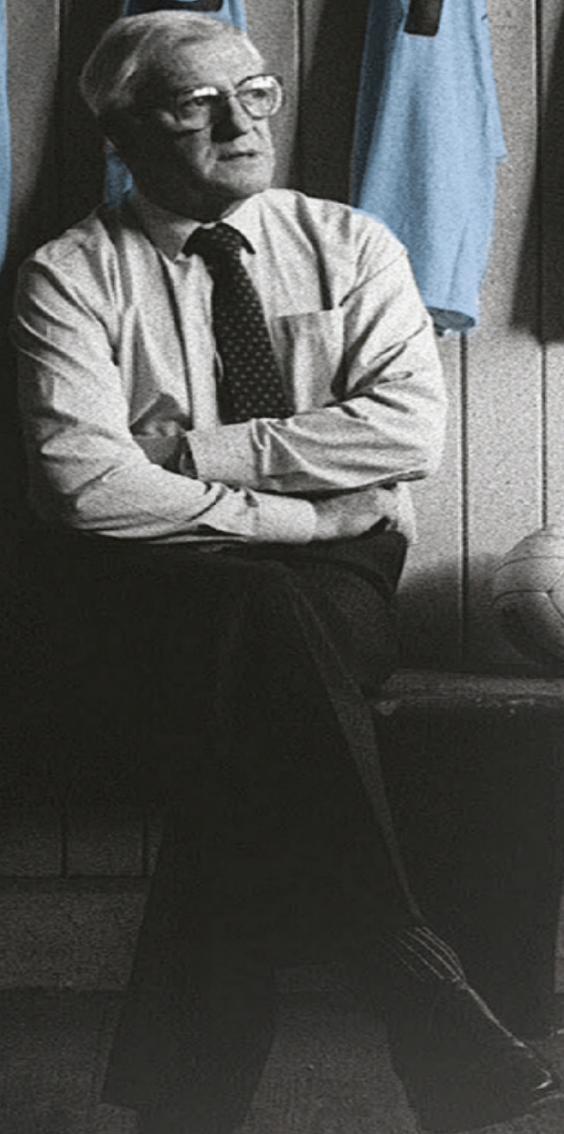


HEFFO

A BRILLIANT MIND



A BIOGRAPHY OF KEVIN HEFFERNAN
LIAM HAYES

ABOUT THE BOOK

Kevin Heffernan was a giant amongst GAA men.

A giant with a brilliant mind. An unforgiving giant. A giant who repeatedly warned everybody that he would not let his own mother get in the way of him winning one more game of football.

Heffo was deeply admired and absolutely feared like no other. And like no other manager in the history of the GAA, his strength of mind and brutal toughness as a leader raised an army that was called his own – Heffo’s Army.

His fierce desire to win, and the forcefulness he displayed in the privacy of the Dublin dressing-room was often shocking. Nobody was spared. Everybody knew that Heffo took no prisoners.

No cowards, no weaklings, no deserters.

Heffo: A Brilliant Mind tells the Kevin Heffernan story for the first time. It’s the story of a boy with the biggest dreams, and a man who lived with triumphs and the greatest regrets. It’s the story of a club, and how Heffo and St Vincent’s GAA club revolutionized the game of Gaelic football and changed the face of Dublin football forever.

It’s the story, too, of a great war.

Heffo: A Brilliant Mind dramatically re-enacts the battles that Kevin Heffernan fought over four decades as a footballer and a manager in a long and punishing war with Kerry. A war waged by one man with the courage and fearlessness of a true giant.

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HEFFO

A Brilliant Mind

LIAM HAYES

To all those men who went to war with Kevin Heffernan on
hundreds of football fields ... and all of us
who stood in his way.

Acknowledgements

Kevin Heffernan stood, and strode across, the Irish sporting landscape as a colossus. He was an emperor and a genius. For forty years he was viewed, and admired and feared. And even though he subsequently, for over a quarter of a century, remained in 'retirement' as a national figure, Heffo never surrendered the mystical quality that had first presented itself in him as a young man heading out in search of adventure on GAA fields, looking for an All-Ireland title he could call his own.

