

Famous bo a big hit w lovelorn so

John B. Kea

OUT IN THE OPEN

DURING the Pattern Day in Ballybunion I met a man in the Marine Hotel whose father had been killed by a boar. I presumed that the dead man had been abroad at the time, somewhere in South America where the peccary or wild pig still runs wild or maybe in Afghanistan where fierce boars still abound in the remote uplands.

Imagine my surprise when I was told that the foul deed was perpetrated between Rathkeale and Newcastle and that the boar in question was a Department boar.

"Weep not for the loss of your father," said John Joe Daly who was in the company at the time, "but rather throw the drop of drink back in you and let yourself go the way of the merry throng."

The man whose father was killed by the boar took heart at this and insisted on buying a round of drinks.

As the evening wore on the drowsy tide of talk ebbed and flowed and in the background a piano tinkled. There was the musical clinking of whiskey and porter glasses and above all an air of great humour prevailed.

Bonhams

"I HAD a boar once," said a man who sat aloof on the fringe of the gathering, "and the bonhams he sired were the talk of the countryside. You will all surely have heard the expression: high and mighty like the Kilflynn bonhams."

We all nodded and the man on the fringe proceeded with his tale.

"This boar," said he, "was beloved of every sow from the headwaters of the Brick River to the silver mouth of the Cashen. A sow that came to him once never wanted to tangle with any other boar. What harm but he was no Department boar, just an ordinary John Smith who was sired himself by a totally unknown and unpedigreed masculine swine from a spot called Lenamore near the village of Ballylongford."

"I heard of him," said a man who was idly swirling porter around the bottom of his glass, "there was sows died of the heartbreak after him."

"Before we pass on from the subject of boars," said Mick Carey, who had earlier unobtrusively joined the company as an interested listener, "let me tell the story of the lovelorn sow." There was a murmur of assent.

"Once up a time," said Carey, "there was a widow who lived on a small farm with her only son. The son was young and it is a known fact that you cannot put an old head on young shoulders. Consequently the son was not as well up as he might be on matters relating to the farm."

The farm supported ten milch cows, a pony, an ass and a sow. One day the mother

pointed out to the the sow had come time and would ha taken to the boar. boar lived nearly a n on a busy road and who has ever tried t sow over a mile roadway will know t very demanding job

The son thoug number. He manag the sow into a whe so off with him to t ence of the boar. boar had performe the farmer who ov took the widow's : and told him that i failed to keep h bring her back.

The boar would secondly free of el if necessary keep forming until the s the family way.

The widow's somewhat pertu explained his posi farmer.

"How will I know whether the sow

*She said i
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was as gc
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daughter
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of the*

or not?"

"A good questik farmer, "and or will now answe days take stock o if she'll be roll and kicking her the air it mean pay a second visi but if she's drear out and a bit sh in appearance t no need for a ret

Satisfied, the home and inl mother that th done his duty. L Hens laid and cc Then after the week the son i morning and r mother to take sow, to see w symptoms dese farmer were al The mother w after a period c

"Well, said th way is she?" "She's sitting wheelbarrow," mother, "with a her face."

Old bachelor

TO OOLA ba passed on your lady in questio cannot put you any others. Si given me leave



The life-size statue erected in honour of Paddy Ryan in Pallasgreen in 2004

Con Leahy one of great family of local athletes

■ Visitors flocked to watch the Leahy family train in a field by their home in Cregane

THE OLYMPIC GAMES are over and Ireland returned with two silver medals, to add to the 29 they had won since Pat O'Callaghan won the Irish Free State's first gold medal in 1928.

During the course of my research I noticed a lot of different facts and figures, and dates, associated with the athletes, I have featured.

There is a lot of information there about them and I have only given brief details in the column. I hope I am doing them justice, and that I am as accurate as possible.

This week we continue our look back to the early glory days when Limerick athletes, were at the forefront of world athletics, and feature Con Leahy and Paddy Ryan.

Cornelius Con Leahy was born in Cregane, in the parish of Colmanswell, on April 27 1876 and brother of Paddy we wrote about last week. He was the eldest member of the world famous family of jumpers.

Con won a gold and a silver medal, at the 1906 special intercalated Games held in Athens, and he won a silver medal, finishing joint second in the high jump at the London Games in 1908.

He won 20 Irish Championships (11 IAAA titles, and 9 GAA titles) as follows 12 high jump, five long jump, one triple jump, one standing high jump, and one standing Hop, Step, and Jump.

The first indication of his talent was revealed to his school mates, returning from Charleville CBS, when he was aged 16. He jumped Mannix's gate which stood 5 foot 8 inches high and spiked on top. It was in response to his pals telling tall tales of their athletic achievements.

