

HAROLD WHITLOCK - RACE WALKER

A chance find at a stamp and collectable fair of an old cigarette card showing H.H. Whitlock, racewalker sparked Sylvia Mort of Bishop's Stortford in Hertfordshire to find out more about this once famous Whitlock. Sylvia wrote to the Race Walking Association and their reply (X4761) provided the details of Harold Whitlock's distinguished career.

Hector Harold Whitlock made the 50k and 20mile races his specialty. The Association records first show Harold in 1931 when he came second in the 50k race in Bradford with a time of 4:55:46. He was first or second 1933-1939 with his best time being 1936 in Derby at 4:30:38. That same year he was in Berlin for the Olympic games where he won the gold medal with a time of 4:30:41.4. Harold is recorded in many races up to 1952. He won the European Championships 50k in Paris in 1938 and placed 11 at the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki. A remarkable comeback, after the War interrupted his career, and likely robbed him of his peak performance years. In 1952 he was Britain's oldest competitor at 48 years 218 days!!

Also shown in the Association files are the records for Harold's brother Rex, including a 4th place finish for Rex at the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki. Rex is shown in three other races in 1952 including winning the Bath to London (100miles) race in 17:44:40

Harold Whitlock was Honorary Secretary of the Race Walking Association from 1948 to 1953 and President in 1955-56. In 1957 he published *Race Walking* the official coaching book of the Amateur Athletic Association of England. Harold was awarded an M.B.E. (Member British Empire) for his contribution to sport.

I first came in contact with this family through May McSweeney, Harold's, sister. May was interested in tracing and recording the story of this most interesting family. May's ancestor Henry Whitlock carried on a coach building business that had been founded in the 1770's and in the early 1900's the business evolved by converting a part of the operation to produce motor cars. There have been several articles in the Newsletter regarding the Whitlock car and I won't follow that story here.

I visited May in Finchley, London several times while living in England in the 1970's. She had lots of family stories and many of them were needless to say connected to sport as both her brothers, Harold and Rex were prominent sports figures. One I particularly remember her relating took place just following the War. The European governments were making their first attempts to return to normality following the devastation of World War II. May McSweeney was requested to help take a sports team of young people on a tour of Germany. It was 1946 and she had major reservations about it. The tour was through some of the most devastated areas of Germany and there were many tense moments but on the whole the young people broke down the barriers quickly and were just out to have fun. The experiment worked well and many subsequent visits were arranged. May and her brothers Harold and Rex maintained their connection to sport all their lives. Harold was still judging sporting events in November 1985 just a month before his death.

Harold's daughter-in-law Jill, wife of his son Ross subscribed to our Newsletter for years and followed up on the research done by May. Jill was able to trace the family back from Henry Whitlock the Coachbuilder to John Whitlock who married Dorothy Jackson at St.Catherine Coleman Church, London August 1,1748. We later discovered through the London will collection that Marianne Whitlock extracted that this John Whitlock was the son of John Whitlock of St.John's, Wapping, London. This

takes us back to the late 1600's and to date we have not been able to get back any further. This family is detailed on our WHITLOCK53 chart.

Peter Cassidy of the Race Walk Association advised there was a wireless play, *Whitlock's Walk* by John Burrows, broadcast on B.B.C. Radio 4 on the 10th September, 2002. In Berlin for the 1936 Olympic Games, Whitlock (always addressed in the play as "Harry") and a boxer called Coleman uncover a plot by Hitler to convince the world that his military strength is greater than it really is by building dummy bombers and leaving them where they can be seen. There is much by-play with drugged drinks, Jewish officials being killed and harsh-voiced Nazis. The intention may have been that the play be taken seriously.

Mr. Cassidy also let us know that if you go to www.britishpathe.com and search for *Whitlock* there are a couple of clips from 1936 of Harold Whitlock in their files that can be viewed on line.

Harold Whitlock's record as the oldest Great Britain international still shows in the Guinness Book of Records. December 16, 2003 will mark 100 years since Harold Whitlock was born and we thank Sylvia Mort for reminding me that it was far past time that this famous Whitlock was recognized in our Newsletter.

Sources: X79; X323; X4761; NP53; NP54; NP198; R644; R2331