A great many people, Dublin footballers and opposing managers and footballers, and sports fans, and sports writers and broadcasters, viewed Heffo for so long. All, without exception, remained forever enthralled.

Some writers came to brilliantly capture the man in words. Foremost amongst those from this present generation are Tom Humphries and David Walsh, and their writings and their works are acknowledged at different times in this publication, and again in detail in this book's notes and bibliography. But there are others too. RTÉ's Brian Carthy, in his broadcasting and writing, has done the life and times of Kevin Heffernan, and so many of his teammates and opponents (and the footballers on Heffo's Dublin teams) so proud. Equally, Radio Kerry's Weeshie Fogarty has brilliantly captured, forever more in print and broadcast, the wonders of the Dublin versus Kerry years.

However, before this present generation, there were men like Mick Dunne, who secured for Gaelic football and hurling fans the most intimate details of the greatest teams and greatest heroes from the 1950s and 1960s and 1970s. In

the pages of the *Irish Press*, and later in his new working life in RTÉ, Dunne especially was a most trustworthy guide and chronicler for GAA people.

Other men and women from generations past, and from the heart of Dublin GAA – from the strong and visionary St Vincents GAA club – also afforded me the opportunity of tracking every step taken by Kevin Heffernan from his earliest years. The St Vincents members who compiled such a thorough history of their club to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary (1931–81) aided me in seeking to make this story of Heffo the story of the man’s whole GAA life – and not just his life as the legendary manager of the Dublin football team in the crazy and unbelievable 1970s.

These men from different generations of journalists, in particular, but also so many other excellent writers and broadcasters whom I will not mention in these acknowledgements (at the risk of omitting even one name) enabled GAA people, and sports fans of all hues throughout the country, to see the deeds of Kevin Heffernan in their most astonishing magnificence. These men also enabled me to attempt to the best of my ability to write this first biography of Kevin Heffernan. I owe them all a thank you.

I would also like to thank so many other people who generously, and kindly, helped me through the course of the last two years as I built this book. The book was a work in progress long before 2011 when I sat down with Kevin Heffernan and informed him that I was about to attempt to capture the fullness of his public life in a biography. For many years, as a journalist and a footballer, I had spoken to so many people about the great man. Therefore, I wish to formally thank everybody who ever gave me even the tiniest glimpse into Heffo’s actions and his thinking – and I must thank especially those, again, whom I will not mention by name, who gave me their time and hearty support.

If I mention one person, it must be Dessie Ferguson. Dessie and his wife, Maura, welcomed me into their home,

and shared with me their cherished memories, and also shared with me their great store of newspaper articles and books which told the story of Dublin football and hurling teams over many decades. The Fergusons' 'treasure-trove' was almost the equal of the Mick Dunne Archive in Croke Park, which was so kindly opened to me by Joanne Clarke and Mark Reynolds.

With the support of those I have mentioned by name, and so many others, I set out to make an unbelievable story, believable.

Heffo was more than some magical 'grey' or 'white' wizard from the pages or the film set of *Lord of the Rings*! However, too often that was all we saw of him. That's how he was captured and presented by too many writers, far too often. We got too much of Heffo in a grey or white cape, and a big pointy hat, and not half enough of Kevin Heffernan, the man.

Or the boy and the young man who existed for and played the game, and won fifteen Dublin football titles and six Dublin hurling titles, before the rest of Ireland first got to meet him, in the early seventies, as 'the Great and Amazing Heffo'.

I wanted to write a book which told the story of the boy, man and wizard - and I sincerely hope that *Heffo: a Brilliant Mind* allows people to see all three persons.

Prologue

'No ... I don't think anybody would be interested in reading about me!'

KH

Thursday, 5 May 2011

There was no point in waiting.

As soon as the large pot of tea arrived and a nice plate of brack, with two slices already buttered, each kindly cut into two smaller pieces, I said what I had come to say.

'Kevin ...'

We had already chatted for about fifteen minutes.

About his health, and mostly my ill health, and my continuing battle to get back fully on my feet after four months of chemotherapy and radiotherapy, though less than two years later, after his own longer fight, Kevin Heffernan would die from cancer at 83 years of age, after a lifetime of pulling and dragging forever on Sweet Afton and half a dozen other famous brands of fags.

