

TIPPERARY ATHLETES



Jack Blackburn

by Michael O'Dwyer

Jack Blackburn was born in 1867 at Mooreabbey, Galbally, County Tipperary. Local church records show he was baptised on 14 August 1867. Though the village of Galbally is in County Limerick the townland of Mooreabbey is in County Tipperary. He was the youngest son of Edmond Blackburn, a farmer, and Mary Blackburn (née Magner). His parents got married in the parish of Galbally and Aherlow on 20 February 1851. On athletics Jack Blackburn noted, 'In my juvenile days I always had a tendency towards athletics, and I suppose environment had not a little to do with this, because in close proximity to my home in the Glen of Aherlow, there existed a little group of athletes that could vie with the best performers in any other area in Ireland at that period. My first appearance in public happened to be at a place called Cappuniac, near Cahir. Not far distant, indeed, but still it necessitated the securing of a suitable conveyance to reach it. Means of transport were rather limited in those days; bicycles were even a novelty then. However, the good old horse, for which our country was always noted, fetched me there in good time. This was my first essay at the pole jump, and amongst my opponents I found Alex Noonan and Owen O'Neill, both of Glen fame, and noted performers. Nevertheless, the raw youth prevailed and scaled the lath at 9ft. 3ins.' His second outing was at Golden and he took the pole vault at 10 ft 1 in. (3.07 m) and long jump at 21 ft (6.40 m). Jack Blackburn, who stood 5 feet 5¼ inches in height, went on to become a noted athlete and won fame as a pole-vaulter, being Irish champion on four occasions. He won his first two Irish titles in 1892 and 1893 at Jones's Road, Dublin, the third in 1896 at Clonmel, and the fourth in 1897 at Durrow. Other events he competed in were the high jump and triple jump. Jack Blackburn won the pole vault at a Gaelic meeting in London on Whit Monday in 1896. He spent two stints in America, in the 1880s, and went back again in the late 1890s. Although engaged on strenuous industrial work he competed in various stadiums and won many prizes. After coming home the second time he got married to Elizabeth Fahey, sister of fellow athlete Jim Fahey. Jack Blackburn died on 8 April 1942 at his residence, Old Street, Galbally, aged seventy-four, and is interred in Lisvernane cemetery. Two of his daughters were Sr Cataldus and Sr Edmund, both were based in the United States.

Titles Won at Senior National Championships:

Irish Amateur Athletic Association Championships

1897	Pole Vault	10 ft 2 in.	(3.10 m)	TIE
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Gaelic Athletic Association Championships

1892	Pole Vault	10 ft 5 in.	(3.17 m)	TIE
1893	Pole Vault	9 ft 7 in.	(2.92 m)	
1896	Pole Vault	10 ft 1 in.	(3.07 m)	