



Tim Ahearne took gold in a hotly-contested hop skip and jump competition at the 1908 Olympic Games in London

Ahearne men leapt to glory on world stage

■ Tim took gold at triple jump in 1908, brother Dan held world record for 11 years

THE OLYMPIC GAMES review concludes this week with a look at Tim Ahearne, from Dirreen Athea, who won the Hop, Step, and Jump gold medal in London in 1908. Dirreen is a townland in the parish of Athea in West Limerick and it translates to Little Oak Wood. It is located a few miles outside the village on the R524 on the way to Glin.

Its setting in the rural countryside has moved many poets and writers to pen very complimentary lines in exaltation of its virtues.

It is a place of peace and tranquility with the rugged beauty of the quarry, the mystery of the glen, and the rippling waters of the river Gale to inspire the mind.

It is a rural bliss with nature close at hand to observe and delight in its trees, wild flowers, and open spaces containing a vast variety of wildlife.

From this background emerged Tim and Dan Ahearne to showcase their great talents to national and international audiences.

They went from Dirreen's fields of gold to Olympic and World athletic fame. Tim and Dan along with older brothers William and Mick grew up on the family farm, helping out with the jobs that needed doing.

They enjoyed the freedom of the open spaces to play football and other games of that time, and they lined out with their local club Athea in Gaelic football.

They trained for their athletic events by jumping the Abha Bheag, a small river adjacent to their homestead. They attended school sports at Saint Michael's College Listowel and other sports meetings.

They often finished first, second third and fourth in the same event showing great promise for the future. They travelled by bicycle to meetings even as far away as Fermoy in Cork.

So few people realise the dream of winning a gold medal or setting a new world record as Tim and Dan did. It must have been a very exciting time around Dirreen and Athea during those heady days of athletic victory abroad.

Family neighbours and friends must have been so proud of the brothers' exploits as the news ar-



Then & Now

with Tom Aherne

rived slowly of their successes in England, Scotland Canada, and the US.

There were no phones, airmail letters faxes, emails, or skype at the time to speed the news to famed Dirreen.

Tim was born on August 17 1885, and he was of fair complexion, with fair hair and blue eyes and stood 5 foot eight inches, in competitive action.

His jumping skills were first revealed at his college sports, when he jumped two feet beyond the long jump pit during practice.

He also performed a remarkable feat by jumping across the river Gale, a jump of 21 feet from bank to bank.

At the age of 18 he won the two jump events at Listowel sports, on July 27 1904.

Success followed success, and 1907 was an exceptional year for Tim, winning the All-Round Championship of Munster at Fermoy and the GAA Long Jump Championship plus sixteen first prizes in a near record year for any athlete.

1908 was destined to be Tim's greatest year, and the following is an extract from David Guiney's book Silver, Gold Bronze, describing Tim's historic feat.

The triple jump at the fourth Olympic Games in London, on July 26 1908 brought together the most impressive field the event had known up to then.

There were 19 competitors, representing seven nations, and 14 of these had been over 46 feet in the months preceding the Games. There were three Irishmen in the competition Martin Sheridan representing the USA, and Tim Ahearne, and Michael Dineen, representing the United Kingdom.

Sheridan injured himself in the preliminary rounds and had to

withdraw, and Dineen was surprisingly below form and was eliminated in the early rounds.

The clear favourite was Eric Larsen of Norway who had cleared over 48 feet in the weeks coming up to the event. Calvin Bricker, the Canadian champion and Platt Adams, the American champion, were seen as the likely threats to him.

In the first round 15 competitors cleared 44 feet, and eight of these cleared 45 feet. Tim Ahearne cleared 45 feet 8 inches which appeared good enough to earn him a place in the final 6.

In the second round Larsen went to 47 ft. 2 1/2 ins and Bricker to 46 ft. 2 ins. Garfield McDonald from Canada surprised everybody with his best jump ever of 47 ft. 10 1/4 ins, and a new Olympic record.

It was short lived as the 22-year-old Tim Ahearne finally showed his Irish form, and landed far out into the pit, to extend the Olympic record to 48ft 4 ins.

In the first round of the final McDonald had another magnificent jump which carried him out to 48 ft. 5 1/4 ins, and another Olympic record. None of the other five improved their distances, but Tim jumped well over 47 feet.

The excitement was intense as the competitors assembled for the final round. Mountpleasant, Adams, Bricker, and Larsen all failed to improve on their best, and McDonald fouled his final effort.

It was all down now to Tim and with his youth and lack of experience at top international level; few believed he was capable of anything better.

He was the essence of coolness as he went to the top of the runway for the last jump of the 1908 Olympic Games triple jump competition.

He came in at a furious pace, hit

the board with a little margin to spare, got in a fine opening hop, took a remarkably long step, and finished off with a great jump that landed him far out towards the end of the pit.

