

THE 1955 LONDON TO BRIGHTON AND BACK WALK

I was recently pointed to a British Pathe newsreel of the 1955 Sunday Dispatch London To Brighton & Back Walking Race. A total distance of 104 miles, it was won by 39 year old **Hew Nielson**, one of the greatest of the English centurions. Check it out at <https://youtu.be/PBWPa7Oero>. I was already familiar with the video and have previously written of Hew Nielson (<http://www.vrwc.org.au/tim-archive/articles/wo-hew-nielson.pdf>), and thought that the video would provide a springboard to discuss one of the greatest of the London to Brighton and Back races.

With 92 entries and 79 starters, the 1955 edition was by far the largest field ever assembled for this classic race. Even more impressive was the fact that 47 of the 79 starters reached the 100 mile mark in under 24 hours. Of these 47, 31 were first timers, thus becoming new English Centurions (C229 - C259). 21 walkers retired from the race at that point but a valiant 26 continued on to the end, completing the full 104 miles.

The wonderful record of 18:05:32, set by Billy Baker, remained untouched, but Hew Nielson of Woodford Green produced a great performance to win with 18:26:27, the third best ever behind Tommy Hammond and Baker. Nielson was hard challenged by **Vic Stone** of Polytechnic Harriers. Nielson had built up a good lead of 17 minutes with 20 miles to go, but Stone finished the stronger and was slowly reducing the deficit mile by mile, eventually finishing only 6 minutes and 30 secs in arrears.

Further back in the field, **Archie Brown** of St. Dunstone & Poly. Harriers, accompanied by **Fred Duff**, battled along gamely to finish the full course and become the first blind centurion. Polytechnic Harriers did well to get 5 finishers in tehe 26 and they deservedly won the team race, with Essex Beagles second and Woodford third.



The great Hew Nielson in action

Here are the results of those 47 walkers who reached the 100 mile mark inside 24 hours.

1955 Sunday Dispatch London To Brighton & Back Walking Race – 100 Mile Mark

1.	H.D. Nielson	Woodfield Green A.C.	17:33:07	C145
2.	V.W. Stone	Polytechnic Harriers	17:45:20	C202
3.	J.O.J. Culver	Essex Beagles	18:31:55	C229
4.	J. Hayward	Enfield A.C.	19:06:20	C230
5.	J.H. Comber	Essex Beagles	19:26:55	C231
6.	L.S. Fairman	Polytechnic Harriers	19:31:33	C232
7.	Karl Abolins	RoyalSutton Coldfield	19:52:15	C233
8.	Tom Milner	Highgate Harriers	19:55:25	C234
9.	H.W. Shields	Belgrave Harriers	20:02:22	C235
10.	A.D. McSweeney	Highgate Harriers	20:04:31	C 94
11.	T.G. Sharlott	Leicester W.C.	20:12:53	C236
12.	V.G. Evans	Leicester W.C.	20:30:15	C158
13.	H.W. Shephard	Polytechnic Harriers	20:37:09	C237
14.	H. Johnson	Trowbridge A.C.	20:45:20	C238

15. W.J. Morris	Queens Park H.	20:47:22	C186
16. W.D. Symes	Queens Park H.	21:06:20	C216
17. R. Andrews	Woodford Green A.C.	21:12:49	C124
18. J.H. Hansen	Essex Beagles	21:14:15	C192
19. T.H. Thomas	Newport Harriers	21:14:57	C239
20. H. Stallard	Belgrave Harriers	21:17:15	C173
21. H. Snook	Eastleigh A.C.	21:19:52	C190
22. J.H. Palmer	Peterborough A.C.	21:29:41	C240
23. D.H. Ashenden	Polytechnic Harriers	21:34:37	C241
24. S. Shirley	Polytechnic Harriers	21:37:52	C242
25. R.E. Strowger	Surrey Walking Club	21:38:25	C243
26. W.G. Lawrence	Woodford Green A.C.	21:41:22	C244
27. F.G. Wellsted	Surrey Walking Club	21:44:24	C245
28. C.F. Hewitt	Leicester A.C.	21:44:32	C226
29. H. Peel	Lozells Harriers	21:59:21	C196
30. P. Wilson	Belgrave Harriers	21:53:55	C246
31. S.J. Price	Lozells Harriers	21:59:21	C247
32. A.H. Foster	Woodford Green A.C.	22:01:29	C248
33. P.A. Jobson	Surrey Walking Club	22:02:44	C249
34. J.R. Taylor	Queens Park	22:04:51	C250
35. C. Whitfield	Lancashire W.C.	22:09:59	C251
36. J.J. Grocott	St Dunstan's & Poly	22:11:53	C252
37. G.A. Brown	St.Dunstan's	22:12:07	C253
38. Fred Duff	Highgate Harriers	22:12:07	C254
39. F. Pearce	Lancashire W.C.	22:29:50	C255
40. V. Murray	Lancashire W.C.	22:29:50	C256
41. F.J. Plumb	Brighton A.C.	22:44:24	C151
42. W.J. Lashmar	Brighton A.C.	22:51:25	C257
43. F. Kavanagh	Brighton A.C.	22:58:39	C198
44. H.H. Hartill	Lozells Harriers	23:16:10	C217
45. Frank Jarvis	Politie	23:25:22	C258
46. B. Butterworth	Lancashire W.C.	23:44:53	C259
47. W.F. Watson	Lozells Harriers	23:52:04	C146

Hew's daughter Pam Ficken wrote to me with her own remembrances from that race.

I was only 14 years old at the time. I thought I would let you know what happened after the race. The BBC were there and asked dad if he would go to the Grove Studios in London to appear on a TV programme that night. Dad agreed and, along with my mother and younger sister, we were taken in a Rolls Royce to the studio. We sat in the back, our feet never touched the floor, the leather seats were so deep. We had never been in anything like that before!

The program was called Stop the Heart of London Traffic. They obviously picked on dad as the race had finished near London. It was a great experience and honour for us all.

Hew is one of the all time legends of long distance walking. To learn more about Hew's many feats, I refer readers to my article at <http://www.vrwc.org.au/tim-archive/articles/wo-hew-neilson.pdf>.

Tim Erickson
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