

THE “BARLOW” O’DONNELL FAMILY

By Nancy and Mike O’Donnell

The “Barlow” O’Donnell family of Lower Grange has been well-known and respected throughout the parish and beyond for many decades. Richard O’Donnell died in a tragic accident in 1964. He was a renowned nationalist. Present at Caherguillamore House on that fateful night in December 1920, he was imprisoned in Dartmoor for a period by the Crown. His son, Mike Barlow, is one of the most liked characters ever to come from Grange. Mike is known far and wide. It is appropriate, therefore, that his life memories are recalled in this article. Prior to Mike’s story appears a tribute to her parents, Josie and Richard, by Mike’s sister, Nancy.

By Nancy O’Donnell

My dad, Richard O’Donnell, was born in 1895 to parents Michael O’Donnell and Mary Russell. Michael and Mary O’Donnell immigrated to America and spent some years there. They came back to Ireland and acquired divided lands in Grange, where they lived their lives and raised a family of eight. Richard’s great passions in life were hurling and Politics. He was always known as “Barlow”, called after a hurler who came from Wexford or Tipperary. Many people had nicknames at that time. My dad hurled for Bruff and Fedamore. We first find Barlow in Fedamore colours in the 1911 county senior hurling final, when Ballingarry were the victors. The following year the tables were turned, and Fedamore beat Ballingarry, 4-4 to 2-2.

Barlow figured on the Limerick team that trounced Munster title holders, the renowned Toomevara Greyhounds, at Dungarvan in the opening round of the Munster championship in 1914. The score was 8-0 to 3-1. With Barlow on that team were Con Scanlon – Captain, Egan Clancy, Mick Harrington, Ned Treacy, Mick Burke, Stevie Gleeson, Tom and Martin Hayes, Mick Clifford, Tom and Paddy Keane, J Clifford, Bill Gleeson, Michael O’Donnell, P Power, M Collins and J Whealan.

Fedamore was suspended from the GAA following their refusal to play the 1915 county senior hurling final. They joined the National Association of Gaelic Athletic Clubs, then a rival of the GAA. They won the all-Ireland championship of that

Association, beating Wexford by 1-1 to 0-1 at Wexford Park on 10th December 1916. On 2nd September 1917, Limerick beat Wexford by 5-2 to 1-1 at the Markets Field, Limerick, in the All-Ireland senior hurling final. Barlow O'Donnell captained the Shannonsiders. The other members of that team were J Whealan, J McNamara, M Harrington, J Keane (Fedamore), T Mangan, M Mangan, P Mangan, M Mullane, J O'Shea, M Feely (Croom), Tom Grady, P Keogh (Ballybricken), D Mahon (South Liberties) and J Clune (Sarsfields).

That team had notable success in the final of the County Infirmary Cup in 1913, in which they beat Castleconnell. One of the highlights of that great game was the exchanges between Barlow and Jack Keane.

Like many great Gaels, my dad was in the thick of the fight for national independence and among the notable engagements in which he figured was the siege of Kilmallock Barracks. He was also at the dance at Caherguillamore House on St Stephen's night in 1920 when the British raided and took some men prisoner. My dad was taken overseas to Dartmoor Prison where he spent twelve months. His prison number was 1659.

Ironically, Josie Brennan from Lough Gur was at the dance that night, and she tried to protect some of the men, my father included. Even though Josie and my father were not involved romantically at the time; some years later she married my father.

At the end of troubled times, Dad went back hurling for Bruff, who reached the senior hurling final in 1923. Finally, he put away his hurley in 1925, but afterwards he was a familiar figure at hurling matches over the remainder of his life.

Dad also followed the gun, and we had rabbit and pheasant as a regular diet. Charlie Hayes of Lough Gur and my dad swam the length of Lough Gur – a feat seldom accomplished.

With the cows milked, Mam would bring down the fiddle and Aunt Bridget O'Dwyer would arrive with her accordion, and we were entertained for a few hours with music and song from Uncle Sonny, Bridget and Dad. We were frequently joined by members of the Maher, Madden, Purcell and Bourke families. We would conclude the night with Sullivans lemonade and homemade scones. Happy days in Grange!

My dad died on 18th August 1964 due to a road accident.

