

The Leader Interview Jim Hogan, long-distance runner

This sporting life on other side of channel

Bonfires blazed on the hills around Athlacca and Dromin when the local hero in the English vest won a gold medal at Budapest. He was superbly talented - but couldn't even get a race in Ireland

Patricia Feehily



As Shakespeare says, "there's a tide in the affairs of men", then Jim Hogan certainly took it at the flood. Whether it led on to fame and fortune is a moot point, for the trappings of wealth never bothered Jim and he still treats fame as something of an impostor. But he was one of the greatest talents this country missed out on - a champion long distance runner beaten only by the fact that he was born in the wrong place (Athlacca) at the wrong time (1933).

There was no sponsorship and little support of any kind for aspiring young athletes in Jim's day. "But nothing," he says, "could ever come between me and the running."

It's now over 40 years since Jim Hogan, aka Jim Cregan, the self-trained athlete from County Limerick, won the gold medal in the marathon at the European Championships in Budapest in 1966. He wore an English vest, after changing his name by deed poll from Cregan to Hogan, and stood proudly to attention as the Union Jack was hoisted over the podium. "It was a moment I would treasure forever. And why wouldn't I? I had no problem doing it. I stood there as an English subject. That country was kind to me and my wife. I got nothing at all in Ireland by way of work and definitely not in athletics. I felt you should support the country you live in and work in. I went to England with thousands upon thousands of others and I was thankful for it..." he writes in his newly published autobiography, *The*

loose among civilised people. The result was that people slammed their doors in his face whenever he felt obliged to make a social call. He was overlooked upon the occasions of neighbourhood parties and although a keen supporter of steeplechasing was never once asked to take a seat in a car to Killarney races or elsewhere. Eventually he moved

problems and the suitability of bedside lamps. He became godfather to 19 children and when he died the street was blocked by the number of motor cars at his funeral.

Saluting people is a fad. Some cannot live without it, while others consider it a nuisance. There is never a guarantee that the person to whom the salute is given

then what are a few for? I will concede however that they are people who deliberately shun others because of the difference in their social stations, but these people are to be pitied, not blamed. There are people who deliberately ignore a salute because they have been told that the person in question said something about them. These are

certain duke will snub a certain earl, until we have a certain tuppence ha'penny snubbing a certain tuppence. Human beings are invested with many failings but deliberate misuse of the power to salute is one of the most contemptible. Some people suffer from embarrassment and may light a cigarette or bend to tie a

that she'll be her old saluting self again when things brighten and fortune smiles a little on her unhappy existence.

The late, great John B Keane was a Limerick Leader columnist for more than 30 years. This column first appeared in our edition of September 15, 1962

RELIVING THE NEWS

with Sean Curtin

Shannon shapes up as a city
From the Limerick Leader
Saturday, March 24, 1964

Anne helping Shannon to get set for lift-off

SHANNON'S most excited personality these days is 33-years-old Mrs Anne McInerney, wife of Mr Amby McInerney. Amby is the man who, with his great industrial enterprise, constructed the giant jet runways at Shannon to make it Ireland's most up-to-date airport and the "homing" port for all aircraft after the arduous journey across the Atlantic.

