JOHN JOE BOURKE

John Joe Bourke from Monslatt, Killenaule was one of the runners from outside the parish to give sterling service to Coolcroo in the 1960's. He started his career at 16 years of age with his local club in Killenaule in 1954 joining his brother Michael, who was already a member of that club. Later his brothers Dan and Paddy joined to make it a family affair. Coming from the defunct Ballincurry club in 1962 John Joe was by then a most experienced and well-known athlete. He quickly settled in with the Two-Mile-Borris outfit and gave them outstanding service.

In 1961, in the blue vest of Ballincurry, John Joe won the individual Tipperary senior title at Moyne, beating the holder Billy O' Dwyer of Holycross. A report on the race in the Munster Tribune commented thus –

"*A popular and well deserved victory was gained by John Joe Bourke of Ballincurry athletic club when he won his first County Tipperary senior cross-country championship at Moyne beating the holder, Billy O'Dwyer of Holycross A.C. into second place. Eighty-eight runners contested the race. The race for the individual honours was very exciting and provided something of a surprise. O'Dwyer was strongly fancied to gain the laurels but from the start Burke went about his task enthusiastically and finished forty yards ached of O'Dwyer. His time of 45 mins 18 secs was very fast for the distance over this particular course and the victory was an outstanding achievement for Bourke, who is one of the most consistent runners to ever represent Tipperary.*"

This was not John Joe's first attempt at the title. He was second in the event in 1957, '58, and '60 and third in 1956, a truly wonderful record. Good things come to those who wait and this gallant runner from Monslatt, Killenaule was rewarded for his prolonged endeavour. Holycross won the team prize with Coolcroo second. Little did John Joe Bourke think that he would win two senior team medals with Coolcroo in 1964 and 1965! He was second to club mate Con Bowe in the 1965 Tipperary senior.

In a long and distinguished career he won seven All Ireland medals, seven Munster championships medals and in all eight county medals. To add to his cross-country haul he won numerous medals and trophies on the track. After most of his contemporaries had retired John Joe Bourke kept on running and took part in veterans races in the O/30, O/40 and O/50 grades. He won a medal at the O/50 in 1984 with Fethard A.C.

In 2001, he was presented with the 'Tipperary Athlete of the past award' to add to a great trophy collection and was honoured by the Tipperary Board in February, 2006 when he received a special award as a member of the last winning Tipperary senior All Ireland cross-country team of 1955. The unassuming Killenaule athlete was a credit to the sport he adorned for so long.

County Senior Championship 1965. (L-R) John Joe Bourke, Con Bowe, Pat Ely.