By Mike Barlow O'Donnell

I am a proud Grange man. I was born there on 12th December 1936, a Christmas gift to my parents, Richard and Josie O'Donnell. My mother's maiden name was Brennan, and she came from Lough Gur. As it happens, the O'Donnells came from Lough Gur as well to occupy land in Grange acquired from the Land Commission. There were two farms involved: the farm that I grew up on, "Hill House" and another known as "The Yard" (which was owned by my grandfather's brother,



L-R: Minnie, Michael, Mary, Richard and Bridget O'Donnell outside Hill House, Grange, the O'Donnell family home.

Tom), now owned by Paddy Wallace and family. Previously, most of that land was in the ownership of the Dixon family, landlords. Over the years, additional land was purchased in order to enlarge "Hill House" farm.

Since I retired from farming some years ago, I have resided at Maria Goretti Nursing Home near Kilmallock. Prior to moving to my current home, I spent a short amount of time at a rest home in Athlacca. I am happy and satisfied with my existing arrangements, and I live a contented life. I have no regrets regarding my retirement from farming. I farmed for a number of decades, and I walked away from that life with no regrets.

I was delighted to hear that Grange Parish had engaged in writing a parish book and even more so when my first cousin, Mary Kate Gallagher (nee O'Dwyer), asked if I would consider writing memories of my life and living in Grange. Mary Kate's mother and my father were sister and brother. I wish to thank Mary Kate for helping me to assemble my story.

I have two sisters and one brother. Mary is a year older than me. Jimmy is younger than me, and Nancy is the youngest of the family.

I attended Grange National School where a number of teachers taught me: Mrs Alice Power (nee Conway), Master Lynch, Mrs O'Donnell and Alice Greene from Meanus, who married Mike Punch. Mrs Power's husband died a young man as a result of a motor accident at Pike Cross. This happened before my school days. I left national school after fifth year owing to the need for additional help on the



Fedamore – Limerick County Hurling Champions 1913. *Front row L-R:* S Gleeson, J Whelan. *Middle row:* P Keane, J Clifford, R O'Donnell, E Tracy (Capt), W Gleeson, M O'Donnell, P Power, M Collins. *Back row:* Rev Fr Dillon, M Clifford (Goalkeeper), M Harrington, M Bourke, Rev Fr Leahy (President), T Hayes, T Keane, M Hayes, Rev Fr O'Neill.

farm. I wasn't taught about farming at school, so I had to learn quickly on the job. My father said, "Do it like this", and I did. In my school class or maybe one class removed were Anthony Bourke, Mick O'Dwyer, Dan O'Donnell, Pat Hogan, John Hogan, John O'Dwyer and Martin Sullivan.

In 1964, my father died in a road accident on the New Line Road in Grange. As a result of his death, I was thrown headlong into farming to assist my mother. My father's death was a terrible shock to my mother and us children. He died as a result of being struck by a motor car being driven by a priest on his way to Kildorrery in Co Cork. He was in the prime of his life at the time. I have often wondered over the years how it happened. I took it badly at the beginning, but I had to get on with life. Following his death, my mother got on with the business of farming, and I was obliged to take over much of what was previously done by my father. My brother, Jimmy, was in England, but he came back to Ireland some months after the accident, and he set up his home in Croom.

My father was a renowned hurler and my sister, Nancy, has written up the details for this book. She has also mentioned that he was a good singer as was my Uncle Sonny, who played the concertina. "She moved through the fair" was a favourite tune and song of Sonny's. Even though Nancy has written about it, I must mention that my mother was an accomplished violin player. My sister, Mary, is a very good singer.

I never married, though I had a couple of possible opportunities that I didn't pursue. Running the farm and looking after my widowed mother consumed much of my attention. Most of my spare time went on hurling and rugby. I must say that I

often wondered over the years and even still at times if remaining single was a mistake, but I am around long enough to know that there is no turning back the clock. Of course, single status brought its advantages too, and I am contented with my lot. One September in the early 1970s, I went to Lisdoonvarna for two nights with another Grange man. We laughed about this afterwards – the couple of days were spent in a haze of porter drinking with very little food consumed and sleeping rough – not a formula for finding a farmer's wife! That was my only visit to the Lisdoonvarna festival.