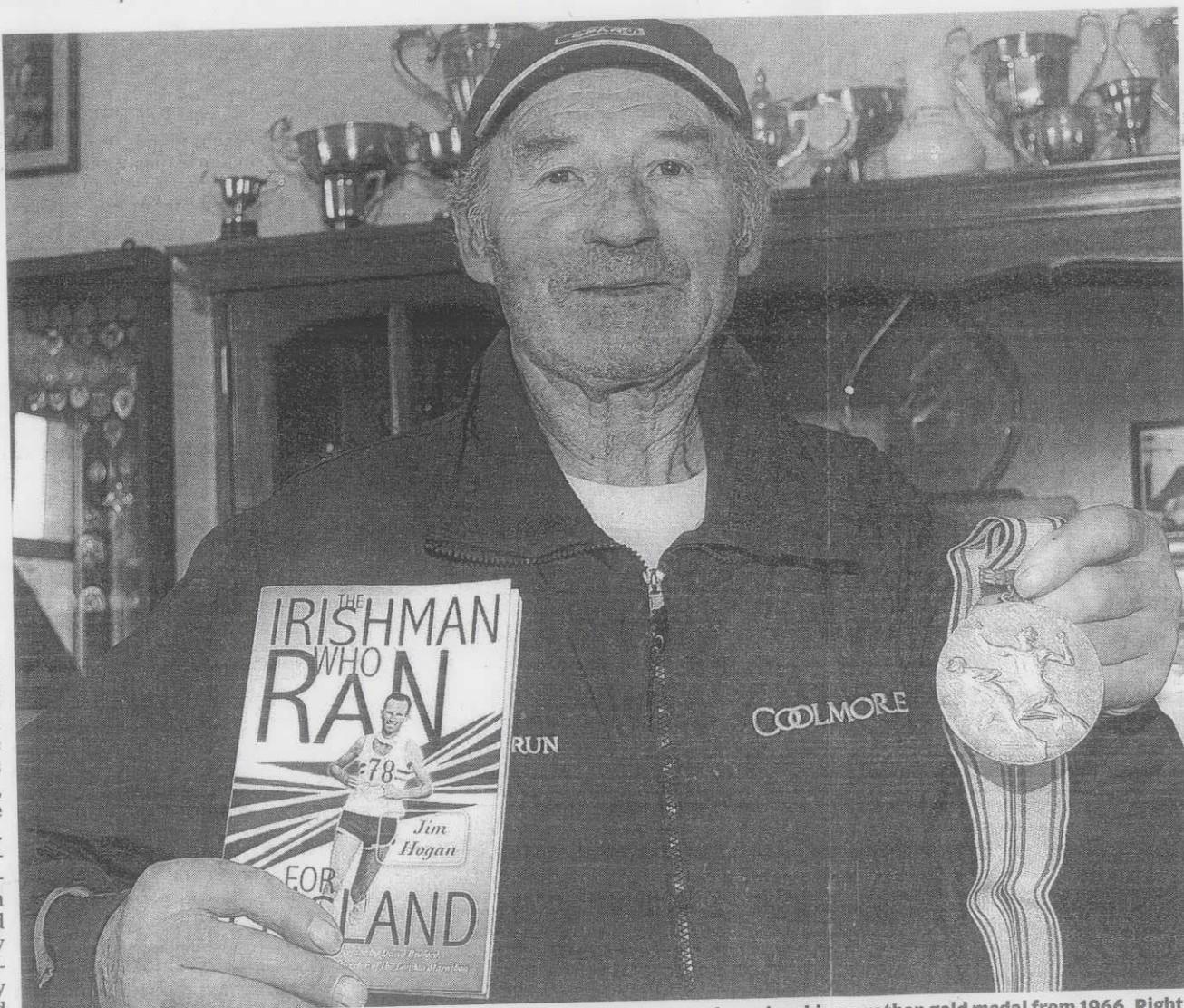
Anne is now also showing her great resourcefulness and enterprise in helping to organise a Shannon community into a town which will have its eyes to being a city in the future. She finds the work most exciting and it could be said that in a way she is making Shannon the "home with a future" for those who have touched down at the airport along the runways shaped by her husband.

Anne has been appointed public relations officer of the Shannon Community Council, which held its first meeting last weekend. The meeting decided to divide the area into 14 wards with a special public relations officer in

Shannon residents are shaping a city of the future

SHANNON'S most excited personality these days is 33-year-old Mrs. Anne McInerney, wife of Mr. Amby McInerney.

Amby is the man who, with his great industrial enterprise, constructed the giant jet runways at Shannon to make it Ireland's most up-to-date airport and the "homing" port for all aircraft after the arduous journey across the Atlantic. Anne is now also showing her great resourcefulness and enterprise in helping to organise a Shannon community into a town which will have its eyes to being a city in the future. She finds the work most exciting and it could be said that in a way she is making Shannon the "home with a future" for those who have touched down at the airport along the runways shaped by her husband.



Spoils of victory: Jim Hogan with his newly published book and his European Championship marathon gold medal from 1966. Right, the Athlacca man in action in his pomp, breaking the British 10,000m record at White City, London, in 1965

PICTURE: MICHAEL COWHEY



horses and never misses a year at Cheltenham. He's a true gentleman, and displays an old fashioned courtesy. We had been warned that Jim was a colourful and direct character and used blue language and 'cuss words' liberally. But apart from one 'Jaysus', he didn't use another expletive throughout the course of the interview. "That's not like me," he laughed, when we told him.

