

TIPPERARY ATHLETES



Tommy Ryan

by Michael O'Dwyer

Tommy Ryan was born in 19 January 1900 at Doorish, Rossmore, County Tipperary. He was the eldest son of Edmond 'Ned' Ryan, a farmer, and Ellen Ryan (née Harte), a dressmaker. His parents were both native of Doorish, and are interred in Clonoulty cemetery. The family nickname was Ryan (Dalton), and Tommy was one of six children. Tommy Ryan and his family were involved in the national movement and their house was a refuge for men on the run. Tommy contributed in the fight for freedom as a member of the Third Tipperary Brigade of the Old IRA and is credited with the removing the British flag from Templemore barracks when the Old IRA took over there. His first job was cheese-making in the co-operative creamery in Rossmore. Later he worked in a bar in Dungarvan and eventually he got a job in a bar in Dublin in 1923, where he was to spend seven years. There he played hurling with Young Irelands and won a Dublin county intermediate title with them in 1927. Early in his athletic career he finished third in both the national 5 miles and 15 miles road race championships, held in 1919 at Bishopswood and Hollyford sports, respectively. Following that he took up running in a big way, including participating in marathons. His most famous win was on 27 April 1930. It was a challenge race between Tommy Ryan and D. J. McKeon, from Dublin, who was the Irish marathon champion. The route was described in the *Cork Examiner*, 'The journey selected for to-morrow's race is from Gould's Cross to Cashel via Boherlahan. When Ardmayle is reached, the contestants turn down the Boherlahan road, and when meeting the Thurles main road, nearing the famous little village of Boherlahan, the course will be changed on to the direct line for Cashel. The distance to be covered will be about ten miles. The start is timed from 3 o'clock (summer time) from Deere's Hotel, Gould's Cross, and the finish will be judged at Cashel City Hall. The race is being run with the sanction of the N.A.C.A., and the New Ireland Assurance Company has offered a massive silver cup for the winner.' The two runners were accompanied by Tim Crowe on his bicycle, and hundreds of cyclists followed, with a couple of thousand people waiting in Cashel. Tommy Ryan reached the tape about a yard ahead of his challenger in 47 minutes. He helped to reorganise the Galteemore Harriers and did much for athletics not only in Tipperary but throughout Munster. After about ten years as secretary of County Tipperary NACA, Tommy, now married with two daughters, went to England. He went first to Birmingham and later to London, where he worked in the railways until he retired in 1965. In London he was actively involved with the Gaelic Athletic Association as well as a number of other cultural societies. He was honorary secretary of the Provincial Council of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Britain, he was chairman of the London Camogie Association and became president in December 1949, and he was one of those responsible for forming the Tipperarymen's Association in 1953 and was its first chairman. After retiring from the railways he got another job and remained in London for another ten years. Tommy Ryan died on 22 March 1987 at St Patrick's Hospital, Cashel, aged eighty-seven, and is interred in St Cormac's Cemetery, Cashel.

Poem by Willie Quinlan, Donohill

I

From Goolds Cross on to Cashel
Was run that famous race;
And from the start wee Tommy
Did quickly make the pace.
Past sweet Ardmayle so peaceful
Went Tommy all alone;
One hundred yards behind him
Raced champion D. McKeon.

II

They sped by Boherlahan
Where Tipperary's sons of fame;
The Leahys, Powers and Donnelly's
Have won an honoured name.
And high our hearts were beating
A clear lead still was shown;
As Tommy raced so fleeting
In front of brave McKeon.

III

But now Kiln Hill is nearing
The inclines long and steep;
And many are now fearing
That the lead he cannot keep.
The champion fast is gaining
His prowess grand is shown;
And feet but now divide them
Young Ryan and D. McKeon.

IV

Then comes the final struggle
'Tis the grandest sight of all;
As mid the cheering thousands
Raced the wee man and the tall.
With scarce a yard between them
Hats in the air were thrown;
When gallant little Tommy
Beat the champion D. McKeon.