We were in one of Heffo's homes from home, sitting at a quiet corner table in the old clubhouse in Clontarf filled with its stories.

Heffo's golf club, just across the Malahide Road from St Vincents GAA club.

Heffo's GAA club.

Parnell Park just around the corner, no longer the dingy little field where he completed his greatest piece of work as a football man, but now looking quite pristine, and floodlit.

His own house on the Howth Road, which he had built for himself and his wife, Mary, and their only child, Orla, just around the next corner.

All told, a small enough plot of land in a large city which, simply put, became the 'Kingdom of Kevin Heffernan' a long time ago. In the early seventies?

Longer than that, right back to the early fifties.

'Kevin ... I'm writing your story ... I'm writing your biography!'

I said it twice because I wanted to make sure that he had heard me, and that he knew exactly why I had asked him to meet with me.

Before saying what I had come to say, I felt a gnawing sense of dread. That's the way it usually was when half-strangers with pens and jotters approached Heffo and, often enough, like everyone else who looked to speak with him, I was nearly always filled with a tidy amount of terror.

One look from Heffo could make most men, tall or plump, shut up and think of quickly turning on their heels.

Scalded cats, all of them, before they had even opened their mouths. 'It's a story that has to be told ... just your story. And I'm here with complete respect to let you know ... that ...' It was time not to talk any more.

Kevin Heffernan, the mighty and amazing Heffo, even at his great age, had put both of his hands up to his face. He did so with an extra dash of drama. I had not expected that.

Neither did I expect him to lower his head, his hands still covering his face, towards the table. He stayed down for several seconds.

His head bowed in my direction.

I looked at the top of his head, and I took an extra deep breath as my uncertainty now definitely catapulted itself in the direction of genuine dread.

He had looked old, so frail.

I didn't expect him to be using a stick when he walked into the clubhouse but when I stood up and walked over to him, and held his hand, he was more Heffo than ever before. He sometimes had a look that could be as hard as nails and, on

occasion, he had another look that was extraordinarily detailed in its open affection.

This morning there was no mistaking the warmth in his sunken face. His handshake was firm. He knew why I wanted to see him.

I had no doubt about that.

He respected me enough to make the time to get himself over to the golf club and talk, enough to sit in front of me and thank me for thinking about him. But, then he was going to say ...

‘No ... I’d rather not.’

Or ...

‘No ... who’d care to read about all of that now?’

He’d said it to me before. It was sure to be a definite ‘No!’ again. If I was to ask his permission, which I had no intention of doing.

It was almost twenty years since we had last met.

We had spoken on only a handful of occasions in our lives.

The first time was in the spring of 1986 when, in my first week working on a national newspaper, I decided to jump into the deepest end of journalism in Ireland. Chasing down either Heffo or Charlie Haughey dared journalists to that place. I was going to call Kevin Heffernan and ask him for an interview. I knew Heffo didn’t do interviews, and I knew that he had no time for journalists, and that if he ever made time it was usually a few minutes filled mostly with barely concealed contempt. The phone call was pleasant, even welcoming. The next morning Heffo was waiting for me in the foyer of the Burlington Hotel and we shared a light breakfast.

I’d played against Heffo’s new Dublin team in the eighties a few times. Twice in the first round of the Leinster Championship in 1983, again in the Leinster final the following year, and there were a handful of league and challenge matches sprinkled here and there, including a

‘warm-up’ game against Dublin, in St Margaret’s on the northside of the county, one wet evening a few weeks before the 1985 All-Ireland final. I’d scored four or five points from midfield, and had completely outplayed two of Heffo’s first-choice men.

I’d walked off the field thinking, more than anything else, that I had shown Heffo something. But, I hadn’t.

Through the summer of 1986 I was also part of a large Irish squad managed by him, and every Saturday morning for two months I turned up in O’Toole Park on the southside of Heffo’s city. In the autumn Ireland were due to fly ‘down under’ and everybody was about to take their lives in their hands by playing against the big, bad men of Australian Rules all dressed up in their tight little ballerina numbers.

All dressed up and ready to knock our heads off once again, as they had two years earlier. Then do a dainty little dance on our graves.

