

Thady Ryan

Genial master of the Limerick pack of foxhounds nicknamed the Black and Tans

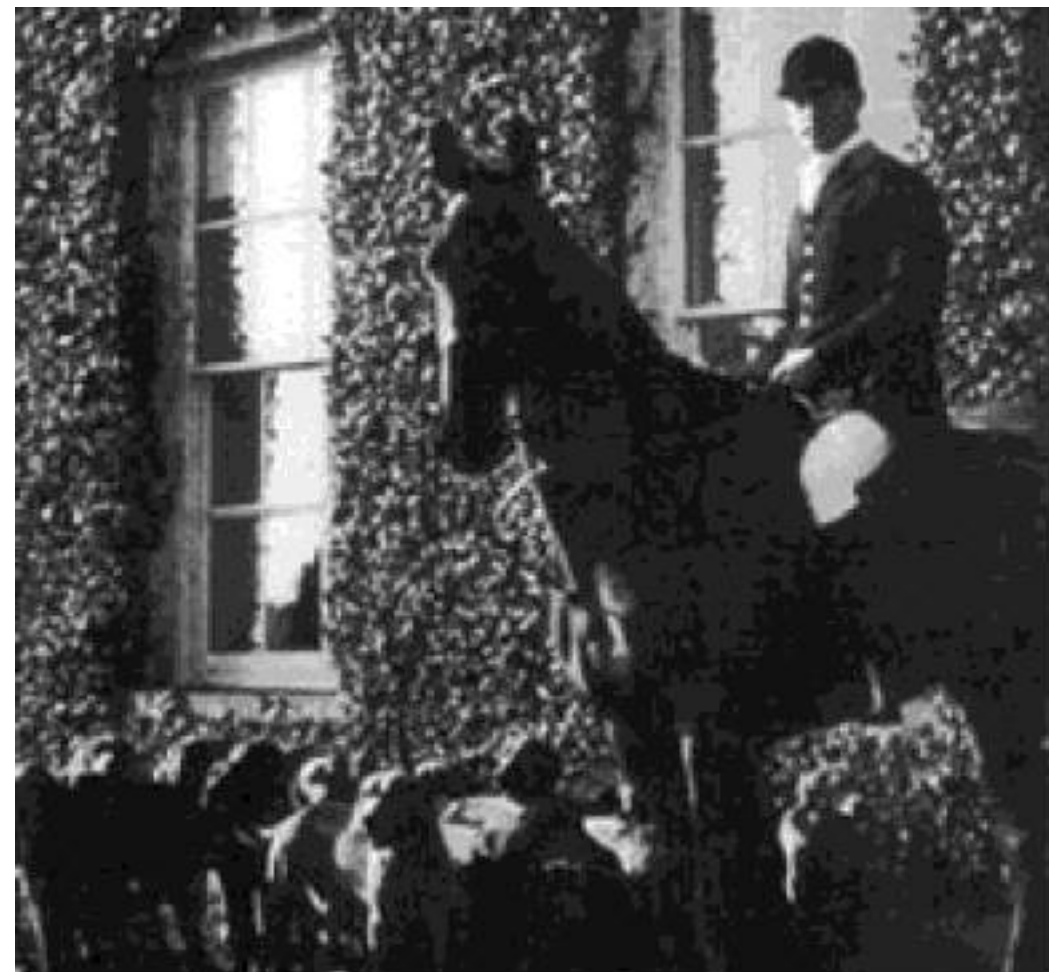
THADY Ryan, who has died aged 81, was for almost 60 years Master of the Scarteen Hounds, Ireland's most famous pack of foxhounds. The Ryans have run the Scarteen Hunt (named after their house in Knocklong, on the Limerick-Tipperary border) since the late 18th century. The hounds, with their high dome and long low-slung ears, are believed to have originated in Spain; they are popularly known, because of their distinctive colouring, as the Black and Tans — a name later given to the notorious paramilitary force sent to Ireland in 1920.

Ryan took over as master, owner and huntsman in 1946, and, with his lovable personality and dedication to his pack, attracted a host of foreign visitors, such as Lord Diplock, Lord Oaksey (the *Daily Telegraph's* racing correspon-

dent) and the trainer Fred Winter, as well as Americans such as the legendary film director John Huston.

The grandson of a general in the British army, and the son of an officer who served in the Boer War and the First World War, Thaddeus Francis Richard Ryan was born in Dublin on September 23, 1923. Although the family was in straitened circumstances, he was sent to Ampleforth, where he was master of the school's beagles. One of his contemporaries was George Hume, the future cardinal, who, one St Patrick's Day, snatched from Ryan's lapel a shamrock sent by his parents from Ireland and stamped it on the ground.

At 18, Ryan decided that his first duty was to return home to help his 70-year-old father on their farm in Ireland, which was neutral; but this was a choice about which he



THADY RYAN: Master of the Scarteen hounds

confessed to feeling a twinge of guilt in later life.

They were uphill days in Irish farming, and it was difficult to keep the hunt going. After the war, however, there was an influx of upper-class Englishmen on the run from

heavy taxation; some wags called it "the retreat from Moscow". They bought up country houses and joined in the hunting, although few achieved the easy rapport with the local people that was Ryan's inheritance and pecu-

liar strength. He was regarded by all classes locally as one of their own. Although the campaign against field sports has never attained much momentum in Ireland, Ryan was occasionally called upon to defend foxhunting against critics. He made his case well, maintaining that it was the least cruel method of killing a fox. But he foresaw a rift between town and country with the growth of urban populations which had never experienced rural life at first hand.

For many years Ryan was chairman of the equestrian committee of the Royal Dublin Society, and he introduced a relay race for different hunts with their hounds in the riding arena. As a huntsman with a silken thread, he was immensely proud of the rapturous reception he received on one occasion for getting all his hounds to follow him up on to the double bank at the Ballsbridge show grounds.

Foreign travel became a bigger part of Ryan's life as the years passed. He was invited

to hunt in England, the United States and in many European countries. He went on trips sponsored by the Irish Tourist Board, but resisted their suggestions for mass tourism from America linked to hunting. He came to England not only to hunt but also as a judge. He was once slated in *Horse and Hound* when, at the Horse of the Year Show at Wembley, he marked down a gelding that had been placed first by his fellow judge, the Duke of Beaufort.

Ryan was chef d'équipe of the Irish Olympic team that competed in the three-day event at the Tokyo and Mexico Olympics in the Sixties. He was a founder-member of Bord na gCapall (the Horse Board), set up in 1972 to promote better horse-breeding in Ireland. When he thought that funds were being squandered on administration, and that travel and other privileges were being abused, he resigned. He was a straightforward man of high principles rooted in deep religious

beliefs that were of a very conservative character.

Having survived a heart bypass, Ryan handed over the hunting of the hounds to his eldest son, Chris, in 1986 and emigrated to his wife's homeland, New Zealand, where two of his children had settled; however, he continued to return home to hunt. The Ryans brought with them several Irish draught horses who contributed greatly to the breeding stock in that country.

Those who heard Ryan recount in a lilting voice his tales about a vanished rural Ireland, and his anecdotes about the people he had met, urged him to write everything down. In 2002 he published *My Privileged Life with the Scarteen Black and Tans*. This portrays a sunny man of great humanity who is essentially untouched by the modern world.

Thady Ryan, who died in New Zealand on January 9, married Anne Peter. She survives him with his daughter and four sons.