



Jim Carney

This Sporting Life

Galway's links with the home town of Footballer of the Year

ANDY MORAN was a popular winner of the Footballer of the Year award on GAA All-Stars night. It's an achievement that also brings honour to his county, Mayo, and his club, Ballaghaderreen, but two questions remain hanging in the air: Is Mayo really his county? And is Ballaghaderreen in Mayo?

Since time immemorial, Ballaghaderreen was in eastern Mayo but it was transferred over the border to Roscommon in 1898 when a new Local Government Act was introduced "with the intention of bringing order to the local authorities." In reality it was much more likely that the man who had the real power in ensuring the map was redrawn was acting on behalf of the town's big traders who had discovered that rates were lower in Roscommon than in Mayo. That man was John Dillon, one-time leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster and MP for East Mayo, and he too owned a large store which grew throughout the 1800s to become Ballaghaderreen's biggest employer. The Dillons who kept the business alive were the ancestors of James Dillon, leader of Fine Gael from 1959 to 1965.

It was a sign of the strength of the GAA in 1898, only 14 years after it was formed at the historic meeting in the billiards room of Miss Eliza J. Hayes's Hotel at Liberty Square, Thurles, that the fledgling Ballaghaderreen GAA Club refused to budge. The town might have been transferred, with the approval of the then ruling Houses of Parliament at Westminster, but its Gaelic Games stalwarts were staying in Mayo.

So, Ballaghaderreen is in Roscommon, except for the playing of Gaelic football. And that's why Andy Moran wears green & red, as John O'Mahony and the late John Morley did many years before him - two renowned Ballaghaderreen men well known to us here in Galway. Tragically, Garda John Morley and his Garda colleague Henry Byrne from Knock, Co Mayo were murdered at Aghaderry, Loughglynn by an armed gang on July 7th 1980, in the aftermath of a bank robbery.

John Morley was one of the top centre half-backs in the country in the 1960s and '70s, having starred for St Jarlath's, Tuam in the 1960 Hogan Cup final win over St Finian's, Mullingar. Seven St Jarlath's students who won All-Ireland Colleges medals that day went on to become members



DOWN MEMORY LANE: Mick Reynolds putting the Kerry defence under pressure in the 1964 All-Ireland final, supported by the Galway full-forward line: John Keenan (No. 15), Seán Cleary and (on left) Christy Tyrrell.

of the victorious Galway minor panel and five of that team, all former colleges football stars, were destined for Three-in-a-Row glory in the mid '60s but John Morley did not get the reward he deserved: an All-Ireland SFC medal.

Another connection with Galway: John's son Gordon Morley was centre half-back for the Salthill-Knocknacarra team who won the All-Ireland Club Football Championship final on St Patrick's Day 2006, against Naomh Gall from Antrim.

A Galway Three-in-a-Row hero had a Ballaghaderreen connection: legendary midfielder Mick Reynolds who drove an equalising "50" over the Meath crossbar in the dying minutes of the 1964 All-Ireland semi-final and then played a part in creating a clinching point scored by full-forward Seán Cleary. Galway were on their way to glory and "Mick the Kick", as he became affectionately known, was assured of everlasting fame.

He was born in England. His mother, Kathleen Phillips, a native of Monasteraden, Ballaghaderreen, and her husband James Reynolds, from Meelick, Ballinlough, Co Roscommon, were living in Manchester. In 1940, at the age of five, Mick was sent to Ireland where his Aunt Mary (his mother's sister) would look after him until World War II was over. His father was working at Manchester Racecourse (long closed) and his mother was a hospital matron. They had to keep working; everything had changed across-Channel in the War years.

Young Mick settled into a new life in Ballaghaderreen and was cared for with love. He went to St Nathy's for two years but then decided he'd "serve his time" in a local shop and later applied for a place in a Dublin shop and got it, and then got a better job offer from a well-known Tuam shopkeeper, Joe Grogan. In early 1955, at the age of 19, he moved to Tuam and stayed there for three years; he was very happy in Tuam and got in with the Tuam Stars club in the middle of their Championship seven-in-a-row.

In 1958 he decided to go back to Manchester; he was in his early twenties and he wished to link up with his parents, and he could play football with the St Wilfred's club. Two Tuam lads were also going over there: Séamus (Jossy) St John and Johnny Mannion, along with a Mayo county footballer, Richie Davey. That group boosted the Lancashire team who qualified to play Galway in the 1958 All-Ireland Junior final, with Reynolds and Davey anchoring the team in midfield, but Galway won the final by seven points. Mick recalls that the date of the original fixture was changed as a mark of respect following the death of Pope Pius XII and when the final was refixed Riche Davey was unavailable.

Mick got good work in Manchester but he came back to Tuam in time for the 1959 County Championship. He had been very happy working in Grogan's but he had an ambition to go on the road as a company rep and that happened for him, with great success. He played with Galway



TUAM Golf Club's victory in the Guinness Trophy at Galway G.C. in the 1960s; it was an annual competition of great prestige. The Guinness representative (3rd from left) Frank Sheehan was pictured presenting the trophy to Mick Reynolds and his team-mates Dan McGrath (on left), Pat O'Gara, Tony Shortt and Seán Higgins. PJ Acton was also a member of the winning team.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTY O'GARA

until 1967, the year they went to the USA after winning the National League and Mick played his final game in the Maroon & White in Chicago, as captain specially for the occasion, an honour he would cherish.

He won five County SFC medals with the Stars and he liked everything about living in Tuam, including going to dances and to films at the Mall and the Odeon. He bought a house in Galway city and he also kept in touch with Ballaghaderreen people who were close to him. In 1968 he moved there again and got involved with the football club; he was a mentor when minor and under-21 titles were won and he got a medal himself when he played for the juniors. He got to know John Morley and some good new players coming through including the three O'Mahony brothers and Seán Kilbride. Mick also played rugby,

including a couple of seasons in Galway with Corinthians, playing in the second row; he loved golf too, and through all the years he loved football and he loved life. He made one more big move - back to Manchester. He enjoys living there now but he misses old friends who have gone to their eternal reward, including Tom Joyce from Killererin. Another great friend, Christy O'Gara from Tuam, now living in London, rings Mick every time there's news from Galway. Christy always knows what's happened in Tuam before most people in Tuam have heard it!

I asked Mick to select a few highlights from his football career. He gave me two: "Seeing the '50' go over the bar in '64 and, many years later, getting a good mention in Mick O'Connell's book. I really enjoyed that," he said with a hearty laugh.

Thanks for the memories, Mick.