I was quite sure I wanted to be on Heffo’s plane.

Heffo, however, had no intention of letting me anywhere near his plane. I knew he didn’t like me all that much as a footballer. He knew I was good enough, but he didn’t believe I was good enough to do the job when it most needed to be done on the football field.

He had said just five words to me in those two months in O’Toole Park, and one week later he kicked me off his squad without another word being uttered.

Heffo had us all on one end-line, and he was standing out in front of us, about 20 or 30 yards in front, looking the same as he always looked, in the same jumper and shirt, same casual slacks he had worn on the sideline all his adult life.

‘Take a deep breath ...’ he had ordered.

‘And ... hold it, and jog out to the “fifty”!’

There must have been forty of us on the end-line, and we all jogged towards Heffo, but when we arrived at the 50-yard line I found Heffo standing right in front of me.

'You didn't hold your breath!'
That's all he said.
Five words which meant nothing much to me.
But it was Heffo saying goodbye.

Almost twenty years skipped by since I had called him, and met him, in his offices in the Labour Court, where he was chairman, and where he said 'No ... I don't think anybody would be interested in reading about me!' in reply to my second request to work with him on his autobiography.

Twenty years, unbelievably.

When I had called him at home a week earlier and an old man's voice answered, I decided to be sure I had taken the correct number from the telephone book.

'This is Liam Hayes calling ... I'm wondering ... ahem ... is this Kevin Heffernan the former Dublin manager?'

I'd kept my voice light, informal.

'Is this Liam Hayes ... the former Meath footballer?' the hoarse, raspy voice replied at the other end of the line.

Heffo seemed happy enough to hear my voice.

I took a soothing, deep breath.

'It is, Kevin ... how are you?'

Finally, he lifted his head.

Heffo had a half-smile on his face, which was a nice surprise. It was a massive surprise, in truth.

'You know I have always wanted to write your story,' I informed him, unnecessarily, and waited.

No words were spoken for the next five seconds, six seconds.

'You're going to do it?' he asked.

'I am, Kevin.'

He lifted his cup to his lips and took the tiniest sip.

'Well ... I can't stop you!' he said.

'I wish you weren't doing it ... but ... I know you'll do a fair job on me.'

'And ... I wish you well with it!'

Our conversation was still just beginning.

The hard part was done.

For both of us, I felt.

We had brack to eat, which Heffo promised me was very good, and we had teacups to be refilled.

We stayed talking until shortly before lunchtime, about everybody. Managers in the old days and managers today, and footballers we knew and loved. There were certainly footballers that Heffo genuinely loved as wholeheartedly as a man might love the most beautiful woman he had happened upon in his entire life.

Most of those footballers were some of his own Vincents lads: Keaveney and Hanahoe, and Mullins. Especially Brian Mullins. Two or three of them were Kerry lads. And then there was Mick Lyons, one Meathman.

An hour and a half skipped by.

This book was never mentioned again.

Part One

A Farewell to Heff

1

'I always wanted men who would die for one another ... die to win.'

KH

Monday, 28 January 2013

Kevin Heffernan was in their hands now.

A little earlier in the evening his hearse began its short journey from St Francis' Hospice in Raheny to his parish church in Marino. The cortège had travelled down the Howth Road on the cold, drizzly Monday night, before turning on to Collins Avenue and stopping outside Parnell Park.

There, in Parnell, on that bumpy field that was turned up at one corner, and in the dingy old hut with the galvanized roof in another corner of the ground, Kevin Heffernan had built one of the greatest football teams there has ever been.

Out of nothing.

That was 1974. And by September of that year, Kevin Heffernan had become the bewildering, the miraculous, the stupendous 'Heffo', after taking his team from A to B, and then the whole damned way to Z.

From a putrefied group of footballers!

To white tracksuited celebrities and the dandiest of All-Ireland champs ever beheld by the trusty old game!

Until '75 that is, when Mick O'Dwyer's giddy young bucks from Kerry sent Heff and his team and his entire army of supporters high in the air with a devastating, surprising punch which, crazily, also came from nowhere.

