

**Seamus Bracken RIP**  
**Funeral Mass**  
**Rathdowney Church**  
**Monday 22nd January 2024**

*Seamus Bracken, 4 Cascade St. Rathdowney, Co. Laois, January 18th. 2024,  
peacefully at home surrounded by his loving family.*

*Predeceased by his parents Patrick and Mary, sister Mary (McNeil) and grand  
daughters Fiona and Danielle who died in infancy.*

*Sadly missed by his heartbroken wife **Sheila**, adoring family **Mary, P.J.,  
Dolores and Cormac**, sons-in-law John Delaney and John Cummins,  
daughters-in-law Coleen and Petrina, grandchildren **Denise, Sinèad, Gràinne,  
Seàn, Luke, Sarah, Emma, Laura, Conor, Niamh, Shane and Eoin**, his 8  
great grandchildren, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, nieces, nephews, extended  
family, neighbours and a wide circle of friends.*

When I heard on Friday morning that Seamus had died my thoughts went back to my very first days here in Rathdowney twelve years ago this coming summer. I was in the process of moving into the house and had not yet said a public Mass here in the church. The doorbell rang and when I answered it a young man from the traveling community was standing there and he asked if he could graze his pony in my field. I wasn't aware that I even had a field and I certainly didn't know where it was. I decided to kick for touch and I explained to the young man that I was new and maybe if he came back in a few days I could think about it. I continued unpacking the boxes and about an hour later the doorbell went again. It was the same young man and this time he had brought me a 'present'. I think it was meant to help his case with securing the field for his pony. A few hours later the doorbell rang a third time and now I was probably getting a little irritated thinking it would be my young friend wondering if I had made up my mind about the field. This time I was a little more prepared but when I opened the door ready to send him packing, I was surprised to find a fairly tall man with a big

smile and extended hand who introduced himself as Seamus Bracken. He had come simply to welcome me to Rathdowney. Sitting among my unpacked boxes we had a great chat about all kinds of things. He admitted to me that when he had heard the new Parish Priest was to be a Camross man he had his reservations as to whether it work out. All my predecessors that he had known were from some part of Kilkenny and I think he found their shade of Black and Amber a little easier to deal with. While I had not immediately recognised the man standing on my doorstep that evening, I certainly recognised the name. Even in Camross we knew of the passionate and vocal Rathdowney supporter, mentor and coach cheering on his team and his parish from the sidelines at many hurling fields around Laois and beyond. As I think back to that first meeting with Seamus twelve years ago I was touched and grateful that he had taken the time to come to welcome me to this community which was so precious to him. Today it is both my sad and happy task to preside at Seamus' funeral Mass. It is sad because we are saying goodbye to a much-loved husband, father, grandfather, neighbour and friend. But there is happiness too that we can celebrate the life of a man who has lived such a full and happy life and has given so much to this community particularly in the area of sport.

Seamus Bracken was born on Monday the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1941, the first child of Patrick and May Bracken of Clonaslee. While Seamus may have been too young to realise it or be affected by it his early childhood was quite turbulent. His dad died when Seamus was only twenty months old leaving his mum to raise Seamus and his younger sister Mary on her own. May took the brave decision to go back to train to be a midwife. The best opportunity for this training was in Liverpool. She was enabled to do this by her own parents, the Clooneys in Aghaboe who offered to care for her two young children. When their mum qualified as a midwife she returned to Ireland and after a brief stay in Ballyroan May secured a position as midwife here in Rathdowney. She moved into the house in Cascade Street with her two young children Seamus and Mary and this house would be Seamus' home for the next seventy-five years until his death there on Thursday night.

After Primary and Secondary school here in Rathdowney Seamus went to Roscrea to serve his time as a mechanic and fitter. One day while standing at a street corner in Roscrea with some of his mates enjoying their break something would happen that would change his life forever. A young trainee hairdresser whizzed past this group of young 'Corner boys' as John b Keane might put it, on her bicycle. Somehow in that split moment, Shelia Shanahan caught Seamus Bracken's eye and a spark was ignited. The scene then moves on to a dance in Mountrath some time later and the rest as they say is history. Shelia and Seamus were married in Roscrea and that initial spark fanned into a flame of sixty two years of love, laughter, commitment and happiness. The fruit of their love would be their four children, Mary, P.J., Dolores and Cormac, and later that love would expand to welcome Denise, Sinèad, Gràinne, Seàn, Luke, Sarah, Emma, Laura, Conor, Niamh, Shane and Eoin and more recently again their eight great grandchildren.

