

TIPPERARY ATHLETES



Tom Phelan

by Michael O'Dwyer

Tom Phelan was born on 18 January 1874 at Grove, Modeshill, Mullinahone, County Tipperary. He was the third son of Edmund Phelan, a farmer, and Anne Phelan (née Comerford). His parents got married in Mullinahone church on 1 September 1869. The Phelan family were always noted for their great physical strength, and a cousin of theirs was Theo Phelan who competed in the 1928 Olympic Games. The following on Tom Phelan was written by his grandniece Mary Teresa Vaughan for the 1930s schools' folklore collection. 'About sixty years ago there was born at Grove, Modeshill, a boy named Tom Phelan. When he was very young he took typhoid fever which was prevalent in the district at the time. He was very bad. One day when the local doctor came to see him he dipped him in a barrel of cold water to reduce his temperature. It had the desired effect. The boy grew up into a big strong man. He was six foot two inches in height, and was known in the district as "Big Tom". At the age of twenty, T. F. Kiely of Carrick-on-Suir (then champion weight-thrower of Ireland) took him and trained him to throw weights. He used to throw the half-hundred thirty feet. He was champion of Ireland for many years. He was also a good high jumper and over the hurdles. At the age of thirty-four [*sic*] he emigrated to U.S.A. where he was also well known in the sporting world. He settled down at White Plains, New York, where he still lives.' Tom Phelan, who is now deceased, was an Irish weight throwing champion six times, and was runner-up on ten occasions. In the Mullinahone GAA book *The Green Above the Red* is written, 'Tom was also a member of the Mullinahone football team. In 1908 he took a trip to the States and we find him playing fullback in Celtic Park in a match between the exiles of Tipperary and Kilkenny. Speaking of him the press declared "it was impossible for flesh and blood to shake or move him – why the man was strong enough to knock down a horse".'

Titles Won at Senior National Championships:

Irish Amateur Athletic Association Championships

1903	56 lb Weight for Distance	24 ft 4 in.	(7.41 m)
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Gaelic Athletic Association Championships

1899	56 lb Weight for Distance	25 ft 2 in.	(7.67 m)
1900	56 lb Weight for Distance	26 ft 3½ in.	(8.01 m)
1904	56 lb Weight (between legs with follow)	28 ft 11 in.	(8.81 m)
1904	56 lb Weight (unlimited run & follow)	34 ft 3½ in.	(10.45 m)
1907	56 lb Weight (between legs with follow)	29 ft 7 in.	(9.02 m)