

Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 10)—DENIS CAREY of Kilfinane

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

ONE of the most outstanding hurling clubs of early G.A.A. years was the Kilfinane Emmets, who wrote their name on the scroll of All-Ireland fame by winning the Blue Riband of hurling in 1897, thus bringing the first hurling title ever to the County of Sarsfield.

We first make the acquaintance of Denis Carey as Captain of the Kilfinane Emmets, an honour he gained whilst still in his 'teens. Just then the Emmets were emerging as a leading Limerick Club, and included in the membership as noble a band of Gaels as ever breathed God's pure air.

As well as a nursery for good hurlers, Kilfinane was, at the time, the home of as grand a band of athletes as any district of similar size ever boasted.

By a visit to Paddy Ryan's school over the old Market House, at Kilfinane, in the 'eighties of the last century, you could meet there as pupils Dan Shanahan, John Flanagan, Mick and Jack Connery, Denis Carey, Jack McCarthy and a host of others. They gave their native district a place in the athletic history of Ireland that time cannot efface or distance dim. I trust the recital of the deeds of one of that gallant number brings back to any of the old campaigners still happily with us golden memories of days that are dead—of times that used to be.

ATHLETIC CAREER.

In 1891, when he had just emerged from his 'teens, Denis Carey left his native Kilfinane to join the Dublin Metropolitan Police.

The following year he made his debut in the athletic arena by tying with Reynolds of Dublin for the championship of Ireland, both competitors throwing the hammer 105 feet from a 7 ft. circle.

From that date until August, 1922, thirty years later, when he last appeared at the Tramways Sports, winning the same event, Denis Carey's career was one of breaking previous records and creating new ones. Truly an extraordinary period.

To enumerate during that period his various performances, not alone in Ireland, but in Great Britain and on the Continent, would occupy a very considerable space. Nothing more than a brief outline is here intended.

At the end of 1892 he found himself the undisputed champion hammer thrower of Ireland, having thrown it at Roscommon in September of that year a distance of 132 feet. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that the hammer of those days was of the sledge description, with a wooden handle, and altogether unlike the pliable missile that has since been brought into use and is now utilised by the present-day exponents of this event.

The following year—1893—can really be said to have brought him out, for not only did he follow up his previous year's successes in the Irish championship with the hammer, but he carried off the English championship for this event, throwing the missile in the latter, 123 ft. 4½ ins.

RUNNING AND JUMPING.

Turning his attention to running and jumping, he suddenly blossomed as a powerful rival to the champions of the day; and a noteworthy performance was a dead-heat with Gerrard of Trinity College, for the 100 yards at Ballsbridge in May of the same year.

As an all-round athlete he now moved to the top rung of the ladder of fame, and for more than fifteen years after he won innumerable prizes for the following events: Hammer-throwing, putting 16 lb. shot, throwing 56 lbs. weight, 120 yards hurdles, 100, 220, 440 and 880 yards flat; hop, step and jump and pole jump.

In field events, Denis Carey's favourite was the 120 yards hurdles. In this event he had no rival. It was considered a treat, in his hey-

day, to witness him clearing the obstacles with the style and speed of a greyhound. He gained the unique distinction of annexing the championship of Ireland in this event on six occasions, five of which were in succession—a marvellous performance, not yet equalled or, perhaps, likely to be.

REPRESENTED IRELAND IN INTERNATIONALS.

During his time on the athletic field he represented Ireland in her international with Scotland on many occasions, and thrice won the hurdles event for his country, whilst in 1895 he carried off the Gaelic quarter mile championship from a large and select field.

In 1893, Carey was the first man to break James S. Mitchell's record by throwing the hammer 121 ft. 6 ins. at the Queen's College, Cork, sports, the far-famed T. F. Kiely being second at 120 ft. 6 ins., and the equally renowned John Flanagan third at 114 ft.

A month later he was successful in winning the hammer and pole jump championship of Ireland at Ballsbridge, the former event at 130 ft. 3 ins. In the same year he won the hammer championship of England at 123 ft. 6 ins.

The following year Carey put up a notable performance in winning the 440 yards flat and running, hop step and jump championship of Ireland on the same day.

REMARKABLE EVENT.

Rounding off a magnificent record in the 120 yards hurdles championship with a great win in 1905, let us study a Press report of that remarkable event. It reads:—"Carey retained the 120 yards hurdles championship of Ireland, Harding being second and Harvey third. Harding was very impatient on his mark, and broke no less than four times. This must have tried the temper of the other competitors, not to mention the starter. At the fifth attempt the quartette—T. F. Kiely was the fourth—got away to a beautiful start, and they took the first hurdle level. They raced absolutely abreast for the first five hurdles. Harding and Carey were clear of the other pair at half distance. At the third hurdle from home Harding was the first over, but at the second last hurdle to go the pair were level. They cleared the final hurdle abreast, but Carey put in a magnificent effort on the flat and won the best race of the day by half a yard, with Harvey, a couple of yards away, third, and Kiely a good fourth. It was the finest hurdle race ever seen at Ballsbridge. None of the competitors knocked the hurdles, and they ran in their own ground all the way. Harding's breaking at the start must have upset the other men, and Carey's win, under the circumstances, is all the more meritorious. He is the 'grand old man' of Irish hurdles, and nothing but his pluck and his grand finishing powers got him home. Notwithstanding the years he has been taking an active part in athletics, he is still in excellent form—in fact, I might say better than ever before, and undoubtedly a credit to his native district and to Ireland."

FURTHER CHAMPIONSHIP WINS.

Denis Carey shortly afterwards retired from the running track, took to weight throwing, and picking up the olden threads, resumed a winning way, adding the Irish championships of 1907, 1910, 1913 and 1914 to his already long list. He was second for the English championship in 1912 at 157ft. 6ins, just twenty years after he had won his first hammer event.