I love the game of hurling. I played a lot, and I enjoyed the skill as well as the rough and tumble of the sport. I doubt that I was as good as my father, but one thing in my favour was that I was afraid of nothing. I recall a game – Grange versus Knockainey at their pitch (probably in the mid-1970s or a little later) when we won a very tough battle. I played in the full-back position, and there was a great tussle between Albert Madden and myself. The Grange team had players from several families from Lower and Upper Grange. In earlier years, I played on the Bruff team with good hurlers such as Willie Ryan, Dan Dillon, Anthony Burke, Mick O'Dwyer, Aidan Raleigh and Mike Moroney.

I played rugby with the Bruff Club. In fact, I was a founder member. I recall the early days of the club and playing in the number five position in 1969 before the great Paul O'Connell was born. Philly Carroll played at that time, a formidable front-row forward. Of course, he was renowned on the hurling field as well. We played Charleville away in a game that didn't go the full distance owing to a fracas, mostly fist-work. David O'Keeffe of Grange was also involved in forming the Bruff Club. Seoirse Clancy was involved in the club and, of course, his son, George, is now a top-flight international referee. I have watched some games on television in which George was referee or assistant referee. It is a great feeling of pride to see a Grange man performing well in such positions of responsibility.

In later years, I attended rugby games abroad in England, Scotland, Wales and France. These were great and enjoyable occasions in good company – a few pints were consumed, but there was no blackguarding. I will leave it to others to tell a few innocent stories about those excursions – but not for this book!

Looking back over the years, there are a few people or characters that I recall in particular. I remember Kate Purcell (nee Blake), a lovely lady who lived near our



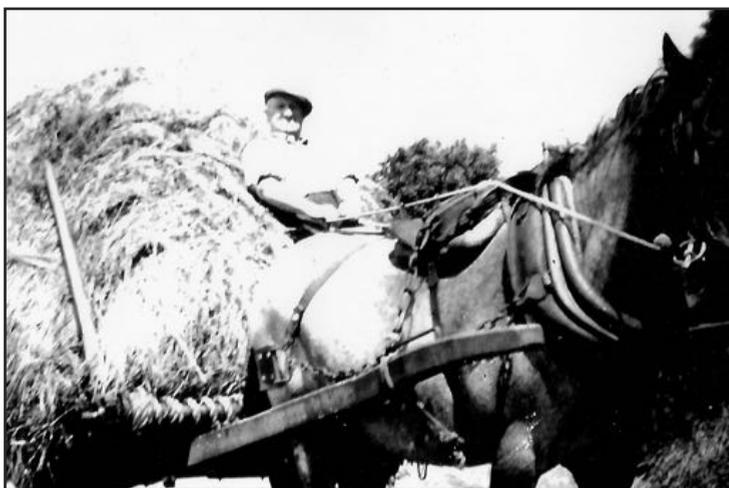
Mike Barlow O'Donnell, Pat O'Donnell, Thomas Dineen, Tim O'Donnell and Charlie Bourke.

home with her husband, Jim; daughter, Biddy and grandchildren. Jim cycled to and from work in Newcastlewest. Martin was my age, and we hurred together. Martin worked for John Ryan of Ballingoola for a while before going to England. Monsie died in a tragic accident while employed by Limerick County Council. Pat Purcell married Gretta Higgins. Patricia also moved to England. Charles now lives in Waterford.

Delia Ryan lived in the house that was subsequently the home of Paddy Harty. Delia looked after a well, situated across the road from her, and she would not allow anybody near it. She drew buckets of cool water from the well to quench the thirst of horses drawing hay from the Corcass during summertime. In those days, many farmers drew hay from the Corcass including several from the Lough Gur locality: family names come to mind, such as Murnane, Carroll and Daly.

Jim Kirby, the father of Sadie, lived on the Old Road. He was a great man to tell a yarn and to drink a pint of porter at The Hamlet. However, he never missed work

and would be first there each morning. He worked at the Croker Estate for a while and later for the Flavin family. Jim Madden was a great blacksmith. I remember taking horses to the forge to be shod by Jim.



Dick O'Donnell drawing hay from the Corcass.

Wheels were banded at the forge and gates were made. Speaking of characters, one of the most well-known was John Harty, best known as “The Wedger”. He spent a number of years in England where he learned to work with leather. He had a disability that impaired his walking, but this never curtailed his activities too much. He would be seen on his bicycle with his walking stick accompanying him anywhere he went. John liked a drink or two, after which he would tell a few yarns and sing songs. I liked him, and we got on very well.