The next twelve months, until September '76, were the longest of his life. The pressure and the torment, from all

sides, and the demands massively self-induced in the Dublin manager's head, nearly finished him off. But Kerry were put down in the 1976 All-Ireland football final.

He had waited twenty-one years to defeat Kerry just once, when nothing else mattered, on the biggest day and last day of the entire season. That single victory in September of '76, however, would have to last him through the remainder of his life.

Even if that victory in '76 was very personal for Kevin Heffernan, and the most precious day of all in his GAA life, it still would be listed down the running order and behind the semi-final meeting of the two teams the next year, in 1977, when Dublin and Kerry came head-to-head one more time to decide, for good, who owned the decade.

The game in '77 quickly became titled for good as the greatest Gaelic football match ever played. However, as it was teased out to its conclusion, Heff was not in the Dublin dug-out or standing on the sideline with a cigarette almost squeezed to death between his right thumb and index finger.

He was in the Hogan Stand.

Retired.

Gone, and gone too early from the Dublin job for his own good. He'd be back, too late, in 1978. Then, once again, Dublin would lose to Kerry in the All-Ireland final. They'd lose again in '79 to Kerry.

Heff would stay even longer.

He'd lose to Kerry again with a new Dublin team in the 1984 All-Ireland final. Lose again in the '85 final to Kerry. Then, and only then, Heff would leave a second time. Get out for good, and stay out, officially. Unofficially, Kevin Heffernan never stopped guiding, and being consulted, and offering direction, and helping in every little way he could.

Tony Hanahoe managed Dublin in '77, and on the field he brilliantly orchestrated everything, right down to the final

two late match-winning goals.

Only 1974 and '76 were Heff's.

Though '76 was outrageous and overwhelming in its own way.

Starting 20 seconds in when Kevin Moran immediately made nonsense of the No.6 on his back and careered forward with the ball, played a one-two with Bernard Brogan, and thundered the ball wide of the Kerry goal with a breathtaking drop-kick. When Dublin did score the first point of the game, another drop-kick, this time a neater and more exquisite drop-kick was at its heart.

Jimmy Keaveney took a short pass from David Hickey. He was nearly 50 yards from the Kerry goal, and was within range, but the full-forward chose to float the ball to the edge of the Kerry large square where Tony Hanahoe popped up, unannounced, exactly where Keaveney himself should have been found. Hanahoe curled his kick over the bar.

That was how '76 began.

The match ended with Dublin defeating Kerry for the first time in a championship game of football since 1934. A forty-two-year wait for the people of Dublin, in which time there had been six defeats and one draw. That untidy list of disappointments at Kerry's feet included the All-Ireland final of 1955 in which Heff struggled with a slight injury, but mainly found himself entirely suffocated by the momentous importance of the day itself.

It was a day, and a defeat, for which he could never forgive himself. Often he would openly admit to feeling shamed by his own failure. He felt he had given in to the day and given up on himself in '55, and he had waited, and waited, and when the final whistle sounded in the final in '76 he found himself marching across the field and grabbing Kevin Moran around the neck.

'I've waited twenty-one years for this!' Heff shouted into the ear of his centre-back, who was born seven months after

the clock had started ticking on his manager's wait for a day of redemption.

The cortège moved back on to the Malahide Road, stopping outside St Vincents GAA club for a few good minutes, stopping again outside Clontarf Golf Club on the other side of the road. Gardai had the traffic halted in all directions as the hearse turned on to magnificent Griffith Avenue.

It inched its way slowly up the avenue. The car came to a final stop outside St Vincent de Paul church. The door was opened.

A folded Dublin flag lay on Heff's coffin.

So many of the men whom he had hand-picked through his days as the boss of all bosses in Dublin football awaited him.

Truly, they now had him in their hands.

It was only a short journey into the church, but there were so many hands available, beginning with the oldest hands in the churchyard belonging to the longest standing members of Clontarf Golf Club.

The next oldest hands belonged to his footballers from the seventies.

Anton O'Toole and Jimmy Keaveney.

Kevin Moran and Robbie Kelleher.

Bobby Doyle and Gay O'Driscoll.

