

JOHN CANNELL – MANX EXCELLENCE

John Cannell, born 29/12/1945, is one of the greatest of the Isle of Man walkers, and that is saying a lot, given the depth and quality of walkers who have come from that small island.

Any article on John should start with a review of the top 10 100 miles walks by British athletes¹

1.	Frank O'Reilly	Lozells Harriers	1925	16:54:16	01/07/1960	Leicester-Skegness	C276
2.	John Moullin	Belgrave Harriers	09/09/1941	16:55:44	25/06/1971	Ewhurst	C462
	<i>Frank O'Reilly</i>			<i>16:58:16</i>	<i>06/07/1962</i>	<i>Leicester-Skegness</i>	<i>C276</i>
3.	Richard Brown	Surrey WC	18/11/1946	17:00:35	29/07/1988	Leicester-Congerst.	C760
4.	John Cannell	Boundary Harriers	29/12/1949	17:10:15	29/07/1988	Leicester-Congerst.	C388
5.	Derek Harrison	Boundary Harriers	02/03/1949	17:15:50	30/07/1976	Leicester-Skegness	C466
6.	Hew Neilson	Woodford Green		17:18:51	20/10/1960	Walton	C145
7.	M. Holmes	York Postal		17:21:52	20/08/1982	Leicester-Congerst.	C717
8.	Dave Boxall	Brighton & Hove	28/10/1933	17:24:00	22/06/1979	Ewhurst	C464
9.	Billy Baker	Queens Park		17:27:35	18/06/1926	Lond-Brighton-Ret	C 66
10.	Karl Abolins	R.Sutton Coldfield		17:32:16	03/06/1964	Leicester-Skegness	C233

I have written previously of the first three walkers on this list (**Frank O'Reilly**², **John Moullin**³ and **Richard Brown**⁴) and now it is time to extend my scrutiny to John, who sits in fourth place with a best time of 17:10:15, done in the 1988 *Leicester 100* at Congerstone.

You should initially read this excellent interview with John, published by Tony Taylor of Lancashire Walking Club:

REMINISCENCES: JOHN CANNELL ON MANY A MILE UNDERTAKEN, OFTEN AGAINST THE ODDS
<https://lancswalkingclub.com/2020/05/20/remiscences-8-john-cannell-on-many-a-mile-undertaken-often-against-the-odds/>

John's 100 mile walk of 17:10:15 one of five English Centurion finishes, ranging from 1966, when he was 20 years of age) to 1989 (when he was 43 years of age). It was one of 3 occasions when he bettered 18 hours for the 100 miles walk, a measure of excellence that few have matched.

14	John Cannell	Boundary Harriers, IOM	21:45:21	05/08/1966	Leicester to Skegness
2	John Cannell	Boundary Harriers, IOM	17:52:39	27/07/1984	Leicester-Congerstone
1	John Cannell	Boundary Harriers, IOM	17:55:10	26/06/1987	Ewhurst
2	John Cannell	Boundary Harriers, IOM	17:10:15	29/07/1988	Leicester-Congerstone
4	John Cannell	Boundary Harriers, IOM	19:28:05	29/07/1989	Hendon, London

Let's start with the 1966 Leicester to Skegness qualifier which saw a record breaking number of starters (84) and an equally amazing number of finishers (47, 27 of whom were first timers). John finished in 14th place in **21:45:21**.

1.	Karl Abolins	R.Sutton Coldfield	18:10:46	C 233
2.	A. Staines	Leicester WC	19:04:55	C 205
3.	R.S. Thorpe	Wakefield Harriers	19:51:06	C 381
4.	John Eddershaw	Sheffield United	20:03:56	C 299
5.	Lieuwe Schol	Suomi	20:12:55	C 291
6.	J.H. Barraclough	Wakefield Harriers	20:22:22	C 382
7.	G.P. Young	Boundary Harriers	20:24:30	C 383
8.	M.T. Blyth	Leicester WC	20:26:15	C 384
9.	Jeff Nutt	Leicester WC	20:34:44	C 385
10.	J.E. Leech	Surrey WC	20:45:50	C 358
11.	Jan Kon	AV40	21:01:40	C 368
12.	E.K. Livermore	Woodford Green	21:07:41	C 386
13.	Mart Kastelijns	KNAU	21:41:46	C 387
14.	John Cannell	Boundary Harriers	21:45:21	C 388
15.	Piet Jansens	RWV	21:46:37	C 389
16.	Edwin Horwill	Dudley & Stour	21:51:09	C 390

