

LIMERICK

LIMERICK LIFE

A LIMERICK MAN WAS ONE OF THE FIRST PEOPLE TO REPRESENT IRELAND AS AN INDEPENDENT NATION IN THE 1924 OLYMPIC GAMES.

John O'Grady, a champion weight thrower, was born on February 17th, 1891 (though he was often recorded as born in 1892) in Ballybricken, Co. Limerick. His parents were William and Catherine O'Grady, who were farmers. Sadly, his mother died when John was only 6 years old, leaving his father, William, to raise five young children on his own.

John was a formidable sight with an enormous stature, he stood over six feet tall and weighed more than 18 stone. All accounts tell of his jolly disposition. This was noted by a sporting teammate of John's who states a practical joke played on John at the Triangular International Contest in 1923. The night before the competition, another team member, by the name of Stuart, decided to steal all of John's collars. At the time collars were not permanently attached to the shirt, but detachable so they could be washed and starched separately. The following morning the rest of the team began to search for the collars and resorted to trying to buy a new one, but they could not find one large enough to fit. John had to attend the event wearing a scarf in its place. When asked why, he kept the joke up so long, Stuart replied that he was scared the gentle giant would knock him out in one blow.

carrying the tri-colour which did not become the official flag of Ireland until 1937. He participated in the shot put, which he threw a distance of 12.75 metres which placed him 17th at the Olympics.

In his later years, he was the rates book inspector for Limerick County Council. He died on November 26th in 1934 at his home in St. Kevin's Alphonsus Terrace, Limerick. His funeral took place in St. Michael's Church (R.C.) and he was buried with his parents in Kilmurry, Caherconlish.

His headstone reads: "Erected by his admirers in proud memory of John O'Grady - World's Champion Weight Thrower born at Ballybricken, Co. Limerick on 17th Feb 1891. Died Limerick 26th Nov 1934. He worthily upheld Ireland's Athletic prestige and endeared himself to all by his loveable character and simple bearing."

There is a memorial to John O'Grady's achievements on Ballysimon Road which was erected in the 1940s. This memorial is a large limestone and steel weight set upon a pedestal with inscriptions on each side noting John's sporting achievements.