The Blue Panther and Mr Dainty Feet. The Marauding Defender and the Deepest Thinker. The Galloping Gourmet of the forward line and the Enforcer in the deepest line of Kevin Heffernan's defence.

The coffin then passed to hands ten years younger, the property of the Dublin team that Heffo had redesigned and sent out to win his third and most defying All-Ireland title of all as manager in 1983.

Joe McNally and John O'Leary and Tommy Conroy.

Tommy Drumm and Barney Rock and John Caffrey.

Still waiting ... there were still younger hands.

Young men from St Vincents who were also present-day Dublin footballers with All-Irelands still in front of them. They brought Heff the last few yards to the church door.

'I had so many satisfying things happen to me but in retrospect the thing about the game is the people you meet and the friendships you make.'

KH

Tuesday, 29 January 2013

If he had thought that they were going to applaud him, and his whole extraordinary life, he would certainly have given someone fairly sharpish orders to have his coffin, unceremoniously, hurried out one of the back doors of the church of St Vincent de Paul.

There were more and more pairs of hands awaiting Heff after his funeral mass on Tuesday morning.

Even bigger hands.

Brian Mullins was one of the easiest of all Heff's choices in all his days and nights managing football teams, and the once long-haired blond giant, who now had little hair at all, but whose shoulders now looked as wide as two medium-sized men, caressed the wood before taking a big step back from the coffin.

Goodbye Heff.

To Mullins, and to everyone who knew Kevin Heffernan as a young friend in the first half of his life, and an old friend and tormentor thereafter, there was no Heffo.

There was only Heff.

'They did him proud,' said Mickey Whelan quietly, in the churchyard that had hushed itself again at the end of the lengthy and spontaneous round of applause that had greeted Kevin Heffernan's coffin at the door.

Whelan, the mastermind behind the incredible levels of fitness which Heff sought from his team, from the very beginning in 1974, was speaking principally of Tony Hanahoe and Pat Gilroy, Vincents men both of them, and both of whom led Dublin to All-Ireland titles, in 1977 and 2011, in Heff's lifetime.

Both had spoken from the altar during the funeral mass.

Gilroy took just three minutes, deciding upon brevity in honour of a man who always had a preference for a message delivered short and sweet, even if it had blood-curdling intent. Especially short, actually, if such intent was being stamped and addressed.

'He created a very healthy legacy, such as how to carry success,' Gilroy reminded both friends, and foe, from olden days.

'He was very humble.

'He never sought the limelight or accolades.

'For him, it was always about the team.'

Hanahoe, a man more used to rich eloquence after almost half a lifetime representing others in the courts of the land, mentioned most precisely '... tea, Marietta biscuits and sheer determination'. He listed each as the three improbable, but chief ingredients of Dublin's march to six All-Ireland finals in succession in the seventies.

Three days earlier, Hanahoe had visited Heff in St Francis' Hospice. Hanahoe had looked at a man, he revealed, who seemed to be wondering where he was going and who he was going to select on his team when he got there.

'I could see him saying ...' said Hanahoe.

'I'll have Lar Foley, Paddy Bawn Brosnan, Enda Colleran, Páidí Ó Sé, Tim Kennelly ... they're the backs.

'Des Foley, John Timmons, Purcell, Freaney ...

'Dermot Earley, Frankie Stockwell ... I'll build around the rest.'

Three of Heff's 'Team of the Heavens' were Vincents men.

Hanahoe may have short-changed his dear friend in that selection as Heff's life experience had left him in no doubt whatsoever that if enough Vincents men banded together anything was possible.

Fourteen of them dressed up in the all-white of Vincents, with only one six-inch blue band wrapped around their chests, had played the reigning All-Ireland champions in April of 1953. It was a National League final. The Vincents players appeared in front of 37,605 paying customers accompanied only by Paddy O'Grady of the Air Corps who manned the goals.

A club team which did not even have a football field it could call its own property, and would have to wait another six years before doing so, was seated in the large cavernous tiled dressing-rooms underneath the Cusack Stand, waiting.

Waiting for them was Cavan in the persons of the Gunner Brady and his most famous bosom buddies, including Simon Duignan and Mick Higgins, who had earned themselves three All-Irelands in the previous six years.

