

The Hyde Terrace Grand National, 1961

Eddie Manning



Eddie Manning (1949–2022)

***Eddie Manning** was born on 8 April 1949 in what had been the old fever hospital in Mohill. He grew up in Hyde Terrace, fifth in a family of four boys and three girls. His father Jimmy Joe was in the Irish army and his mother Ellen (nee Galway) was from Cork City. He attended the Boys National School in Mohill 1953 until 1961 where he made lots of mischief, though Master JJ Kelly recognised the spark in him. Afterwards, he worked on the convent farm and hen houses.*



In the mid-1960s, he followed some of his sisters to England and worked at many and varied jobs. He married young, and with his wife Patricia, raised a family of three. Back in Ireland, Eddie drove for Gallogly's bus company.

Eddie was a colourful character who didn't suffer injustices gladly. He was fiery and funny at once, with a keen wit. He loved to have a flutter on the horses and loved the banter of the barstool, describing it as pure theatre. Eddie was a deep thinker, loved reading and writing poems and ditties. For his own epitaph, he wrote: 'Tread warily gravedigger, don't mock! For on the morrow, that fleshy coat that's worn around your soul could be cast aside in death'.

It was the second day of the school holidays. A group of us gathered in the middle of the terrace and wondered what we would do for the day.

– I know, said Jim Mc Garry – we'll have a game of bangin.

Banging was a game akin to Gunfight at the OK Corral.

– Nah, we all said – we played that yesterday.

– We'll go and pick a fight with the Treanmores at the top the hill, said my younger brother Jim who was always itching for a fight.

The hill was between St Patricks Terrace and Hyde Terrace. St Patricks Terrace is now called St Patricks View or St Patricks Avenue or Church view. They've renamed it that many times I don't think I could find it.

– No, we'd better not, I said – we're in enough trouble as it is over the last one.

Tommy Murphy's eye was still black and swollen from the last fight after Scot hit him with a Scot's Pine cone fired from a catapult.

– I know, said Bula. We'll run the National. It must be twelve months since we ran the last one and the hedges have all recovered by now.

– Right, we all agreed. We'll run it. There were about fifteen of us ranging in ages from fifteen down to six or seven.

– What about the young wans? Harry Mc Crann asked.

The young ones were Aiden Beck, Gerry Mc Crann, Michael Beck, Sean Beck, Patrick Barden, Fletcher' Conboy, Georgie Taylor and Jude Conboy.

– They'll just have to take their chances and anyway it will be great experience for them in future races, said Frankie 'Ronnie Delaney' Cosgrove.

– Right, we all agreed, now let's sort out which jockeys and horses we want to be.

I wanted to be Nicolas Silver as he was just after winning the National a couple of months previously. I knew that because 'JJ' Master Kelly had sent me down the town on the Friday before the race to put a half-crown on Nicolas Silver. The bookies – Mary Killeen's – was where Jim Rodgers lives now.

– Right that's fine, said Kevin Beck – but I want to be Arkle and Pat Taaffe.

– Arkle never ran in the National so ya can't, said Val Prendergast.

I think he settled for Oxo, in the end. Anyway, we sorted it all out and duly trotted off down to the start point on the hospital lawn.

Now, a bit about the course. There are thirty-six houses in the terrace which is roughly in the shape of a horseshoe. The hedges consist of privet, box, whitethorn and Rosie-Dandrum, some big and some small. One thing they all had in common was that they were always neatly trimmed. In other words they were just crying out for the National to be ran. We got into line on the hospital lawn, jostling for position. Gerry Murphy had agreed to be the starter.

– Don't tell your mothers or fathers I had anything to do with this, Gerry said.

The younger ones were at the front and as the first fence wasn't a fence at all but a six-foot stone wall they were allowed to run around it and into the first garden. That was our way of making the race fair. They were also allowed to go through holes in the hedges as some of the hedges were bigger than they were.

– Get back into line Paddy Thomas, Gerry was shouting.

I had my hand on the hem of Al Mc Guinness' jumper ready to tug him back at the off. Kevin Beck was getting ready to trip Ronnie Delaney and my brother Jim was getting ready to punch anybody that got in his way.

Gerry got us into some kind of line. I was wondering what kind of calamities and mishaps we were going to have. And we were off.

First to the wall was Paddy Poker.

I had a quick look back over my shoulder to see where the favourite was. He was on the floor. Kevin had managed to trip him up at the start.

We jumped for the wall more or less in a line and boots and shoes scraping on the wall looking for a toe hold, pulled ourselves to the top. Many a free boot and shoe got scuffed on that wall.