In my younger years, I cycled to sports events with others. I remember one year going to Knockane near Killeely. A number of us including Denis and Davy Browne (later to become priests) and Mick O'Dwyer attended. As Mick and I lined up for the under fourteen one hundred yards race, the starter told me to move back to the back – I was tall for my age, and he thought I had an unfair advantage.



Dick O'Donnell with his wife Josie (nee Brennan).

In any event, Mick O'Dwyer won the race, he was a good runner but maybe not as good as his brother, John. The Browne duo in other age categories also won that day. On another day, I competed at a school sports day in Bruff. Master Lynch had trained the Grange team. I won the high jump after clearing a height of four feet. People often wondered how I was very tall as my father was a short man – I must have taken my height from the Brennan family.

I cycled to dances at many locations with my pals. I was a good dancer. I went to Dromkeen, Bruff and Kilmallock and to "The Fog" in Ballysimon. In Limerick, I attended dances at The Stella, Cruise's Hotel and the Glentworth Hotel. I learned to dance in Bruff where I danced most frequently.

In those times, you could leave your bicycle unattended, and it would be safe. At Bruff, we frequently left our bicycles in the garden of Jimmy Connors. Jimmy was the father of Charlie Connors (school teacher at Herbertstown) who lived in Grange for a period. The "Coll" in Bruff minded bicycles during dances, but he charged for the service. There was no drinking prior to dances. In my case, I didn't take alcohol until later years. The fact that my father was totally opposed to alcohol had probably some influence on my earlier life's abstinence. Thank God, I never smoked tobacco.

I enjoyed going to The Hamlet for a few pints, but I was never a big drinker. It was all about chatting with friends and neighbours, and there was never a shortage of topics – between hurling, rugby and of course, farming. I liked a sing-song and was known to sing a few verses myself. I had a few in my repertoire including, *The poor poor farmer* and *The broken hearted farmer*, *Dan O'Hara*, which were very appropriate! Here in Kilmallock I still sing the odd song. A lady, Lisa Finn, who is a great singer, visits to sing for us and I join in with her.

The mention of The Hamlet reminds me of the handball alley that was on Bulfin's land. It was a venue for big social gatherings and many a good game of handball was played there.

I also partook in amateur poetry reciting with a group who regularly met at Reardon's Pub in Holycross. One of my contributions was *I will go with my father a ploughing*.



Jimmy and Sonny O'Donnell.

I remember the times when our family, like many others, travelled to Mass in Grange by horse and trap. During Mass, the horse would be tethered to an iron ring set into the wall on the stream side of the road. Many families had their own ring. Many years after the practice ceased, I could still identify the ring used by my father. I think the rings are no longer there. Thomas Bulfin of Lower Grange also travelled by horse and trap. He had a great horse; he was a flyer. Thomas always left his trap at the Clancy house, a distance from the church. He trained horses for trap work, and he was superb at it.

There was very little farm machinery during my younger days. We hadn't a tractor on the farm while my father was alive – it was much later. I remember going to the Fedamore Creamery for my father on an ass (*donkey*) and car. In my own time as a farmer, I drew hay by tractor from my land in the Corcass. This was tough and hazardous work when the land became wet or even flooded, as it did in the



Nancy and Mary O'Donnell.

years prior to drainage of the Camogue River. Flooding could be so bad that you could almost swim there. Richie Power was known to climb on a wynd of hay and dive into the floodwater. Others did this too – a trip to the seaside in those days was out of the question. If history had taken a different course, I might have been an air traffic controller instead of a farmer! It was widely believed that the Corcass area was considered as a possible location for an airport, but it was shelved owing to the cost of removing a local hill. Some people maintained that the decision to

locate the airport at Rineanna (*Shannon Airport*) was a political manoeuvre.

I participated in set dancing at Grange School and travelled far and wide to events. Ivan Ryan was a great teacher and organiser, and he was responsible for many significant wins in competitions.

I had many great friends and great neighbours in Grange, too many to mention, but I remember them all. Some call to visit me now and then, and I love to see them all. Pat O'Dwyer, my cousin, visits regularly and sometimes Helen comes with him. Mike Prior, a great friend of mine, visits me every week. We talk about old times mostly, and I get updates on parish affairs. Of course, hurling and rugby are always high up on the agenda. I am looking forward to the hurling championship season at club and county level. The Rugby World Cup will be a big event later in the year, and I look forward to that.

My appetite is as good as ever, and my dinner has arrived. So, *slán* for now. Mike.