It was all so improbable.

Or most likely a probable humiliation.

The thought of defeat never entered the head of a single Vincents man. Dessie Ferguson looked around him and nothing looked unusual. Nobody looked out of place. Everything was normal.

Perfectly so, right up to the last minute when they left the dressing-room.

'It's a fact,' he remembers to this day. 'We never thought for a second that we might get a bad beating ... that would never have entered our minds.'

Right from the throw-up, the blond heads of Dessie Ferguson and Ollie and Cyril Freaney caused mayhem in the Cavan defence. Bernie Atkins scored Dublin's first goal after five minutes, Kevin Heffernan scored a second after eight minutes, and Ollie Freaney set up his brother Cyril for a third goal on ten minutes.

By the end of the afternoon St Vincents had scored 4-6. The All-Ireland champions had managed 0-9.

Two of the goals were Heff's. Two of the points as well. The No.15 had, most people in the club calmly reckoned on their way out of Croker, just played the greatest game he had ever played for the club or the county.

All in one short afternoon.

In the same churchyard of St Vincent de Paul, where they now all waited to see Heff off on his final journey, Kevin Heffernan had also waved off too many of the men who had once sat either side of him, and opposite him, in dressing-rooms in so many grounds on so many unforgettable Sundays.

With his dearest friends of all, he'd won fifteen Dublin senior football titles, including a seven-in-a-row, and six more Dublin senior hurling titles. The Vincents fellas had more than enough medals between them to share around the entire parish and, halfway through that haul, in the club's jubilee year of 1956, it was agreed by the players to get their medals smelted down and made into a gold chalice, which was presented to one of the two 'black cloths' who had founded St Vincents.

The Reverend Dr William Fitzpatrick, or 'the Doc' to all and sundry who lined out under his eye in the blue and white, was the recipient of the perfectly made chalice. His younger co-founder, Reverend Brother Ernest Fitzgerald, pulled the shorter straw from the same group of fellas. He was handed a golden pen and pencil set.

Over half a century later, Heff's funeral mass was celebrated by the Doc's nephew, Fr John Fitzpatrick. The chalice took pride of place on the altar. Built by so many men, by Heff and others gone too early before him.

Two years younger than Heff, Noel Drumgoole had been taken from the St Vincent de Paul church on a cold, bleak January afternoon in 1995. A footballer and a hurler, and

captain of the Dublin team that went down to Tipperary in the All-Ireland final in 1961 by a single point. His medals were part of that chalice.

Before Drumgoole's funeral mass, Heff remarked that his friend was the 'most honest Vincents man ever'. The most loved Vincents man, however, may have been Ollie Freaney. He'd died four years before Drumgoole.

Freaney had died suddenly, twenty-two years earlier, back in September of 1991, during a family holiday in Donegal. And Freaney, with his socks down around his ankles and his jersey flowing over his shorts, was the first man they all had ever known to embark on open psychological warfare on GAA fields. Particularly, Ollie's motley choice of amusing and light-hearted remarks was usually aimed at the opponents of other Vincents players. They chaired him off the field when he captained Vincents, in his last game, to victory over UCD in the Dublin senior final in 1959.

Ollie, the original Tony Hanahoe.

All movement, all the time running defenders around the field like dummies, and all the time leaving wide open spaces behind him in the middle of the opposing defence. Ollie was brought back home from Donegal to the same church. He was 62 years old when they said goodbye to him.

Ollie Freaney's medals were in the chalice.

Too young to have their medals on the altar, the famous Foley brothers were also long gone, though Heff and the fellas had to see them off from a different church than St Vincent de Paul, closer to the Foleys' birthplace in Kinsealy. The once tall, blond Adonis, Des Foley, had passed away at the age of just 54, in 1995. Des was empowered with such athleticism and raw power in the middle of the football field and the hurling field, but his stout, older brother Lar was a rock of muscle and common sense in the centre or the corner of those same Vincents and Dublin defences.

Lar was 65 when he went. He was right corner-back on the Dublin team that Heff captained to the 1958 All-Ireland title, beating Derry on the same day that Des Foley captained the Dublin minor footballers to All-Ireland victory also.