Together with other Irish born athletes, Peter O'Connor, and John Daly, Con Leahy was entered to represent Ireland in the 1906 Olympic Games in Athens, by the Irish Amateur Athletic Association (IAAA) and Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA).

However under the International Olympic Committee rules, they were designated as representing Great Britain and Ireland. They attended the games entirely



Then & Now

with Tom Aherne

at their own expense, receiving only green blazers.

Leahy won the gold medal in the high jump with 1.775 meters, (after 36 jumps) beating Hungarian Lajos Gönczy by 2.5 cm. and the silver medal, in the triple jump coming second to fellow Irishman Peter O'Connor.

Con Leahy was subsequently involved in the protest at the flag-raising ceremony for the long jump when O'Connor, from Waterford scaled a flagpole, in the middle of the field and waved the Irish flag.

Con and John Daly stood guard underneath to stop any interference. Peter was an accomplished gymnast whose rapid climb and protest caused a great sensation.

In the 1908 Olympic Games, Leahy again took part in the high jump. Three jumpers, Leahy, Géó André and István Somodi, shared second place with 1.83 meters behind the American Harry Porter, who won with 1.90 meters.

After his Olympic success Con Leahy returned to Ireland. A year later in 1909 he emigrated to the United States and settled in New York. He died in Manhattan at the age of 45 on December 18 1921. In 2006, to mark the 100th anniversary of his Olympic medal win, a memorial was unveiled in Thomas Street, Limerick.

The Leahys were a wonderful family of athletes; six brothers Paddy, Con, Joe, Tom, Mick, and Tim, could hold their own with the best, and they must go down as the most versatile performers in the history of athletics.

The seventh brother Jack, though devoting the bulk of his time to horses, and the show ring, also won prizes in the athletic arena. They had a sister who it was said could beat the best of them, even when world honours rested

in their little home in Cregane, by the banks of the winding river Maigue.

Many visitors came to see them train, in the little field close to their home, including an English gentleman, who was amazed and delighted to see the sister perform alongside the brothers.

He became so charmed with the lady that before long he proposed marriage to her.

Miss Leahy refused the offer, although he was a fine type, and of good social standing, as she preferred to refrain from mixing the true Celtic blood with that of the Sassenach.

Paddy Ryan was born at Bunavie, Pallasgreen, on January 20 1983, one of eight in family to Patrick Ryan, and Bridget Hayes. He grew up to be a strong man, with powerful hips, and shoulders, and he stood at six feet four inches, and weighed up to 19 stone.

The throwing of an ordinary sledge hammer, was a favourite rural pastime, which aroused considerable interest and rivalry at that time. In 1903 Paddy threw the hammer 136 feet to defeat Tom Kiely of Ballyneale, the greatest all round athlete of his time.

Paddy won 11 All-Ireland hammer titles under the auspices of the GAA and the Irish Amateur Athletic Association, and was part of the Irish weight throwers known as the Irish Whales.

In 1910 he emigrated to the United States, and signed on with the Irish American Club, and later joined the NYPD. In 2011 he won the New York championship with a throw of 175 feet four inches.

He had not established citizenship in time for the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm, and so missed an opportunity to compete.

At the Firemen's Athletic Games at Long Island on February 6 1913

Paddy threw the hammer 189 ft. 6 1/2" (57.77m) to establish the first official IAAF world record.

This remained a world record for 25 years, and an American record for 40 years, being eventually beaten by Martin Engel in July 1953. During the First World War he joined the US Army and served in France, in 1917.

He competed for the United States, at the 1920 Summer Olympics and won a gold medal in the hammer throw and a silver in the 56-pound weight throw.

He threw the hammer 173 feet and four inches in the final despite the very wet and unsuitable conditions. This was nearly 13 feet more than the runner up Carl Lindh of Sweden.

He finished second to Pat McDonald from Clare, in the weight throw event a few days later. This was the only time this event of throwing a 56 lb. weight for distance, was held at the Olympics.

Roddy Kirwan, from Kilmacthomas composed a poem about Paddy when he was at his peak. The opening lines are as follows.

*In historic county Limerick around eighteen eighty three
A bouncing boy was born and neighbours came to see*

For an infant prodigy was he and his size rarely seen

He was the future hammer champion Paddy Ryan of Pallasgreen.

In 1924 he returned to Ireland to take over the family farm, and settled down with his wife Johanna Mary King, and family on the farm at Moymore, Old Pallas.

Paddy has been described as a homely character, with a warm personality who loved to tell stories. He missed the excitement of competing and he regretted that he never won an Olympic gold medal for his homeland.

Paddy Ryan died on February 13 1964 at the age of 82. He was laid to rest in Old Pallas cemetery under the shadow of Knockgrean Hill. Ronnie Delaney another Olympic champion, unveiled a life-size bronze statue of Paddy in Pallasgreen in July 2004.

I will conclude our Olympic journey in next week's column.