Seamus' work life would involve a lot of driving, whether it was CIE lorries or working with farmers fitting and repairing Milking machines. The work with Milking machines would later allow him to set up his own business.

Seamus' contribution to this parish community has been very significant and among other things he was a key member of the Rathdowney Festival Committee when it was at its height back in the 80's. But every day when Seamus looked out his front door on Cascade Street he saw his first love and the great passion of his life, The hurling field. There could be no celebration of Seamus Bracken's life that would not acknowledge his love for and his contribution to the GAA and particularly to hurling both in this parish but also within County Laois. I'm indebted here to our local GAA historian Alex Stenson who devoted a section of his recently published book to the unique contribution made by the man we honour with Christian burial today.

As I read down through what Alex has written about Seamus' GAA career I understood a little bit better why there would have been at least two good reasons why the visitor at my front door twelve years ago might have been somewhat reluctant to welcome a Parrish Priest to Rathdowney who came from Camross. Those two reasons were 1966 and 1986. It might not have helped my case if I had told him that I was

actually ordained a priest just a few weeks before that County final in 1986 when Camross beat the Errill team trained by Seamus by one point. To paraphrase a line from the bible; Seamus might well have thought: *'Could anything good come out of Camross, could anything good come out of 1986'*

Seamus would have acknowledged himself that he had limited success as a hurler, an U16 medal his only reward for a career that spanned the '60s, early 70's. He will be best remembered for his work with Rathdowney and Laois GAA, serving the Association in almost every conceivable capacity, Player, Manager, Selector, Referee, Administrator, one of the unsung heroes, dedicated to the cause.

Within that impressive cv , it is as a coach that Seamus will be the outstanding highlight, credited with the emergence of Rathdowney as an underage hurling power throughout the 70's/80's. In coaching terms, he was ahead of his time. A believer that success at adult level in his club would only come if the work was put in at juvenile level, he was instrumental in establishing structures that are still serving the club very well to this day. The *"Bracken School of Excellence"* blazed a trail of glory throughout the county and brought an avalanche of County titles. Alex sums up *The Brack's* contribution in the following terms. A *pioneering figure in coaching and games development, his work as a coach, at club and county level, are without doubt Seamus's greatest legacy to Cumann Lúthchleas Gael.*

One further viewpoint and tribute worth mentioning here comes from Seamus' great friend Tommy Hickey. Tommy believes that Seamus Bracken *'could see more on a hurling field, both in relation to an individual player and the game itself, more than any coach or manager I've ever known "he had a brilliant eye for the game and a player"*

I hope this in some way has been a snapshot into the life of the man whom we celebrate today. In that First reading from the Book of Ecclesiasticus we heard about *the list of generous people whose good works have not been forgotten.* Seamus Bracken is very definitely on that list and as that reading goes on to say it is right that *we the assembly should celebrate their praises.*

Seamus Bracken was a man of many parts and we have spoke of some of them, the husband, the father, the grandfather, the hard worker, the GAA man, the community man, the character who loved to tell a good story. There was also the man capable of great kindness. I saw that first hand when I regularly visited his neighbour and friend Mark Whelan. Seamus was also a man of Faith and when he could he was a regular attender here at Mass. In more recent times he loved to receive Communion at home which Sr. Anita brought to him. That second reading which Seamus' family chose for his funeral today could so easily be Seamus' own words as he slipped away quietly on Thursday night: *the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.*

Alternatively, Seamus might be more comfortable with the final words of the "Hurlers Prayer" *"When the final whistle for me is blown, And I stand at last at God's judgement throne, May the Great Referee when He calls my name, Say "you hurled like a man, you played the game"*

Seamus; 'The Brack' may your gentle and generous soul rest in Peace.

**Symbols: (Shane)**Car keys. His love of driving. Meet him many times down the town in any one day. His work involved driving to every part of the country

**Evie** brings the Foster and Allen cd. Love of Country music and dancing

**Eoin** brings a hurl. Self explanatory

**Ollie** brings a packet of Rich tea biscuits. Seamus's sweet tooth even when against doctor's advice

Fiadh brings an album of family photographs

JJ brings a newspaper symbolising his love of current affairs and keeping up with the news. Daily visit to Keanes

Readers: Petrina and Eimear

Prayers of The Faithful: Caragh, Eva, Evan, Eoin

Bread and wine

**Thank Yous,**

Dr. Maeve Carroll and staff, his carers, howard and staff at the Chemist, All who brought food to the house,

All his great and loyal friends

To Michael Doyle and Mick,

Sr. Anita

Musicians today, Margaret, Teresa, Johnny

GAA and all who helped in any way