)

and was approached by Jackie Delahunty at the end of the year to transfer, as the club needed a couple of players. Paddy decided to move, a decision that wasn't well-received in Lorrha.

He played intermediate with Knockshegowna in 1960. Nine teams affiliated in the championship and Knockshegowna qualified for the final, which was played at Nenagh on August 28, and they defeated Portroe by 6-3 to 3-7. As was the practice at the time the winners of the intermediate played the winners of the junior championship to decide who would represent the division in the county championship. Kilruane were the junior winners and they trounced Knockshegowna in the play-off by 8-2 to 1-3. In fact Kilruane went on to win the county final against Moycarkey and bring the first county final to the parish of Cloughjordan in fifty-eight years.

Playing intermediate with Knockshegowna qualified Paddy for a place on the Tipperary intermediate team in 1961. An All-Ireland intermediate championship was inaugurated that year, in place of the junior. Paddy was picked at right corner back and Tipperary defeated Clare, Waterford and Cork to win the Munster final. This qualified them for the All-Ireland 'home' final against Wexford. Played at Kilkenny on August 13, the game ended in a draw, 5-6 each, after Tipperary lost a ten-point lead. Paddy played at corner-back and, in the match report, the inside back line was regarded as the stoutest line of defence. Wexford won the replay by 4-11 to 3-9 a week later on a day when the Wexford team 'all but ran our lads into the ground with a devastating second-half display.' Paddy was replaced in the second-half when his knee gave up.

He transferred back to Lorrha at the 1961 club adjourned convention and he is listed as a Lorrha club player in the match reports of the Tipperary intermediate team that year. He played wing-back in the senior championship, winning first round against Shannon Rovers but losing to Borrisolkane. In 1962 the first round against Borrisokane was called off. As the referee's report put it "The game was hard and robust and the man seemed to be more important than the ball." (As a result of this row, Lorrha didn't play in Borrisokane for over ten years!) Lorrha lost the replay at Nenagh but got to the semi-final through the loser's group but were beaten by Kilruane. In 1963 Lorrha started well, beating Borrisileigh in the first round, but went down badly to Toomevara in the next round. In 1963 Lorrha defeated Kiladangan and Toomevara before going down to Eire Óg.

Lorrha were improving by the year and they really impressed

in 1965. They beat Kilruane, Toomevara and Roscrea to qualify for the North final, but were beaten by Kilruane, who had qualified through the loser's group, with a late goal on a scoreline of 3-10 to 5-2. Paddy was sorely missed at full-back, having been sent off in the semi-final. At that stage there were quarter finals for runners-up in the North and Mid championships, and Lorrha qualified as losers in the North. They played Carrick Davins at Cashel on October 10 and went down in a high-scoring game by 4-14 to 6-7.

### Great Year

There was better luck in 1966 when they won the North final for the first time since 1956, defeating Toomevara by the smallest of margins, 3-11 to 2-13. In fact Lorrha, captained by Noel Lane, were the favourites and Toomevara nearly created a surprise. The team qualified for the final following victories over St. Flannan's (Kiladangan-Shannon Rovers), a three-game saga against Eire Óg, and Kilruane. Paddy played corner-back in the first game but full-back in the later games. Lorrha received the Frank McGrath trophy for the first time, since it was presented in 1961.

Victory over Golden-Kilfeacle followed in the county quarter-final, before defeat followed against Holycross-Ballycahill in the semi-final on a score of 4-10 to 5-6. A twenty-one yard free by Peter Hogan to draw the game was adjudged wide to the annoyance of Lorrha supporters. As a result the club lodged an objection against Holycross player, Roger Ryan, claiming he was illegal. The county board threw out the objection and Lorrha appealed to the Munster Council, which upheld their appeal and awarded them the match. All of this took five weeks and the county final against Carrick Davins wasn't played until November 6.

The Carrick team won in a canter by 2-12 to 1-3 against a team that was unfit and unsure of itself after a long period of uncertainty. It was an unsatisfactory ending to a great year and unrewarding one for a fine Lorrha team, which had a good chance of winning their first ever county senior hurling championship. It was particularly galling for Paddy, who was nearing the end of his playing career.

There was some consolation when Lorrha won the North junior football title. The championship didn't start until November 26, when Lorrha defeated Eire Óg, with Paddy playing at centre-forward. In the final a week later they defeated Borrisileigh by 0-5 to 1-0. The team went on to win the county semi-final against Moyle Rovers, but were beaten by Clonakenny, 1-7 to 1-5, in the final.