In August, 1899, Carey during a like

visit to England took part in no less than twelve races in three successive days, nine of which he won. Not a bad performance for a boy from Kilfinane.

Carey's best performance in competition with the hammer was at Ballsbridge in 1912, when he won at 165 ft., and only fouled the circle by two inches at 174 ft. 4 ins.

It was like a breath of old Kilfinane to visit Denis Carey's Dublin home, and I spent a few pleasant evenings there, listening to stories of the long ago and of the great, great men that graced the Irish athletic stage in the golden era. Very little could I ever get from him concerning his own career, but on one occasion, when accompanied by another Kilfinane hurler and athlete of the old school—the late William Drake, he told us some of his story and here it is:

"Looking back, I may say that I take legitimate pride in having won the 120 yards hurdles championship of Ireland so often, while performing the ordinary duties of a Dublin policeman, for no training facilities were allowed in those days.

SELECTED TO REPRESENT IRELAND.

"I made my debut in this competition in 1896, when I ran second to G. P. Myles. We were then selected to represent Ireland against Scotland at Ballsbridge a month later. Here I had the satisfaction of winning by three yards from Myles. I attribute this rapid improvement to my being enabled to train daily at Trinity College Grounds, while on night duty for eighteen days.

"In all, I competed in the hurdles championship eleven times, the last occasion being in 1907, and I confess that the unusual circumstances bearing on the result of this race ranked in my memory for a long time.

"I won my heat so easily that it was assumed I would be unbeatable in the final. However, in this, my last hurdles championship race, I was faced with an additional but unforeseen obstacle which proved my undoing. The last hurdle was placed two feet further off than the regulation ten yards. I was actually gliding along well in front when, owing to the alteration in spacing I misjudged the distance, and my rere leg, catching in the last hurdle, brought me down. I never could elicit whether the wrong spacing was a genuine mistake or an act of malice, but it terminated my hurdle racing.

"I never won the hurdles championship of Ireland, but was beaten inches on one occasion, and was leading over the last hurdle another year when I fell. In 1897 I won the 120 and 300 yards hurdles at Notts Forest, for which I got two gold medals, each value for £10. A month later I won the 120 and 300 yards hurdles at Southport, though I was penalised yards in both events. Amongst my opponents were a Doctor Donovan and two University students. The present Protestant Bishop of Waterford, Right Rev. Dr. Harvey, ran second to me for three years in the Irish hurdles championship.

ALL-ROUND ATHLETIC ENTRY

"In 1894 I pulled in eight tugs-o'-war in one day, at the Glasgow Police Sports. Having made an all-round athletic entry, I won the high jump at 5 ft. 8 ins. before the tug-o'-war started. Then the D.M.P. team, of which I was a member, beat the Govan police by two pulls to nil, the Aberdeen police and the Liverpool police by like margins, but lost to the Bel-

fast R.I.C., also by two pulls to nil. Immediately after I competed and won the long jump at 22 feet 2 ins., the hammer at 130 ft, and the shot at 38 ft. 6 ins.

"An honour which I greatly appreciated was paid me in 1901, while I was undergoing a course of instruction at Chelsea Barracks, London. It was my spontaneous election to the London Athletic Club and also the London Polytechnic Athletic Club."

Standing about 6 ft. 2 ins. in height, and weighing over 14 stone, Denis Carey was so beautifully framed that he was ideally built for an athlete. No better proof of this is needed than the fact that during his career he won over five hundred prizes, of which fifty were championship medals.

In 1907, owing to pressure of official duties, he retired from track events, but still continued at the hammer and again carried off the Irish championship. In 1912 he represented Ireland at the Olympic Games at Stockholm, and as late as 1920 appeared at Stamford Bridge at the English A.A. championships.

AMAZING ENERGY.

His energy and vitality, combined with will power, were simply wonderful. He thought nothing of taking part in six different events visits from one meeting to another on the same day, or making flying-on successive days. In 1899 he competed at Coventry, Stoke-on-Trent and Leeds in succession. At the first named place he won four events, secured third in the fifth, and defeated in the 300 yards hurdles no less a person than the record holder, Dr. T. M. Donovan.

In addition to all this, he trained and coached the D.M.P. heavy weight tug-o'-war team which wrested the world's championship from the Liverpool police at Ballsbridge in 1908, the latter team having beaten all comers at the Olympic Games in London the same year.

And though devoting so much time to athletics, he never neglected his official duties or responsibilities. In his early years he was chosen, and, of course, was admirably adapted for the position of drill, gymnastic and general police instructor. In this capacity he was a marked success, and his abilities were recognised by gradual promotion, which was by no means either premature or undeserved.

That Denis Carey was a big figure in the athletic life of his country can finally be summarised by a brief record of his championship successes:—Pole jump (under I.A.A.A. laws), 1893, 9ft. 6ins. Running hop, step and jump (under G.A.A. laws), 1894, 45 ft. 7 ins, 440 yards flat (under G.A.A. laws), 1894, 55 secs.; 120 yards hurdles (under I.A.A.A. laws), 1898, 17 1-5 secs.; 1899, 16 4-5 secs.; 1900, 16 4-5 secs.; 1901, 16 3-5 secs.; 1902, 17 secs.; 1905, 16 3-5 secs. Throwing the 16 lbs. hammer from 9 ft. circle (under I.A.A.A. laws), 1892, 105 ft. 4 ins.; 1893, 130 ft. 3 ins.; 1907, 127 ft. 10 ins.; 1910, 148 ft. 4 ins.; 1913, 153 ft.; 1914, 155 ft.

No. 11.—Dan Ahearne of Athea.