

ÉIRE ÓG SET DANCING CLUB

By Carmel and Marella Cregan

Grange Éire Óg Set Dancing Club was founded in 1975 by the late Ivan Ryan and was based at the old schoolhouse in Grange. Both Ivan and his wife, Eileen, had a great love of culture and everything Irish. The club enjoyed unparalleled success over thirty odd years, mainly due to the boundless energy and enthusiasm of Ivan, not forgetting his competitive spirit and ability to instil loyalty and dedication in those whom he mentored.

We joined the club shortly after its inception and continued dancing for thirty years. We can honestly say that our childhood, adolescence and earlier adulthood revolved around our years at the old schoolhouse in Grange. We made lifelong friends there and travelled the length and breadth of Ireland every weekend, dancing. Looking back, our memories are more of the fun and enjoyment we had from dancing rather than the successes that we achieved.

The club was a remarkable success. Many nights were spent training, both children and adults, and an enormous amount of achievement was brought to the parish. The club competed all over Ireland as well as taking part in international competitions in London. In 1994, a trip to New York was organised, where the club gave exhibitions in many venues including the Béal Bocht, Manhattan College, The Shamrock Club and

the Purchase State University. We were guests of honour at the St Patrick's Day Ball in McCleans in Yonkers.

The club holds fifteen All-Ireland titles. They were winners of Slogadh Náisiúnta na hÉireann, Pan Celtic, All-Ireland Festival in Kilkenny, Fleadhanna and the Oireachtas.

One of the club's most memorable events was when our team "Éire Óg" danced on the "Donncha at Bantry"



Carraig Dubh Set Dancers 1984 L-R Front row: Audrey O'Donoghue, Miriam Gallagher, Biddy Farrell (musician), Marella Cregan, Miriam Daly. Back row: Marion Bourke, Collette O'Donoghue, Valerie Carroll and Regina Keevey.

programme on RTÉ in the 1980s. We all travelled to Bantry on one of the hottest days of summer to film the programme. It was the highlight of our year. We

danced on flagstones outside Bantry House in the blazing sun. After filming, we were treated to dinner and we all headed off to the beach. Although we had not packed swimwear, this did not deter us from taking a dip in the Atlantic, fully clothed. We still have a group photo of all the kids and adults alike on the beach, wet and smiling.

The Club had over the years some of the most talented musicians at our side. Ivan never trusted that the musicians provided at competitions would be of his standard, so he always insisted on bringing our own. The late Biddy Farrell from Meanus travelled the country with us for years with her accordion by her side. She knew our dancing teams backwards and knew exactly what tune and speed we needed. Other musicians who played for us over the years were Timmy Byrnes, Michael O'Connor of Boher and Seán O'Dwyer of Fedamore.

The positive influence of Ivan Ryan on our lives cannot be overestimated. He was a force of nature. His complete dedication to the club was apparent. We can remember vividly being at a competition in Croom. As part of the Croom festival, there was a carnival outside the hall in which we were competing. After performing, all of us immediately headed to the carnival, but due to a tie-break in the result, we were asked to dance again. I can still see Ivan standing underneath the chair-planes, shouting at us to "jump" off the moving ride!

Ivan Ryan sadly passed away in 1995 and the club continued for some years after that. Ivan's son, Derek, took over the reins for a time, followed by Suzanne Leahy. In the latter years of the club, Ivan's wife, Eileen, and Mary Lombard continued the time honoured tradition in the old schoolhouse in Grange. Ivan had such an influence on the youth of our community. His passion for the club rubbed off on us all, and this is the main reason the club continued for so many years after his passing.



Éire Óg Senior Set Dancers. *Front row L-R:* Caitriona Walshe, Carmel Cregan, Margaret Corbett, Valerie Carroll. *Back row:* Tom Carroll, Derek Ryan, Ivan Ryan, John Kirby.