Following a delay to measure and re-measure the distance it was announced that Tim Ahearne had set a new Olympic and World record of 48ft 11 1/4ins (14.92 meters).

Tim Ahearne, was the youngest Gold Medal winner at the games and the Olympic champion of 1908.

His win in the British Championship in the Long Jump and second place in the High Jump gave him the Lord Alverston Cup in 1909.

In 1911 he was awarded the Winged Foot Trophy for being the best individual athlete to score the greatest number of points for the New York Athletic Club. Tim died in December 1968 in New York.

Tim and his brother Dan, who died in 1949 brought great honour and glory to the village by the river Gale, and were true ambassadors for West Limerick.

Dan was the World Record Holder of the Hop, Step, and Jump from 1909 to 1920 and he finished 6th in that event at the 1920 games in Antwerp. Athea Community Council erected a Wing Foot Monument to the brothers in 1996 in Athea.

In those days all athletes were equal as there were no facilities, coaches, or drugs, and the true Olympic spirit shone through.

It was harder to win honours making the achievements of Tim, Dan, and our other Limerick athlete's achievements far greater. They did our country proud and their deeds deserve to be remembered.

I will conclude with a verse written about the brothers by John Joe Sheehy from Lyreacromphane.

The County of Limerick has produced the world's best athletes
And in the annals of sport recorded are their feats
Jack Grady and Dan Shanahan,
Paddy Ryan, from Pallasgreen
And fit to stand beside them are the Ahearne's from Dirreen.

Let's not gi on Castlem wild ass jus

John B. Keane

OUT IN THE OPEN

THERE IS a letter this week from Edward Purser of Bismarck in North Dakota. Mister Purser is a university lecturer and some weeks ago one of his former pupils sent him a copy of the Limerick Leader. The copy contained an account of the life and times of our old friend, the Castlemahon wild ass.

"Dear Mr. Keane,

"I was intrigued to read your account of the Castlemahon wild ass. Are you absolutely certain that the breed is completely wiped out? Could you undertake an in-depth search?

"I know many foundations and institutes who would gladly put up the money for this kind of undertaking.

"If necessary, I could go to Ireland and help you organise a search party. I am not familiar with the Castlemahon terrain but I would gladly lead an expedition into it. Could you send a map of the district?

"One of my chief reasons for writing is to tell you about the Missouri River wild ass.

"Until the summer of nineteen sixty three it was firmly believed that this breed of ass was extinct. This was not so.

"A maintenance worker in Fort Peck Reservoir (which is in Montana and forms the dam on the reservoir) discovered a small herd of wild asses while on a shooting weekend with his son.

"These turned out to be genuine Missouri Wild Asses. So you never know. It is possible that there are still Castlemahon wild asses in the hinterland there.

"I will be eagerly awaiting your letter.

"Yours sincere,
Edward Purser."

Charity

I DON'T know what to say. Castlemahon locals whom I met recently in Ballybunion assure me that there is no trace of the wild ass in Castlemahon.

In fact I have received a number of letters attacking me for ever suggesting that there was such a creature as a Castlemahon wild ass.

Some of these letters insist that I should write about neither goats nor asses but rather about real people and real happenings. It is never easy to please everybody. There are some who love all God's creatures and some who do not.

There was the same furore when I first wrote about Canavan's talking dog, Banana the Fourth, and later about his nephew, Banana the Fifth.

About two years ago I stopped writing about the dog and now everywhere I go people stop me and complain that they never hear of Canavan's talking dog these

days. It's hard to know to do. One must look higher authority. What the Bible say? Let us to the Book of Job, ch thirty-nine:

*Knowest thou the when the wild goats c
rock bring forth? Or
thou mark when the hir
calve?*

*Canst thou number
months that they fulfil
knowest thou the time
they bring forth?*

*They bow themselves
bring forth their young
they cast out their sorro*

*Their young ones c
good liking, they gro
with corn, they cast out
sorrows: they go forth a
turn not unto them.*

*Who hath sent out th
ass free? Or who hath l
the bands of the wild as*

*He scorneth the mul
of the city, neither rego
he the crying of the driv*

*I don't know
what to say
Castlemahon
locals whom
met recently
Ballybunion.
assure me th
there is no tr
of the wild a
in Castlemah*

*The range of the mow
is his pasture and he
cheth after every green*

I sincerely hope that verses will silence my c or at least invest them some charity.

Making the hay

BROTHER Stephen sell is no stranger to columns. He is still tioned at the Al Brothers Nursing Home Mary's Road, Manchester, and he is writing poetry.

There now seems every hope that a bo same will be publ shortly by the Oriel Press Charleville.

Ted Riordan who is head of this distinguish house knows a good j from a bad one and it is hoped that Brother S work will be in the shops very soon.

His latest effort is a talgic piece called "M the Hay." Here are verses from it.

*The asphalt 'neath n
is hot,
Pollution fills the air;*