Heff and Des had the two trophies back home in Scoil Mhuire and Joey's the following day, commencing one of the happiest weeks the people of Marino, and the members in St Vincents would ever remember.

Before 1974.

After '74? Oh, after 1974 it was never the same for Dublin and for the GAA folk who lived in every nook and cranny in the city, not just Marino and Fairview and Donnycarney. After '74, and after Dublin and Kerry had formally commenced the most pulsating duel in the history of Gaelic football the following year, life was never going to be the same again.

In the churchyard, they lingered awhile.

It was not a day to rush home. It was a day to feed one another memories of all the days, the bad days and the good days. All were equally enriching.

Young and old, and politicians and footballers and hurlers, they talked and they listened. They shook their heads and smiled. Laughter could also be heard. They knew that Heff would not want them to take the business of his funeral mass with a deathly seriousness.

In the middle of them all, maybe not as tall as everyone had remembered him, but wider, even wider than Mullins, was 'the Bomber' himself.

It was the Bomber, also known as Eoin Liston to his mother and father, who had begun the process of pounding Heff's beautiful, mesmerizing Dublin team into the dust in the final two years of that long duel in the seventies.

The Bomber chatted about great battles that ended all too quickly in the end, especially after the All-Ireland final in 1978 when he plundered three goals and Dublin were

obliterated long before the final whistle. Kerry had five goals and 11 points that afternoon, making it not just an unholy rout in the second half, but the biggest winning margin in an All-Ireland final since 1936, when Mayo beat Laois by 18 points. Dublin managed just nine points after, weirdly enough, leading by 0-6 to 0-1 in the middle of the first half.

Tears had flowed down Hill 16 that day. And into the night not enough of the hardest stuff could flow down the throat of a Dublin man or woman to lighten memories still only hours old. The dream of three All-Ireland titles in a row had not perished. It had been pulverized.

Five maddening goals.

John Egan getting the first with an immaculate pair of hands at work. Mikey Sheehy, the second, chipping a free-kick over the head of the frantic, panicked figure of Paddy Cullen trying to scramble back on to his line. Then the Bomber, one, two, three ... Boom, Boom, Boom!

Five of the best.

Now, thirty-five years later, everyone chatted, and huddled up against the chill wind as they slowly followed the hearse out on to Griffith Avenue, remembering only the joy of living through those six exhilarating years.

They remembered those gone from those games in the seventies.

Egan went twelve months earlier. He was 59. Tim Kennelly was only 51 when he went, in 2005. Mick Holden in 2007, went at 52.

The Horse ... Egan ... Holden ... and then, six weeks before Heff passed, Páidí Ó Sé had also died suddenly at 57 years of age.

All of them too young. All suddenly.

Heff, at the end, was the fine age of 83 years old.

He was always a man to do his own thing, and decide on his own timing, on his arrival and, more importantly, his departure.

And, coming or going, Heff never wanted any fuss.
He hated that.

No fuss fellas ... you hear me?

Part Two

A Parish Built of Stone

3

'In a football sense Vincents was always my home. That's how I view it. And like all homes and like all families, you have squabbles and arguments, but it's when some outside influence tries to upset things that you really see unity and purpose.'

KH

Thursday, 10 August 1893

'The Doc' was born.

The building of the parish of Marino on the northside of Dublin was a long way off. So too, the creation of St Vincents GAA club. Thirty, forty years, the pair of them. Meanwhile, a few miles outside Mountrath, in County Laois, Michael Fitzpatrick and Mary Phelan brought three sons into the world, two of whom would give distinguished service in the Archdiocese of Dublin.

One of the pair, Willie, would himself bring into the world, with the help of another religious figure, or 'black cloth' as Willie preferred to call the two of them, a GAA club which would do more than offer distinguished service and do whatever was asked of it.

They concocted St Vincents.

And St Vincents would very quickly be leading the way for Dublin football and hurling folk and, more than that, St Vincents would be moulding a whole different Dublin than anyone thought possible.

Willie Fitzpatrick.

A man of prayer. But never long-winded, never tripping over himself to sound extra important or impressively eloquent. His sermons were simple, they ran in straight lines, direct, and to the point. In the net, and on to the