

TRIBUTE TO MARY GILLIGAN



• The late Mary Gilligan RIP

To the forefront of a number of initiatives, when it came to Craughwell GAA, the late Mary Gilligan (née Cannon) always had the betterment of the club at heart.

Serving as Assistant Secretary of the club during the late 1980s and 1990s and Secretary during the early 2000s, Mary was one of the driving forces behind the development of the great facilities that Craughwell GAA enjoys today.

In the early 1990s, Mary, as Assistant Secretary, and the GAA Committee set about redeveloping Gilligan Memorial Park and, in May of 1993, the refurbished grounds were officially opened by then County Board Chairman Frank Burke.

The cost of the development, which included the renovation of the James

‘Sonny’ Shaughnessy clubhouse and drainage of the grounds, came to £150,000, which Mary played a vital role in fundraising.

Drawing a large crowd to Craughwell, that day was marked by a Gaelic football challenge between Galway and Clare and a hurling match between Galway and Offaly. The report in *The Connacht Tribune* described the pitch as being “in top class condition” and, one suspects, Mary would not have had it any other way.

Former Galway Hurling Chairman Michael Larkin, who was also Club Chairman that day, says Mary played a huge part in bringing those projects to fruition. “Mary was very active in the fundraisers carried out in those years and the years that followed,” he began.

“The redevelopment of Gilligan Park, she had a huge role in that. Mary, though, was not only prepared to take on those

challenges, but also meet the challenges. Then, in later years, we purchased the land for the training pitches. That was another big development and, again, she was very involved in the fundraising and finances of that, namely the €50 ticket draw which netted €253,000. That helped clear the debt on the purchase of the training grounds and the building of the ball wall.”



Mary’s work ethic and larger-than-life personality stood the club in good stead and she was never one to shy away from selling

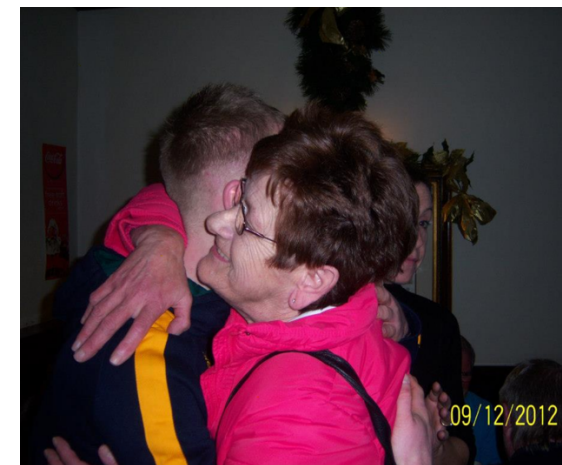
tickets or whatever else needed to be done to raise money.

When the club enjoyed great days, be it winning underage, intermediate or junior titles, she really came into her own and she would be one of the first on the field to celebrate and congratulate the players and management on these momentous occasions.

And Mary saw many of them as Assistant Secretary and Secretary. These included such hurling victories as the U14 ‘A’ (1997), U16 (1997, 1999 and 2002), Minor ‘A’ (2001 and 2002), Minor ‘B’ (1997), U21 ‘A’ (2002), U21 ‘B’ (1997) and Junior ‘B’ (2003), along with all those titles she saw won before and after that golden period.

She also took particular pride in watching Fergal Healy become the first Craughwell player in 63 years to line out for

Galway in the All-Ireland senior hurling final in 2001.



In the interim, there has been many more who she would have enjoyed watching play for the county – Niall Healy, Adrian Cullinane, Aidan Ryan, to mention but a few – and it would also have given her great pleasure to see Ryan Howley win an All-Ireland minor medal for Galway in 2018.

At last winter’s club AGM, Mary and Vinnie were made Vice Presidents of Craughwell GAA for 2020 and this was something that brought them both great joy.



Yet, Craughwell GAA was not her only – or, indeed – her first love. That honour fell to her family – her husband Vinnie, sister Josie, nieces and nephews, relatives, neighbours and a long line of friends. Mary always took great interest and satisfaction in all their achievements, on and off the field.

“There is a very close-knit community up there (in Emlagh), be it the Gilligans, Spellmans, Cannons or Clarkes,” says Michael Larkin. “And she was just such a jolly person, and out-going. She spent so much of her time going to matches and fundraising money.”

Another of her great passions was playing cards and she’d travel the length and breadth of the province – and as far away as Clare – for a good game of 25 or Poker. “Every Friday night, she was involved in the card game in Craughwell,” recalls Michael. “As soon as the game of 25 would finish, the game of poker would start. She loved the poker.”

Since news of Mary’s passing came to light on Friday, the tributes have been flowing. Among those to pay his respects was another former Craughwell GAA Chairman, Martin Rooney, who wrote on our club Facebook page: ‘Rest in Peace, Mary. A true friend to all who knew her. A great servant to Craughwell Hurling Club through the years. A shrewd poker player, also. [She] will be sadly missed.’

Deeply regretted by her loving husband Vinnie, Mary is also survived by her

sister Josie, nieces Mary and Audrey, nephews Colin, Ronan and Ross; brothers-in-laws, sisters-in-laws, relatives, neighbours and her many friends, inside and outside Craughwell GAA.



Due to Government advice regarding public gatherings, the Funeral Mass for Mary Gilligan tomorrow, Monday (12 noon) in St. Killian’s Church, Ballymana, will be private. Burial will take place afterwards in Killogilleen Cemetery.