

Grand old lady of Limerick hurling toasts the champions

KILMALLOCK'S GRAND old lady, 93-year-old Mrs. Margaret McCarthy of Bresheen, is a living link between Limerick's first all-Ireland hurling championship victory in 1897 and the sensational triumph of 1973. Seventy-six years ago her brother, Tom Brazil, scored the winning point for Limerick in the first all-Ireland, and a great hurling tradition has been carried on by her family down through the decades to the present day.

"My father, Michael Brazil, was a member of the Kilfinane team and was hurling as far back as I can remember," she told me in the living room of her beautiful rose-clustered home in Bresheen this week.

"He and my brother Tom hurled together in the local team, and it was from him that Tom learned the skills of the game."

They were hard times, and Tom's hurling apprenticeship was no exception.

Mrs. McCarthy recalls one memorable occasion when her father got the nickname "Doon" Brazil. Tom was a member of the Kilfinane team that was playing in Doon that day and he made one or two mistakes that looked like costing the visitors the game. His father, watching from the sideline, bounded over the fence, seized the stick from his son's hand, and showed how fields were won. They called him "Doon" after that.

Tom took the lesson to heart, and went on to make hurling history for his county.

Mrs. McCarthy likes to talk of the great part hurling played in the lives of the local community in those far-off days.

Moonlight

She recalls the moonlit nights when the boys would roam the countryside together in search of suitable ash trees which they would cut down to make their own hurleys. She recalls the long horse drays which would put up at her door to take the boys to some fixture in another part of the county. And how the vehicle and its occupants would be blessed with holy water to protect them from danger on their journey.

Teams

Times changed, but the great hurling tradition continued in her family. In 1957 her grandson, Tom O'Donnell, captained the Limerick team that defeated London for the junior title. Tom, who was a member of the Kilmallock team, now fields with St. Mary's in London.

Also playing with St. Mary's in London is Cal O'Donnell, another grandson, who before he went to England won a County minor medal with Kilmallock in 1955 and several other titles.

Medals

At home in Bresheen, 12-year-old grandson, Tadgh McCarthy, has won two medals in the Kilmallock School League. And over in London the two youngest members of this great hurling family, 7-year-old Patrick O'Donnell and 5-year-old Dave O'Donnell, great-great-grandchildren of Mrs. McCarthy, play the game.

"Hurling is in our family's blood," she told me proudly. "I love the game, and I said months ago that if Limerick won the All-Ireland I would go on a spree." And, true to her promise, she went to Kilmallock and had "a drop or two" to toast the victors.

Mrs. McCarthy, who will be 93 on the 29th of this month, is the oldest woman in the parish of Kilmallock. And, let me add, one of the sprightliest and most mentally alert. She was born in Main Street, Kilfinane, and is living in Kilmallock for the past 73 years.

She has 13 children, 41 grandchildren, 72 great-grandchildren and 3 great-great-grandchildren.

Good times

She has firm views on the rich and great times of the 1970s. "I am telling them now, and I tell them often, that they don't realise the good times they are having. I often had a very hard day."

She recalls the times when one would earn 2/6d or 3/- a week for milking cows, and when, walking to work over the dew-drenched fields in the morning, one would take the precaution of stuffing one's stockings in a pocket to keep them dry.

Mrs. McCarthy's garden in Bresheen has won three first prizes and a second prize in Kilmallock Garden Show. If you enquire the whereabouts of her home, people in Kilmallock will tell you: "You can't miss it; it is the house with the beautiful rose garden." And they are right: last Tuesday in the September sun it looked a little corner of heaven.

MCCARTHY (Bresheen, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick) — Oct. 30, 1977, at her residence, Margaret; deeply regretted by her sorrowing sons, daughters, son-in-law, daughters-in-law, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, relatives and friends. R.I.P. Funeral from SS. Peter and Paul's Church, Kilmallock, today (Tuesday) at 10 o'clock to Effin Cemetery.