We dropped down into the garden en masse crushing begonias, pansies, daffodils and every other kind of flower that had the audacity to be blooming. Jim and Bridie Agnew, the unfortunate owners of what had been a magnificent floral display were standing at their front door. Bridie's eyes were popping out of her head in disbelief.

No problem with the hedges here – two small box hedges running either side of the path to the front door which all of us cleared with one leap and then we vaulted the railing into numbers two and three which were Health Board houses of which both had open-plan gardens. No flowers or hedges here. We often wondered why the occupants looked so gloomy.

And then it was on to John Gormley's our very own Becher's Brook: four huge privet hedges and a whitethorn on exiting. John had been alerted by the commotion and he was standing by the front door with his double-barrel shotgun and his trusty lieutenant, Maggie the Boer. We never knew if it was loaded or not, the shotgun I mean not Maggie, although I had often heard my father say that she was loaded. With John pretending to take his aim we were expecting to get shot anytime.

Over the first two hedges without mishap. Val Pandy and Jim McGarry had now taken the lead and were a fence ahead of us. Martin Prendergast got stuck in the third hedge and all you could hear were shouts and branches breaking. John Gormley wasn't one for flowers. His forte was growing vegetables and we were in the middle of his veggie garden. Onions, beetroot, spuds, cabbages and cauliflowers all met the same fate as Mrs Agnew's flowers. The squeals out of Maggie the Boer, you'd think she was stuck like a pig.

The next hedge was the one to fear because behind it was the dog, a vicious brute of a Kerry blue. The only salvation was that he was chained to a big log but if you were unfortunate enough to jump the hedge and land anywhere near him then God help ya. A few years earlier when George Booth was running the race he got caught by the dog just as he was about to jump the last hedge. He was lucky to get away with just the arse out of his trousers. The young ones were directed what route to take to avoid the dog.

Everybody still in the race no casualties yet.

I was in fifth or sixth place at this stage. Ahead of me was Ronnie Delaney who had made up a lot of ground and was travelling well within himself.

The next garden number five was Packie Foley's, no hedges, nor veg, nor flowers but a veritable minefield of rabbit skins and fish heads – pike eel and cardy and just an occasional red herring – not to mention the dogs, about fourteen of them. Packie's dogs weren't wicked and we all knew them by name as we had hunted rabbits with them the length and breadth of the townlands. There was Sport and Razor and Bandit and Lord Haw Haw and others too numerous to mention. Packie was at the door shouting encouragement to his nephews one of whom was Ronnie Delaney the other the other being Josie, or as he's better known, Sinclair.

Over the railing and into number six, Rosie and Harry Beck's. Rosie was standing at the door shouting encouragement to her lads, one of whom, Harry Junior, was in third place. Rosie – a lovely lady – loved children. Rosie once sent her son Michael over the road to Maggie O Shea's to buy a couple of eggs. Maggie was one of the people in the terrace to keep hens. Michael came back after minutes and told Rosie that Maggie didn't have any eggs and that he had also tried Mrs Manning – my mother – and she didn't have any either.

– why did you try Mrs. Manning when she doesn't have any chickens, Rosie asked.

– you didn't send me for chickens, you sent me for eggs, Michael replied.

Back to the race, over the railing and low hedge and into Walter Beatty's. No sign of Walter but Walter's sister, poor Lizzie May who was paralyzed and bedridden, was watching our progress with the aid of her hand-held mirror. She was shouting for Walter to stop us but Walter was over the town shouting about Duffy's circus. Lizzie May hadn't been out of that bed in fifteen years. Scarce things wheelchairs back then but in later years the health board gave her a wheelchair. There were many willing hands to push her around the streets of Mohill, to discover sights and sounds that she hadn't experienced for such a long time. My mother was a very good friend of Lizzie May. She would visit her every day for a chat and to wash and change her

when the need arose. Lizzie May was very fond of children and we would often pop in for a chat. She'd ask you about school and various things. She had a chair beside her bed and as we sat and talked to her she'd put a hand on your head and rub your hair. We never left without getting a tanner or a shilling. In Valhalla or heaven or wherever it is people who pass away find peace and happiness, may she be skipping arm in arm with my mother and other friends through fields of gold.

Back to the race and over the hedge and into number eight, Mrs Prendergast's, Val shouting at us not to trample his mothers flowers.

