

PAT MCMAHON



In the calm chill of an early Autumn morning with the first leaves gently falling in the demon light, Patrick McMahon passed gently away in his home, 'The Tarry' in North Circular Road, Lurgan. He was surrounded by his loving family and surely was supported by the prayers and genuine concern of all the Gaels of Armagh who visited him during his last illness, bravely borne with dignity until the end.

My first meeting with Pat was on the firm sod of Davitt Park, Lurgan and I never forgot it, He was wearing the dark blue of his first home club, Clan na Gael and I was defending for rivals Clann Eireann. I

learned very quickly into the game never to underestimate his talent or that the light gangling frame with socks around ankles could stand up to all that was ever likely to be thrown at it - with the ability to come back for more and give as good as he got.

So it was throughout his career as a player for Clan na Gael and later when he transferred his allegiance to Clann Eireann where he gave total and dedicated service until his passing. Pat was born sixty five years ago in Edward Street, Lurgan, an area of the town steeped in Gaelic culture, games and the Catholic faith. Pat inherited all of that.

He was educated in the old St. Peter's Primary School in North Street and was one of a generation of pupils who played their first gaelic football in a school team. His team was Clan Og, the nursery for Clan na Gael, run by that doyen of juvenile coaches, the late Harry McGarry.

Pat was also among the most able intellectually of his generation and he won a scholarship to St. Mary's CBS Grammar School, Belfast, where he again played his football at Rannafast and MacRory Cup at Ulster Colleges level.

Then like many of his contemporaries, he won a place in St. Mary's Training College where he qualified in 1953 as a primary school teacher. As was the situation in those days, positions were in short supply locally, so Pat was exiled in Derry until his return in 1954.

He became a member of the teaching staff of Tannaghmore Primary School in North Lurgan and came under the benign patronage of one of the all time great Gaels, Alf Murray, who was then Vice-Principal of the school. There are those who say Alf - silver tongued as he always is - spirited Pat from Clan na Gael to Clann Eireann. Thus began a long, dedicated and sterling service to his adopted club. Pat worked tirelessly as a committee member and office bearer to raise standards and make the club an example to all in the land.

It was also no surprise to locals and county Gaels when his talents were quickly recognised at County Board level. He began great work at Minor County level, but was soon a valued member of the County Executive as a Chairman or Secretary of league and County Committee of all levels. He remained a faithful servant to all right to his untimely end.

Pat was respected by all clubs in all areas of the county. His experience in the rules and regulations and his firm but fair disciplined approach will be sadly missed by his colleagues in the Association. He was a dedicated Grounds Committee Official particularly for Davitt Park, Lurgan.

Pat, while steeped in Irish culture and our native games, was also a true Irish man, very much in the mould of his mentor and life-long friend, Alf Murray. He believed in Ireland and things of Ireland and he promoted a vision of peace where traditions could unite and be respected. He worked for that legitimate goal in the community and was respected for this vision. As a class teacher and later a respected Vice-Principal in Tannaghmore Primary School, he piloted generations of local children through the minefield of the 11+ system and the beginning of the N.I. Curriculum.

He was an able administrator with an interest in choral music and prepared many a school choir with high tonal quality in Irish song. He also practised what he preached as a life-long member of St. Paul's Church male voice choir. No man is an island in a sea of Gaelic culture. Pat, I know, would say that the best moment in his life came when he met Bernie Henderson, also a primary school teacher of Lisacorran in Tannaghmore. They married in due course and reared a fine family of sons - Darragh, Conor, Peadar and Pearse. They, in turn, and their wives extended the family to include grandchildren to be proud of. Pat enjoyed their love and concern, especially in his last days.

Sadly, Pat has been taken from them and us. His family will find his loss a cruel blow as he parted from them with much still to give in his twilight years. They have the consolation of knowing he gave generously and courageously all the days of his life.

So too, will we miss him, who served with him in the Association in the past. I offer, on our behalf sympathy to his wife Bernie and his sons Darragh, Conor, Peadar and Pearse and his extended family I would wish to end this tribute to him as a great Gael with the words of the great Peig Sayers of the Great Blanket Island near the Kerry coast about the hardships of life which Pat experienced as we all do from time to time.

She said: "We often noticed that the high and holy master was favourable to us because 'twas many a squall and storm of wind caught our people on the sea where there was no escape except through his power. Often we won the reward of our labours- often we did not."

Pat has won the reward of his labours and we remember him with affection and gratitude for what he was in all weathers.

Go ndeannaigh Dia trocaire ar a ainmh.

Brendan McStravick