Paddy continued to line out with the Lorrha seniors in 1967, playing at full-back. The team got off to a disastrous start against Moneygall in the first round, losing by 5-9 to 1-6. Entering the losers group they recovered to defeat Kilruane and Newport before exiting the championship against Moneygall in the semi-final. There was one success for the senior hurlers when they won the D. E. Williams senior hurling trophy on September 16, beating Drumcullen by 6-9 to 4-7. This competition had begun five years previously but never finished. On this occasion it was lucky to finish. Scheduled for 6 pm, it didn't get under way until after 7 o'clock and after twenty-five minutes aside, was lucky to end in almost total darkness and a heavy drizzle of rain.

There was little success in 1968. Lorrha lost heavily to Borrisileigh in the first round and to Roscrea in a replay in the losers group. Paddy did have success in football. Playing in goals on the Lorrha junior team, he won a divisional medal when the team defeated Knockshegowna and Borrisileigh to win the North final. Progressing to the county, they caused a sensation when they defeated St. Luke's of Clonmel in the semi-final, before going down in the final to Emly by 3-1 to 1-2 in a game described by the referee 'as scandalous and of the worst possible behaviour.'

The county board introduced the Open Draw in senior hurling for the 1969 championship. Lorrha were drawn against Na Piarisigh (Burgess-Kiladangan) in the first round and won by 8-8 to 6-5. They were badly beaten by Roscrea, 4-21 to 1-3 in their next game. Paddy didn't play in either of these games but turned out in later games against Wild Rovers, Toomevara and Roscrea. Defeat was their lot in the last game against Roscrea. In all, the club played in seven senior games, winning four and



*Paddy O'Meara with his award winning set of horse shoes from his early days as a blacksmith.*



**Tipperary under-21 selectors 1991**

*Left to right: Noel Brown, Mick Minogue, Paddy O'Meara, Billy Carroll, Willie Ryan*

losing three, all of the latter against Roscrea!

Paddy lined out for Lorrha in the first match in the 1970 senior hurling league at Borrisokane against Moneygall, who won by 4-9 to 1-3. He also played at full-forward in junior football in which Lorrha defeated Eire Óg and Inane Rovers, before going down to Newport in the North final. Paddy was still playing senior hurling in 1971. There is a report of him being replaced by P. K. Gleeson in the second round of the county championship against Borrisokane on June 26.

### Regraded

At the North Adjoined Convention of 1972, Paddy O'Meara was one of a number of Lorrha players to be regraded senior to junior. Eighteen teams affiliated in the junior championship and

were divided into two sections. Lorrha lost out to Toomevara in the semi-final by 1-13 to 2-9. This was probably Paddy's last outing for the club.

### Club Management

Paddy got involved in club management towards the end of his hurling career, and also as a selector. He was a selector in 1984, when Lorrha got to the county senior hurling final, only to be beaten by Moycarkey Borris. He was club secretary for a long period 1970-1983, and served as chairman for three years, 1984-1986. He is particularly proud of been club chairman and senior hurling selector in the Centenary Year of the Association. He also served as assistant secretary and assistant treasurer at different times. His great service to club and county was recognised in 2011, when he was presented with a Sean Gael award.

His most impressive period as selector was with the county under-21 team. He was with the team initially for a five-year period between 1980 and 1984 inclusive. During that time Tipperary won All-Irelands in 1980 and 1981. He believes the defeat of the team in 1982 was his worse memory of the period. They had ten of the previous year's winning team and looked good for another All-Ireland, but were well-beaten by Limerick on a wet evening at Limerick in the Munster semi-final. Paddy's fellow selectors in those years were Mick Minogue, Billy Carroll, Phil Lowry and Danny Morrissey. Paddy, together with his fellow-under-21 selectors, was also part of the senior hurling selection group in charge of the Tipperary team that lost to Cork in the 1982 Munster championship.

His second period with the team was also five years, 1989-1993. This period started off on a great note, when they beat Offaly by 4-10 to 3-11 at Portlaoise before an estimated 30,000 people. The game will be ever remembered for the three goals banged in by Dan Quirke in a hectic finish to the first half, which turned a seven-point deficit into a seven-point lead. Paddy had important insight into the Offaly team, having managed them the previous year. The biggest disappointment was the following year at the same venue, when Tipperary were beaten by Kilkenny, 2-11 to 1-11, on a day when the forwards made very poor use of the ball in spite of plenty of possession. There was no success in the following three years and the selectors, apart from Paddy, were Mick Minogue, Noel Browne, Willie Ryan and Vinny Ryan, were replaced after 1993.