St. Anne's Limerick Leader
12TH APRIL 2008
PAGE 13



F, as Shakespeare says, "there's a tide in the affairs of men", then Jim Hogan certainly took it at the flood. Whether it led on to fame and fortune is a moot point, for the trappings of wealth never bothered Jim and he still treats fame as something of an impostor. But he was one of the greatest talents this country missed out on – a champion long distance runner beaten only by the fact that he was born in the wrong place (Athlaca) at the wrong time (1933).

There was no sponsorship and little support of any kind for aspiring young athletes in Jim's day. "But nothing," he says, "could ever come between me and the running."

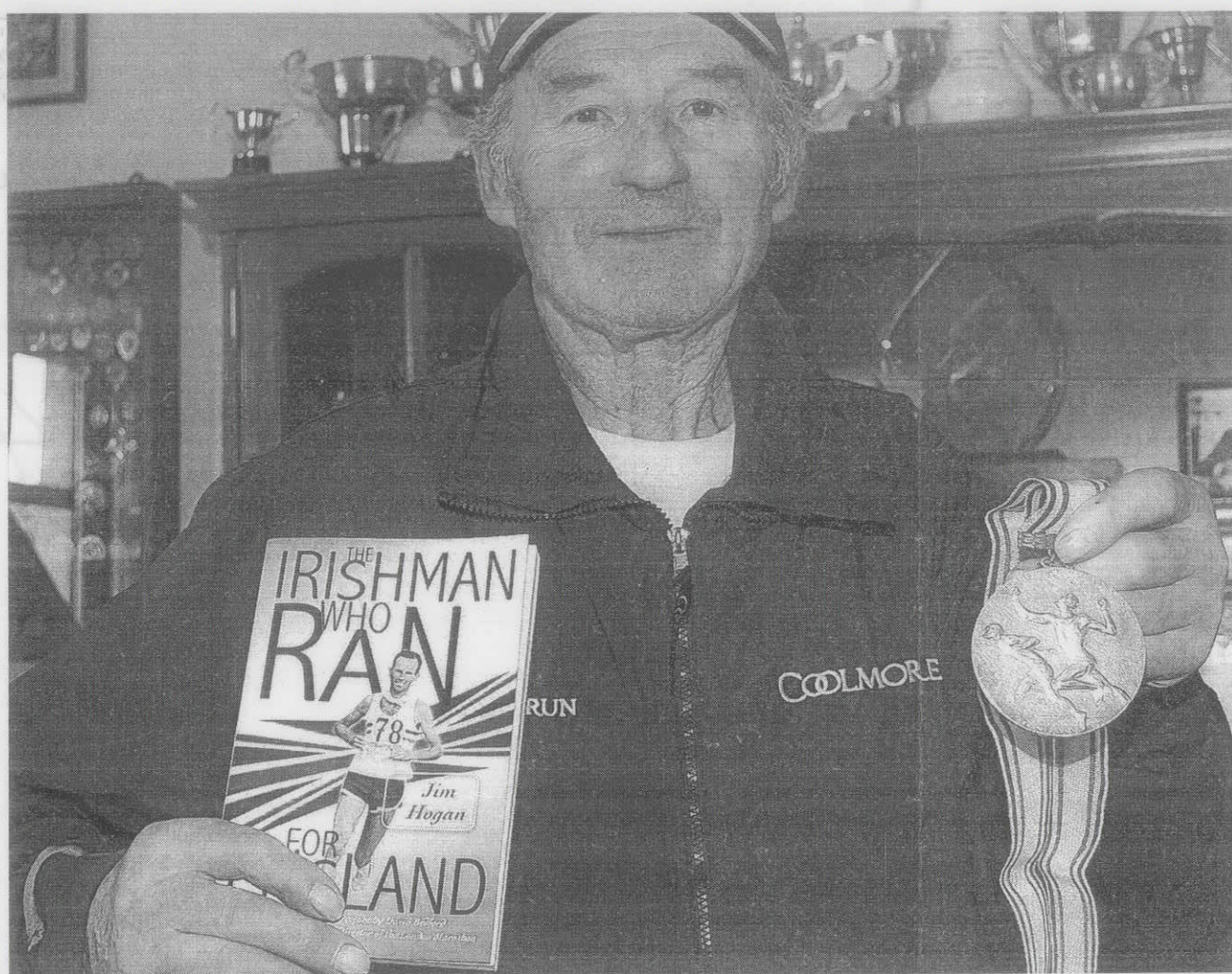
It's now over 40 years since Jim Hogan, aka Jim Cregan, the self-trained athlete from County Limerick, won the gold medal in the marathon at the European Championships in Budapest in 1966. He wore an English vest, after changing his name by deed poll from Cregan to Hogan, and stood proudly to attention as the Union Jack was hoisted over the podium. "It was a moment I would treasure forever. And why wouldn't I? I had no problem doing it. I stood there as an English subject. That country was kind to me and my wife. I got nothing at all in Ireland by way of work and definitely not in athletics. I felt you should support the country you live in and work in. I went to England with thousands upon thousands of others and I was thankful for it..." he writes in his newly published autobiography, *The Irishman Who Ran for England*.

