

Faith Comment published in the Petersfield Post

6 July 2012: Michael Rowan, St Laurence Church

Olympics Friday Focus



We are a flag owning family. We have Panamanian flags for my wife, Irish tricolours for the land of my birth and Union Jacks for our wonderful home and country. The Union Jacks have been liberally flown at our home during the Queen's Jubilee celebrations. As an Irishman I had a soft spot for the Queen Mother, the Colonel in Chief of the Irish Guards and I have enormous respect for her Daughter, our Queen.

The flags bring me to the point at hand. In my wife's study on one of the bookshelves is a linen folded fading flag. It has sat there since we moved to Harting in 1979 and it has never been disturbed. It is heavy and old in its detailing. It is a tricolour of green white and orange. It is my father's flag, a man who was born eight years before Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The flag was very precious to him. In 1948 as President of the Irish Olympic Rowing Union it was carried in front of the Rowers of the young Republic participating for the first time in the post war Olympics. What must they have felt?

They were young, strong and ambitious, participating in an international amateur event. My father truly believed that sport was a medicine for peace for his country's troubled past. He was a pacifist and a true Olympian.

Like other countries, their uniforms and sporting flannels would have been made at home. The accommodation in London would have been simple and homely. Their food would not be extravagant. Their expectations would be modest against the many mighty rowers of other nations. They rowed on the Thames at Henley. I understand that they put up a gentlemanly presentation. No Gold, Silver, or Bronze went to the new European Republic.

I respect their participation. My father must have been so proud. The flag from the shelf in the study is coming out. It will be flown.

My father's memory will be acknowledged. I know that the spirit of the 1948 Games will flow in the forthcoming Olympics