1 <http://www.centurions.org.au/documents/Top%20100%20100%20miles%20Gerrit%20De%20Jong%202016.pdf>

2 <http://www.vrwc.org.au/tim-archive/articles/wo-frank-oreilly.pdf>

3 <http://www.vrwc.org.au/tim-archive/articles/wo-len-duquemin-john-moullin.pdf>

4 <http://www.vrwc.org.au/tim-archive/articles/wo-richard-brown.pdf>

17. C.G. Evans	Leicester WC	21:53:02	C 158
18. Hew Neilson	Woodford Green	22:00:10	C 145
19. G. Hall	R.Sutton Coldfield	22:03:42	C 107
20. B. Mawer	Sheffield United	22:07:07	C 391
21. S. Smith	Lancashire WC	22:07:07	C 355
22. Eddy McNeir	Cambridge Harriers	22:07:47	C 375
23. Leo Scholten	LAT	22:09:58	C 392
24. Piet Borst	RWV	22:13:10	C 393
25. D.G. Pook	Hinckley College	22:20:05	C 394
26. D.D. Seddon	R.Sutton Coldfield	22:35:24	C 395
27. Hendrik Doornekamp	Altis	22:38:36	C 377
28. P. Maskell	Metropolitan Police	22:39:53	C 396
29. Ko van der Kwaak	AV Leiden	22:45:10	C 365
30. Klaas Kruymer	LAT	22:46:20	C 397
31. D.R. Hill	Leicester WC	22:48:32	C 398
32. Wiebren Teensma	LAT	22:49:44	C 399
33. Chris v.d. Heuvel	P.H.	22:49:50	C 400
34. W.R. Stapleford	Hinckley College	22:52:34	C 401
35. R.W. Stone	Coventry Godiva	22:52:36	C 185
36. Wout van Wieringen	RWV	22:55:05	C 402
37. F.G. Nickolls	Surrey WC	23:04:40	C 320
38. Rinus van Kuilenburg	RWV	23:07:14	C 403
39. R. Eenling	Lionitas	23:14:20	C 404
40. Fred Gerrish	Metropolitan Police	23:21:56	C 405
41. W.R. Meijer	RWV	23:24:57	C 406
42. Wim Timmer	RWV	23:26:20	C 379
43. H. Martin	Trowbridge AC	23:27:07	C 273
44. Herman Hekelaar	Suomi	23:29:16	C 360
45. Herman Stakenburg	Suomi	23:38:57	C 302
46. Ger Cozijn	RWV	23:41:46	C 407
47. Anne Sinnema	LAT	23:51:40	C 380

It would be another 18 years before John walked another centurion qualifier, and it was a race to remember. Hosted by the Leicester Walking Club on their usual Congerstone course, the 1984 Centurion Qualifier saw another big field and another big finishing list, with 31 of the 64 starters completing the course. The winner, the first of 10 new centurions, was local man **Brian Adams** in a sub 18 hour performance (17:39:28). After a fierce battle with Brian, John had to settle for second with **17:52:39**. The race also saw **Sandra Brown** C735, in only her second hundred, clock the remarkable time of 18:36:29. As an aside, she then had to wait 14 minutes for her husband Richard C760 to finish.



John in action in the 1984 English Centurions walk in Leicester (photos <https://lancswalkingclub.com/>)

Three years later, John returned, attracted by the fact that the 1987 Centurions Qualifier had been designated by the R.W.A. as the National Long Distance Championship. Hosted by the Surrey Walking Club at Ewhurst, it saw John win with **17:55:10**, another sub-18! However, the race was not without drama for him. Apart from having to contend with the next 4 men who all finished within half an hour of him, he went straight past the dogleg on one lap during the night. Thankfully the referee allowed him to do the dogleg twice next time around to make up the distance. Overall, 38 of the 54 walkers completed the full 100 mile distance.