### Coach to Many Teams

Paddy has an impressive record in preparing teams in a wide range of clubs. Starting in 1982, while still a selector on the county under-21 team, the county senior team and Lorrha club secretary as well, he was invited to Portumna to help with the junior team. He trained the team to the club's first county title in donkeys years, and it was to be the beginning of the great Portumna achievement, that led to four All-Ireland Club championships.. He was also with Portumna when they won their first county senior hurling title.

Paddy's next team was also across the Shannon, in Abbeyduniry, in 1989. He took charge of the intermediate team, which met Portumna in the county final and won in a replay!

Lusmagh was his next port of call, in 1990, where he managed the senior team. He stayed with them a year, remembers them as a good team, with the Troy brothers, the Berminghams and Joakim Kelly, but had no success.

He spent the next three years with St. Rynaghs and had major success. In 1991 the club won senior and intermediate Offaly titles, beating Lusmagh in the senior final. The seniors went on to lose to the Wexford champions in the Leinster club championship. They did the double again in 1992 and won the Leinster cub championship as well. They lost to Galway champions, Sarsfields, in the All-Ireland semi-final, who went on to beat Toomevara in the All-Ireland. The club had no success in 1993.

Paddy spent 1994 with Coolderry, without success. He was with Seir Kierans in 1995 and 1996, a club with a miniscule population



**Lorrha North SH Champions 1956**

*Back row, left to right: Richard Bracken, Bob Young, Fr. Neylon, Paddy O'Sullivan, Jim O'Meara. Second row, left to right: Fr. Keating, Hubie Hogan, Paddy Guinan, Davy Sullivan, John Moloney Tony Reddin, P. J. Slevin, Paddy Madden, Phil McIntyre, Fr. Corcoran. Third row, left to right: Billy Hogan, Mick O'Meara (B), Paul Slevin, Mick Brophy (capt.), Frank Larkin, Billy Duffy, Joe Molloy, Fintan Spain. Front row, left to right: Batty Harding, Johnny Larkin, Paddy O'Meara, Sean (Snipe) Meara. Inset: Eugene O'Meara, Seamus King. Missing: Paddy O'Meara (Roughan), Dan O'Meara, Jimmy Darcy, Martin Darcy.*

but with outstanding players like the three Dooley brothers, Eugene Coughlan and Kevin Kinahan. They lost to Birr in the 1995 final, which had to be postponed to the following year because of an unplayable pitch in Birr.

He was with Shannon Rovers in 1997, when the club qualified for the intermediate semi-final but were beaten by Knockshegowna, 3-11 to 0-15 at Nenagh on September 11. During his spell with the club he had a serious accident when a horse reared on him during shoeing, smashing him jaw with a kick. He was out cold for twenty hours.

Paddy did find time in a hectic life to get married and he did so in September 1967, when he married Gertrude Feehan from Roscrea. The couple had three children, Catherine, James and Padraig. Sadly, Gertrude passed away in 2016.

#### Paddy's Sporting Achievements

- 1 Munster Intermediate medal 1961
- 1 County junior football medal 1971
- 2 North Senior hurling medals, 1956 & 1966
- 1 North Intermediate medal, 1960 (Knockshegowna)
- 2 North Junior football medals, 1966, 1968

Tipperary Runner-Up, junior 6 mile cross-country medal 1951 (Moneygall)

Tipperary Winner, senior 9 mile cross-country medal 1952 (Moneygall)

### A Full Life

Paddy O'Meara has led a full sporting life, predominantly devoted to hurling, but varied by football and cross-country running as well. In his early days the transport he used to events was mostly the bicycle. All of this physical activity produced a very fit person, who never smoked or drank alcohol. On the field of play he was an uncompromising opponent, who was feared by the opposition. His work as a blacksmith was one of great physical activity as well, whether shoeing horses or working iron, interluded by a bit of farming, all producing a very fit body. Today, at ninety-one years, he is still lean and fit. The bouncing cartilage no longer causes him difficulty, but his major ailment is very poor sight, the result of a car accident at the bridge in Riverstown on his way to a match, and failure to protect his eyes during welding work. He can be proud and satisfied of an active life in which he contributed greatly to his family, his community and the wider world.