Some of the young ones were dropping out at this stage – about nine of us were left I think. Ronnie was up to third place and was closely following Val P and Jim Mc Garry. Kevin Beck was in fourth, Al Mc Guinness fifth, myself sixth, my brother Jim seventh, Paddy Thomas eighth, and the Bula bringing up the rear.

Over the railings into number nine, Jas and Tessie Reilly's. Tessie was a big boisterous woman who loved a laugh and lived life to the full. She was the spitting image of Hattie Jacques and laughed every bit as much. She shouted at me as I went past.

– Go on Eddie, give yourself the whip – and the roars of laughter out of her.

Big privet hedge to be jumped into Mc Garry's number ten and another one out.

As I jumped in I could see Jim Mc Garry who had already traversed his own hedges and was about to exit number eleven about two yards back and racing neck and neck Val P and Ronnie Delaney. I jumped into number eleven, Nan Mc Crann's. Nan was a great singer and the Bula, who had nicknames on everybody used to call her Margaret Barry after the singing Traveller.

I was starting to tire badly at this stage my asthma was beginning to act up. I knew I wouldn't be able to keep going for much longer and I also had a bad headache, a legacy from Martin Prendergast who three weeks previously had smashed me over the head with a rock while I was having an altercation with his brother Val. I asked him why he hit me with a rock. – Because I couldn't lift the boulder, he replied. Smart fella Martin, never stuck for a quick retort. He's even sharper now.

I stumbled out of number eleven and fell in a heap into number twelve Tommy 'The One Hundred' McCrann's. They called him that because when anybody asked him how he was keeping his reply was always the same – one hundred percent. Bula, the son shortened it even more. He just called him The Hundred.

My form frames for the last three runnings of the National didn't make good reading. PPF – pulled up, pulled up, and fell. It reminded me of the joke about Paddy the Irishman backing a horse that duly obliged at odds of one hundred to one. On picking up his winnings the dumbfounded bookie asked him how he had picked a winner, he replied – Look at the form he had: first, first, first and pissed it.

I was out of the race so I went out onto the street to watch the rest of it unfold. The leaders were jumping number fifteen, still Jim Mc Garry in front, Ronnie Delaney and Val P neck and neck for second place, Kevin still fourth, Jim fifth, Paddy Thomas sixth and the Bula seventh and last. Everybody else had dropped out by now.

I suddenly remembered. Where the hell was Paddy Poker. I hadn't seen him since John Gormley's. They had jumped number thirteen, Paddy Conboy's and number fourteen Maggie Murphy's. They were in number fifteen now, Nellie Hopper Conboy's. A stiff privet to jump and they were into Jamesie Nolan's number sixteen. No danger of Jamesie saying anything to them or giving out. He was so laid back he was in danger of falling over.

Out of Jamesie's and into Ma Crawdawn Reilly's. I don't know how the Reilly's got that nickname. To my knowledge a crawdawn was the burr of a thistle. Maybe they were clingy kind of people.

Ma Reilly's front door was open and in the hallway there was Ray, her son, astride a magnificent Palomino rocking horse and he was riding it hell for leather. He had been watching the race as it came up the terrace. I'm sure he would have loved to join in but Ma was very particular about what kind of games she would let her son join in.

Small box hedge and a railing into number eighteen, John Tom Goldsberry or as we called him Gooseberry. Not a man that was fond of children. We were glad that he was out.

Ronnie Delaney was jumping the privet into number nineteen, Oweny O'Donnell's, closely followed by Jim Mc Garry, Val Prendergast, Kevin Beck, Al Mc Guinness and Paddy Thomas.

My brother Jim had stopped in Nellie Hopper's, number fifteen and was sitting down eating boxty in the kitchen. Nellie was a great woman for making boxty and she doled it out on a regular basis to all the kids in the terrace.

A small privet into number twenty, Joe Coleman's. Joe was Al McGuinness' grandfather and a great tin whistle player. We would often meet him in the street and ask him to play a tune. He always had his whistle in his breast pocket and he would march up and down the terrace depending on whether he was going to town or coming back. We all marched behind him as he played the Sally Gardens, or Miss McCloud's Reel. He was like the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

Al shouted to the leaders not to break his mothers flowers or he'd be for it.

Two large hedges into number twenty-one. George Beck's, Kevin's father, and a man who was larger than life. He waited for the Bula who had just scrambled over the hedge in last place.

George grabbed Bula by the scruff of the neck. Bula was spluttering and protesting:

– I'm running the National George, let me go.

– Bula, said George, I never did get to tell you about the time I was in the trenches at the Somme and Gallipoli, and he promptly frog-marched Bula into the house.