And now onto the 1988 race, which was held on the usual Leicester course at Congerstone, despite concerns for the safety of walkers on the outward and return sections from the town centre. 75 walkers started the race, many of them repeat protagonists. The race soon became a titanic battle between the winners of the two previous years, namely John Cannell and Richard Brown. Richard won with 17:00:35, just under 10 minutes ahead of John, who recorded **17:10:15**. In total, 47 completed the race, with 19 first timers. The quality of the 1988 race can be judged by just looking at the times of the first 10.

1.	Richard Brown	Surrey WC	17:00:35	C760
2.	John Cannell	Boundary Harriers	17:10:15	C388
3.	AdLeermakers	Attila	17:38:27	C561
4.	Dirk Timmerman	België	17:38:27	C772
5.	Jan Vos	RWV	18:32:59	C369
6.	T.W. Corkill	Boundary Harriers	18:34:56	C828
7.	Tony Collins	R.S.Birmingham	18:42:18	C688
8.	Dave Boxall	Brighton & Hove	18:49:50	C464
9.	Gordon Beattie	Medway AC	18:55:25	C807
10.	John Sturgess	Leicester WC	19:15:58	C829



John with the Sunday Dispatch Trophy in 1988: The Sunday Dispatch Trophy was won that year by Boundary Harriers team of John Cannell C388, C Corkhill C828 and C Keown C799 (photo John Cannell facebook)

For good measure, John completed one further Centurions Qualifier the following year (1989), coming 4th with **19:28:05** on a new off-road course at the Metropolitan Police Training Centre in Hendon, London. Times were generally slow due to high winds and squally showers which plagued the race.

John had many other highlights in a long career in racewalking.

He represented the Isle of Man in the 1970 British Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh, coming 15th in the 20 Miles walk with **2:56:19**.



John Cannell (227 in dark singlet and glasses) sits at the back of the field as it circles the track before heading out of the stadium in the 1970 Commonwealth Games 20 Miles Walk in Edinburgh

John's favourite event had to be the classic 85 miles Parish Walk on the Isle of Man. He still holds the record for the most wins, with six, ahead of Richard Gerrard and Robbie Callister, both on five.⁵ He was also the first person to win the event three years in a row (1981-1983). The full list of his wins reads as follows

1976	John Cannell	17:28:12
1981	John Cannell	16:15:11
1982	John Cannell	15:59:33
1983	John Cannell	16:31:38
1993	John Cannell	16:11:11
1994	John Cannell	16:13:46

These wins were not always easy. Robbie Lambie, in his essay *OUTSTANDING MEMORIES OF THE PARISH*, discusses John's first victory in 1976:

*Another Parish that stands out for me was John Cannell's first win in 1976 when he won in 17.28.12. John had overcome a serious illness only several years earlier so you can imagine how popular that win was.*⁶

John made a return visit to the Parish Walk in 2009, participating once again 7 years after his retirement.⁷

The reason I am taking part in the Parish Walk this year is simple. I could not resist the challenge. It's all about the challenge and of course I am curious about whether or not I can still make it round the course. And if I do, what sort of time I can do.

*The Parish Walk is the toughest course I have ever done. It's much tougher than some of the 100 mile competitions because of the terrain. It's difficult to sit by and watch other people taking part. This year I wanted to be involved again.*⁸

He was not successful on that final occasion, having to stop at the 32.5 mile mark. But a finish was not necessarily the goal – it was just a chance for one final walk in his favourite event.

John was a postman by profession and had been a regular competitor in the annual Postman's Walk. 2009 saw him, now retired, appear in the 48th annual Postman's Walk in London⁹, walking with the Isle of Man team and coming in 13th in the men's event.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parish_Walk#Past_winners

⁶ http://www.iomvac.co.uk/Parish_Walk_Reflections.pdf

⁷ http://www.bbc.co.uk/isleofman/content/articles/2009/06/19/johncannell_feature.shtml

⁸ http://www.iomvac.co.uk/Parish_Walk_Reflections.pdf

⁹ <http://www.isleofman.com/News/details/32229/manx-posties-walk-tall-at-london-race>

Aged 74, John is still going strong in 2020, and is still seen regularly at major Isle of Man events. We hope that continues for many years to come.



Still looking fit - John Cannell walking in the 2010 edition of the Guernsey Church to Church

Tim Erickson
Saturday 23 May 2020