But that night in 1966, far from Budapest, bonfires were blazing on the hills around Athlaca and Dromin, celebrating the local hero who had done them all proud. "That meant a lot to me," said Jim.

He ran in 25 different countries in his day, but there was a time in Ireland when he couldn't even get a race.

But two years before Budapest, he had run, what he still considers the race of his life, this time in the Irish colours, at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. He had entered the 10,000 metres and failed miserably. Then he tried to make up for it in the marathon and took on the world champion, Abebe Bikila, from Ethiopia, staying on his shoulder until the last hurdle when he was forced to drop out exhausted and dehydrated, ending up in hospital. Observers still talk about it as one of the great sporting dramas of the time. Bikila won the race in what was then the fastest time ever for a marathon. Hogan might have won silver if he hadn't tried to do the impossible – beat the world champion in the marathon without having taken even a drink of water beforehand: "I knew nothing about the importance of taking a drink before the race or the importance of hydration." And to this day he believes that he could have won silver if an Irish team doctor had paid any attention to him in the period between the failed 10,000 metres and the marathon. Even after his collapse, it was the New Zealand medical team that looked after him.

But then Jim always did things his way. In his early years he won every Munster and national title – "but for some reason



Spoils of victory: Jim Hogan with his newly published book and his European Championship marathon gold medal from 1966. Right, the Athlaca man in action in his pomp, breaking the British 10,000m record at White City, London, in 1965

PICTURE: MICHAEL COWHEY

PERSONAL FILE

Home Dromcomogue, near Knocklong

Education Athlaca National School

Favourite Film *The Godfather*

Favourite TV show *Only Fools and Horses*

Favourite Food Plain food, ideally a nice steak and chips

Favourite holiday destination: Canary Islands

I could never win a four-mile race," he said. He had trained in the hard school of a small Irish farm in the 1940s, up at dawn on summer mornings when he was only 14 years old, milking the cows and helping his father mow hay for local farmers: "We had a mowing machine and three horses and we cut hay for everyone around." Muscle strengthening stuff for sure! And although he practiced his running, in barefeet, on a home made track – a sward cut out on the meadow – he had to do it surreptitiously, because it was regarded as something of an indulgence in the rural Ireland of his day. "People would think you were mad. You had to steal out," he writes in his book.

Confident, assured and fulfilled – to a large extent – although many would say that he never got even a sporting chance to reach his full potential, Jim Hogan remembers the Ireland he left behind in the 1960s as a class-conscious society, riddled with snobbery.

"You'd come out of Mass on a Sunday morning, and the big farmers would be talking in one group, and the labourers and small farmers would be in another group. I came from a small farm," he says proudly. But he doesn't recall those scenes with any obvious bitterness. He has risen above it, and although he mentions it in his book, snobbery didn't bother him then and it certainly doesn't bother him now.

He comes from a large family, most of whom are still living in the area – one brother Michael, and seven sisters, Mary, Margaret, Frances, Nora, Josie, Betty and Tess. He met his wife, Mary, who hailed from Kilmallock, when they were both

working in England. "Mary was always a great support to me. She was very well educated, had won a scholarship in Kilmallock and worked with a publishing company in England. One day, out of the blue, she told me that she wanted to go home."

"I didn't realise it then, but I think she knew that time was running out for her and she knew that I would be happier back home among my own family when she was gone."

Mary was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and Jim looked after her until she passed away four years ago. They had bought the house and eight acres of land near Knocklong and they worked on it together restoring the house and out-houses and landscaping the garden. Every chapter in Jim's book is testament to his grit and courage in overcoming obstacles, but the one chapter where the real hero emerges is the one devoted to Mary. They were a close couple and the fact that life went on for Jim after her death is a tribute to that relationship. "I wouldn't dishonour her memory by giving in to grief and loneliness... but when I'm here on my own I do occasionally dissolve into tears," he writes.