George was a great man for telling war stories and this time had a captive audience. We often sat around George in his kitchen and he would keep us spellbound for hours telling us how he flew planes, drove tanks and skippered submarines. All that time I was never sure which side he was on, what with his name being Beck. I was sixteen before I knew that it was with the Allies. I have a special fondness for George, God be good to him. His grandson Georgie Taylor inherited his storytelling skills.

Only six left in the race now. Numbers twenty-two, twenty-three and twenty-four negotiated without mishap. Ronnie Delaney in the lead,

Jim McGarry and Val Prendergast neck and neck in second, Al McGuinness fourth, Kevin Beck fifth and Paddy Thomas sixth.

Small box hedge into number twenty-five, Sonny 'Bray' Barden's where Bray was waiting to nab Kevin. The previous week Kevin had set fire to Bray's hedge, the one at the front gate and it was now a blackened mess. Bray had Kevin in a headlock, and was calling him an arsonist. Kevin was shouting – let go of me and I won't put my arse in it again. The garden he meant. Bray showed him out the front gate and Kevin was out of the race.

Years later Kevin and I were taking the short cut home from fishing in Lough Rynn. The short cut was across the bogs in Clooncahir and into Logan's bottoms. We caught a couple of tiny frogs the size of a fingernail. Kevin put them into a matchbox, the one that he carried his fishing hooks in and said – they'll come in handy later on.

I was wondering what kind of villainy he was planning and I didn't have long to wait before I found out. That night we were having a pint in the Bear McKeon's and Bray was there having his usual pint of Guinness. As hostilities between them had long since ceased, we stood on either side of him and engaged him in conversation. While he was talking to me, Kevin slipped a frog out of the matchbox and into Bray's pint. The frog was hidden by the creamy head on the pint but you could make out the swimming movements as it swam to the side of the glass. I think it was doing the breaststroke. Bray didn't notice anything. He grabbed his pint and downed half of it in one swallow. We looked into the remaining half pint on the counter. The movements had ceased. We looked at each other and burst out laughing. Bray asked us to share the joke but of course we couldn't.

A couple of weeks later Bray tried to engage Kevin in conversation and Kevin pointing to his own throat croaked out – Can't talk Bray, frog in my throat. And then took a fit of laughing. I'm sure Bray must have thought he had brain damage from the throttling he had given him years earlier.

Back to the race. Big privet into number twenty-six Sonny McKeown's the local barber. Sonny was in the garden snipping at the air with a big pair of scissors. He cut our hair and the hedges with the same scissors. He was shouting – I'll cut the goolies out of the first wan I catch.

Of course he didn't mean a word of it. Sonny was a gentle giant of a man who loved to see the children enjoying themselves. I can picture him to this day, bristling grey hair and bristling grey moustache and he always wore an unusually wide belt, not for holding his trousers up but for holding his belly up.

Into number twenty-seven, Ronnie Delaney still leading. Bea Cook lived in twenty-seven, a lovely gentle old woman who always dressed in black. She had a severe disability in that her feet pointed inwards toes facing toes. But that didn't stop her going to mass everyday. She would set off for mass thirty minutes early every day, shuffling her way with the aid of a walking stick, down the terrace over the town to the corner and up the hill to the Church and then the same time to get home. It wasn't a simple thing to walk to mass for Bea, it was a true pilgrimage.

Into number twenty-eight and the positions are the same. Small box hedge in and large privet out. Paddy and Maggie O'Shea were the owners of twenty-eight. Paddy was our local tailor and he must have been a good one, either that or he was cheap as all the local farmers got him to make their suits. He made my first suit which was for First Holy Communion, short trousers and long jacket. There was only about four inches of trouser leg under the hem of the jacket. He sat on a large table in the kitchen sewing and stitching and beside him his assistant Allymon Clyne.

As soon as the runners landed in the garden there were squawks and cackles and chickens flapping around. It sounded like a fox in the hen house. There were pullets and clockers and broilers running and flying for cover. Maggie rushed out to see what the commotion was about but by this time the runners were into number twenty-nine, my own house.

_____ *Story ends here*

Written by Eddie Manning around 2010, many Mohill people will recognise themselves or their neighbours in this story. Several of those mentioned have passed on, but Eddie's writing captures their world and immortalises their personalities with empathy, warmth and humour. Eddie was keen to point out that 'we were running the National in the terrace since the late 40's,' long before Roddy Doyle published 'Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha' in 1993.

Unfortunately, Eddie never got to finish the story: for all the riders in this great Grand National, the race finishes early, at number twenty-nine.

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