

**Plus ça change? Emigration poses a problem to Edenderry GAA in 1929 & 1987**  
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**By Ciaran Reilly**

Unfortunately most GAA clubs around the country at the moment are feeling the pinch; those who undertook massive redevelopment in the last ten years probably worse off than others. Clara GAA club being a prime example here, but hopefully their efforts to provide new facilities will pay dividends in the future, but lets hope not to much at the expense of the reds. Another problem facing many GAA clubs and in particular those in rural Ireland is emigration. To what extent it has affected GAA clubs in Offaly is hard to gauge; perhaps when the adult championships swing into action shortly a clearer picture will emerge. Emigration is no new phenomenon to Ireland or indeed to the members of Edenderry GAA.

**Flash backwards: March 1929.**

An article in March 1929 in the Irish Independent highlighted the problems faced by GAA clubs around Ireland and cited on this occasion the case of Edenderry in county Offaly.

'Emigrations drain on the strength of the GAA was emphasized at a meeting last night of the Offaly County Board at Tullamore when a delegate appealing for the regarding of players stated that - 'since Christmas twelve of our best men have left for employment in England. Mr J O'Connell, Edenderry delegate declared that the continuing drain on the countries manhood constituted a menace to the nation and threatened the existence of the GAA'.

**Flash Forward: January 1987**

An article on 24 January 1987 in the Irish Times entitled 'emigration causes drain on resources' highlighted the problem of emigration to the GAA in Offaly, in particular to Edenderry and Rhode. The January meeting of the Offaly county board was dominated by the talk of emigration and the problems it posed for GAA clubs in the county.

'Fifteen lads who played senior football for Rhode in the last few years were seen in a pub in London recently. Eleven lads from Edenderry were seen together in a pub in Birmingham before Christmas and eight of them were footballers. These two quotes from Tony Mulvin, Secretary Rhode GAA and Sean Dillon secretary of Edenderry GAA highlight the growing problem affecting Offaly's GAA clubs. 'No sooner have we trained a lad to the adequate levels of football than he's taking the boat or the plane' explained Dillon. Apart from the problem of fielding teams were finding it hard enough to get lads to coach the underage teams so that it's a vicious circle in that fewer coaches will mean fewer players in a few years time'. 'My uncle is the treasurer of the Warwickshire board of the GAA' says Sean Dillon and he tells me that the number of Irish transferring to clubs in the midlands has greatly increased over the last few years'. Tony Mulvin went one further exclaiming that emigration in Rhode was at levels not seen since the famine times. 'In all some 57 lads in the 19-25 age category came home to Rhode at the Christmas time which is a sizable amount in a small parish'.

**Flash forward: 2010**

It's now eighty one years since J O'Connell spoke on the problems of emigration to the GAA. The newspaper article did not state whether he was successful or not in having a dozen players regraded in time for the 1929 championship. After more than a decade of economic prosperity emigration looms large again in Ireland. Plus ça change? The more that changes, the more it's the same thing.