Today, the race has slowed down for Jim, but he is as agile as ever. He now has a busy life training racehorses in his paddocks near Knocklong.

"That's a right good one," he says, pointing to a graceful foal grazing peacefully in the rolling fields. His passion for horses is obvious and one gets the impression that if he hadn't made his mark in another field, Jim might well have been a champion jockey. He loves



horses and never misses a year at Cheltenham. He's a true gentleman, and displays an old fashioned courtesy. We had been warned that Jim was a colourful and direct character and used blue language and 'cuss words' liberally. But apart from one 'Jaysus', he didn't use another expletive throughout the course of the interview. "That's not like me," he laughed, when we told him.

But he is still as outspoken as ever, and hasn't much time for some of the developments in modern running – like pace-makers and vitamin diets. "There was nothing like that in my day." And he abhors drug-taking of any kind. "Any athlete caught taking drugs should not be allowed to compete again."

Sonia O'Sullivan, he says, is our greatest sporting talent. "She is the greatest we've ever had. She was very unlucky not to have won an Olympic gold, but then she was beaten by druggies."

He's delighted now to have written a book. "People were always asking me why don't you write a book? Then PJ Browne put it in my head. I had four scrapbooks of reports about my races, so I just got down and wrote it."

It's quite a riveting read, both from a sporting and a human perspective, and the fact that the preface is written by David Bedford, one of the most colourful British athletes of the 1970s and current director of the London Marathon, shows what an important figure Jim Hogan once was in the world of athletics. "His place in world athletics is secure beyond doubt," writes Bedford.

Jim still travels over to the London marathon every year – but as a guest now, no longer a participant. But one can't help thinking as you watch him jump over a paddock fence in Knocklong to inspect his foal, that he could still give them all a good run for their money.

■ *The Irishman Who Ran for England* by Jim Hogan is in local bookshops and is published by Currach Press, at €14.99

SHANNON'S most excited personality these days is 33-years-old Mrs Anne McInerney, wife of Mr Amby McInerney. Amby is the man who, with his great industrial enterprise, constructed the giant jet runways at Shannon to make it Ireland's most up-to-date airport and the "homing" port for all aircraft after the arduous journey across the Atlantic.

Anne is now also showing her great resourcefulness and enterprise in helping to organise a Shannon community into a town which will have its eyes to being a city in the future. She finds the work most exciting and it could be said that in a way she is making Shannon the "home with a future" for those who have touched down at the airport along the runways shaped by her husband.

Anne has been appointed public relations officer of the Shannon Community Council, which held its first meeting last weekend. The meeting decided to divide the area into 14 wards with a special public relations officer in

Shannon residents are shaping a city of the future

SHANNON'S most excited personality these days is 33-year-old Mrs. Anne McInerney, wife of Mr. Amby McInerney.

Amby is the man who, with his great industrial enterprise, constructed the giant jet runways at Shannon to make it Ireland's most up-to-date airport and the "homing" port for all aircraft after the arduous journey across the Atlantic.

Anne is now also showing her great resourcefulness and enter-

each ward. These new PROs will be appointed in the near future and their duty will be to find out what the inhabitants of each ward are thinking and to report to the council.

The council is not a government body and has not statutory power and at the moment is endeavouring to find out what are the ideas and wishes of the majority of the people.

"They have a wonderful spirit here at Shannon," said Anne. "I love it. We came here five years ago when my husband was building the jet runways at the airport. I wanted to be living near where my husband was working so that he could come home to lunch. I did not want to be separated from him for a day; I would even have lived in a caravan just to be here. So we build our own house on the top of Drumgeely Hill and we are still here. We found the people extremely friendly and nice."

The visitor to Shannon will indeed notice the beautiful bungalow on the hill top approaching the airport and this is where the McInerney's live. It is really a gem.

The officers of the Shannon Council are: president, Mr. Joseph Villo; vice-president, Mr. Paddy Monaghan; treasurer, Mr. William Ryan; secretary, Miss Una Mansfield and, of course, Mrs. McInerney, as public relations officer.

They were elected last week when the Council of 11 held their first meeting.

Who knows? Shannon may have a Mayor and Corporation sooner rather than people think.