

# City honours its Olympic gold winner

JUST weeks before he hands over the chains of office to his successor, Mayor Diarmuid Scully ended a 100 year wait for a public monument to the only Limerick man to ever win an Olympic Gold Medal.

by Marie Hobbins

SOME months ago the mayor, who also revived an ancient Limerick tradition of casting a silver dart into the Shannon to honour every Mayor of Limerick's figurative role as admiral of the Shannon, announced that a memorial to Con Leahy of Cregane, County Limerick will be unveiled in Bedford Row on Saturday, June 3.

Con Leahy made history in 1906 when, after he won gold in the high jump in that year's Olympic Games in Athens, he refused to accept his medal while the British national anthem, God Save the Queen was being played. Con, with two other Irish medal winners did a victory lap of the stadium proudly holding aloft his Irish Tricolour to the rapturous applause of the crowd.

Leahy's fame for winning the Olympic Gold Medal was further enhanced for being the sportsman who brought the cause of Irish independence to a world-wide stage.

"The manner in which Con won that gold medal was historically significant because he brought the cause of Irish independence to an international audience," said the mayor.

On Saturday, June 3, 100 years after his Olympic triumph it was Limerick's turn to publicly honour the great sportsman. A large number of his relatives and descendants had travelled to Limerick from as far away as the United States to be present at the unveiling by the mayor of the

Leahy Memorial which consists of a simple bench with a short inscription along the top listing the athlete's achievements. The

important place that sport holds in the hearts of Limerick people and this weekend Limerick honours one of its greatest sporting

triple jump in Athens in 1906 and then went on to win silver again for the high jump in London in 1908. His older brother Paddy also achieved

been the greatest of them all. He had eclipsed his brothers by jumping 6'6" in 1912.

"Another brother, Joe was a great all-rounder,

tance running and winning several championships. Mick, the youngest, was a champion hurdler, pole-vaulted and high jumper who also played rugby with Garryowen, hurled with Limerick and rowed for Shannon."

The Leahy family of seven brothers and three sisters were brought up on a small farm, Cregane, on the Limerick/Cork county border.

They competed in regional and local events, national, international and Olympic events from 1897 though to 1913. During their time in athletic competition they won five Olympic medals, 33 Irish Championships, six British Titles and three American Championships. They were renowned as high jumpers in World Athletic history.

Mr Murphy said the brothers were "modest in their success as they were sportsmanlike in their competitions and were also immensely helpful to the fledgling GAA in getting events off the ground.

"Their influence in being able to attract athletes at the highest competitive levels and their own participation

in sports events always guaranteed a highly successful sporting occasion."

He said that were it not for the interest of such writers and journalists as An Maignaire Sugach, Sean Murphy and

Seamus

O'Ceallaigh of the Limerick Leader, Paddy Mehigan and his annual publication and journalists in the Kerryman, Cork Holly Bough and Cork Examiner, the Leahy success story would have been confined to history.

## Sport benefits

AMONG the big Limerick West scorers in the Sports Capital Grants Programme just announced by the Government are:

Garryspillane GAA Club, 170,000 euro for pitch development; Broadford Handball Club, 140,000 euro for dressing room and handball court development; St Senan's GAA Club, 140,000 euro for pitch development; Galbally AFC, 100,000 euro for pitch development and floodlighting and Glin GAA Club, 65,000 euro for pitch development.

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Henry Leahy, Mayor Diarmuid Scully and Graham Morpheu pictured at the unveiling of the Con Leahy memorial on Bedford Row.

memorial will be transferred to Thomas Street when pedestrianisation is completed. If a recommendation of Mayor Scully's is taken up, then other Limerick luminaries in the field of the arts will be honoured on Bedford Row, joining another memorial to the late actor, Richard Harris. They may have suggested that Thomas Street be reserved as a street of fame for memorials to sporting heroes.

Speaking at the unveiling ceremony, Mayor Scully said: "The extraordinary scenes in O'Connell Street just over two weeks ago proved beyond doubt

heroes, Olympic gold medallist Con Leahy with this memorial on the city's newest pedestrianised street, Bedford Row which will be followed by a reception in City Hall."

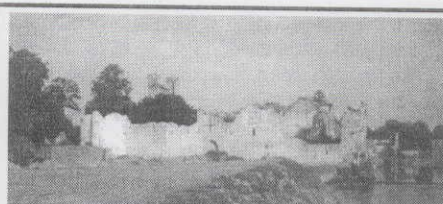
The mayor also paid tribute to the achievements of the Leahy family of Cregane.

"They were, quiet simply the greatest family of athletes that Ireland has ever produced. Con won Olympic gold for the high jump and silver for the

Olympic glory winning silver for the high jump and bronze for the long jump in Paris in 1900."

According to Graham Murphy, grand-nephew of Con Leahy, it was Con's brother Tim Leahy who, had he been spared, would have

capable of competing with and beating his more famous brothers and was in many people's eyes the best athlete in Ireland for several years and yet another brother, Tom was a talented jumper excelling at short and middle dis-



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