

## TOM “ LINKED” TO JIM.

When first I contacted Tom Walsh about “doing” the story about himself and “The Link”, he did his damndest to fob me off. “Who would be interested? or, “Sure there’s no story to tell”. “Yes there is a story to tell Tom, and it’s needed for the Dunnamaggin book” said I. That clinched it - the Dunnamaggin bit. Because Tom Walsh is of the “Dunnamaggin diaspora”. Because that’s where it all started for Tom and Jim, and his other brothers, who were no mean yielders of the caman. Davy, of whom more later, carved his own niche in the hurling world while Pat too, was a very good hurler in his day. The gable ends of dwellings, farm houses, or crumbling outhouses, were the arenas where the hurling skills of the four Walsh lads were honed down in Ballintee.

Tom, who was senior to Jim by three years, hurled with the school team, under the guidance of a footballer, and a Mayoman, Mr Mc Loughlin. At the time there was no organised juvenile competition in Kilkenny - or anywhere else for that matter between school and minor level.

Pat and Davy were first in the house into the minor scene. They both won minor hurling championships with Moanrue, (Hugginstown), in 1940. Jim and Pat came to the Christian Brothers in Callan, and Jim hurled with Callan as a minor, winning a championship with the Eoghan Ruadh team (Callan) in 1950. He made the Kilkenny minor panel in 1950, and they won the All-Ireland title that year. Pat Lannon (Callan) was the captain, and the very first man to collect the Irish Press Cup. Johnny Mc Govern, Mick Brophy, Mickie Gardiner (Callan), Patsy Hogan (Callan), Jack Murphy (Piltown) and John Brennan (Tullaroan) were all on that team. Jim played at full back on their minor team of 1951. Galway defeated Kilkenny in the semi-final that year.

The brothers Walsh took differing roads to stardom. Dunnamaggin “broke up” in 1948, and stayed that way for a couple of years. Tom was “picked up “ by Carrickshock in 1950, while Jim continued to hurl with John Lockes. Tom won a Senior Championship with Carrickshock in 1951, while Jim was on the John Lockes panel that won the County Junior title in 1952. With Tom on the Carrickshock team were his “neighbours”, Tom Ryan, Dick O’Neill and Billy Treacy. Teamates too, and later to share in All-Ireland victories with Tom and Jim, were household names like John Sutton, Jimmy Heffernan and Jimmy Kelly. Tom was a member of the All-Ireland winning Junior team of 1951.

In 1953, with the introduction of the Parish Rule. Jim and Tom had to return to their own Parish team of Dunnamaggin, and there they played Junior hurling from 1953.

Kilkenny won their fourth All-Ireland Junior crown in 1956. On that team, there were three Dunnamaggin players:- Tom Walsh, Jim “Link” Walsh, and Tom Ryan. The All-Ireland Senior win of

1957 - the first for ten years - was backboned by that Junior team. The same Senior team was composed of some ten players from Junior clubs. " Those were the days," Tom would say with a glint in his eye.

Yes indeed, the brothers from Dunnamaggin had great days, side by side in the black and amber. With John Maher at left corner back, that defensive line was near impenetrable. " We had a brilliant understanding," Tom would say. " We also had Ollie behind us, and if they got by Jim and myself, they earned whatever they got."

Tom would name the likes of Wexford's Tim Flood as one of the greatest forwards that he ever met on a field. He crossed swords too with such forward marvels as Johnny Kiely (Waterford), Paddy Kenny (Tipperary), and Paddy Barry (Cork). He also had great admiration for the "Tipp" lads. Pat Stakelum, Jimmy Finn, Seamus Bannon, Liam Devaney, and the "Rattler" Byrne, would be top of his list. The Wexford lads too, would rank highly with Tom. "There were never better hurlers around than the Rackards, Flood, the Kehoes, Ned Wheeler, and of course Jim English," he would say.

Tom and Jim travelled to London many times with the Kilkenny hurlers. They played in New Eltham, and on the hallowed turf of Wembley Stadium. Hurling took them to America too, trips that will live long in the memory of Tom Walsh. Friendships were made, and cemented. They got to know and respect great men like Monsignor Tommy Maher, Paddy Grace, Sid Bluett, Bob Aylward, "Chew" Leahy, and many more. Wherever hurling men gathered to talk a " good game" the names of Tom and the "Link" Walsh would be mentioned.

They never won a Railway Cup medal, but their brother Davy did - twice with Munster. They never won Dublin Senior Championships, but their brother Davy did - twice with U.C.D. So in the broader context, the Walsh boys from lowly Ballintee have anything that was worth winning won, between them.

Barrie Henriques.