

MARTIN SHERIDAN

REMEMBERED IN HIS NATIVE VILLAGE

By Séamus Ware

Bohola is a small village in County Mayo in the West of Ireland, which even many Irish people have not heard of or could not locate.

It comprises about 20 houses, a church, primary school, post office, two pubs (or taverns), and most importantly the "Sheridan Memorial Community Centre". This last-named building gives a clue to the fame of the village, as it has the proud boast of having produced winners of more Olympic medals per head of population than anywhere else! In fact two Olympic medal-winners were natives of Bohola - Martin Sheridan (winner of nine medals) and Jim Clarke (winner of a silver medal for tug-of-war in 1908) - who thus won a total of ten medals. An interesting detail is that Sheridan and Clarke were first-cousins, and were on opposing tug-of-war teams in the first round at the London 1908 Olympics - Sheridan for the U.S.A. and Clarke for the United Kingdom No. 2 team (comprised of members of the Liverpool police). The Liverpool policemen easily defeated the team comprised of the big weight-

throwers from the U.S.A., and had to survive an objection by the Americans to their "extra big boots with spikes". Incidentally, Sheridan was also a policeman.

Last December, I travelled to Bohola with a few other athletic enthusiasts for the launch of *The Martin Sheridan Story* (see Book Review page 53 this issue). This event took place in the Sheridan Memorial

Community Centre, which was opened in 1994 as a result of great community work in fund-raising. The main hall in the centre is used by up to 150 children in various types of sports at weekends and for social activities, and it was crowded for the book launch. One of the other rooms in the building is reserved for a planned museum in honour of Sheridan.

The new book was launched appropriately enough by another all-round sportsman from County Mayo, Liam McHale, who is prominent in Gaelic football and basketball. One of the speakers, with whom I had travelled to

Bohola, was Dr. Cyril White of the Irish Universities' Athletic Association, who spoke on the great Olympic achievements of Martin Sheridan.



That night Dr. White, another friend and myself, stayed locally and the following morning the Parish priest came to meet us by arrangement and guided us to the O'Dwyer Cheshire Home -where a number of old and handicapped people are cared for. This Cheshire Home was built on land donated by Paul O'Dwyer, who with his brother Bill also came from the area - Paul being a prominent lawyer in New York, and Bill a politician who became Mayor of that City. The purpose of our visit was to see the Sheridan Memorabilia,

which are on display in the Cheshire Home - medals and photo's on loan from the Paul O'Dwyer Trust in New York, and an illuminated address presented to Sheridan by the priests and people of Bohola, when he visited after the London Olympics. This

address was presented by the present owner of the Sheridan farm - not a relative.

One of the two gold medals (for discuss freestyle and discuss Greek style) won at the 1908 Olympic Games was on display in a glass-topped case; as this case was locked and the key unavailable, we could not examine the medal closer to check for which event it had been awarded.



Old Sheridan homestead - the present two story building incorporates the original one story thatched cottage

On our return to Bohola Village, we called to Clarke's Pub, where we saw a vaulting pole which, according to a certificate on display, was presented to Sheridan by the King of Greece in recognition of his winning five medals at the Athens Olympics in 1906. This pole was made of bamboo, about 14 ft ($\pm$ 4.3 mtr) long, with a grip about one foot (0.3 mtr) from the top, and a spike at the bottom end. I knew that Sheridan had won his Olympic medals in throwing events and standing jumps, but I was not aware until then of his

interest in pole vaulting.

During his visit to his native county in 1908, he gave an exhibition of pole vaulting!

Before returning to Dublin, we also viewed the Sheridan Memorial at the village green, which was erected in 1966, and also the house and farm

[about one mile [1.6 km] outside the village) where Martin Sheridan was born.

I hope to return to Bohola to see more of his memorabilia, and look forward to the opening of the



Sheridan Memorial, Bohola