

58th London to Brighton Walk 3rd Sep 1983

The competitors and officials and spectators who gathered at Westminster Bridge on the dawning of the morning of the Open Brighton could be forgiven for thinking that they were about to witness the administering of the last rites to this once great classic race. For despite the colossal efforts of our President, Ken Mason, who wrote to every walking club in the country, and Peter Selby, the entry was wretchedly scant. Even the weather turned against us; the long hot summer collapsed on Friday evening and in its place rushed gale force winds and squally showers.

The scene had an almost ghostlike, unreal appearance, there being only a handful of people about on this chilly, wet, dark morning, and even the face of Big Ben was obscured by scaffolding. It seemed like a good idea to pretend we had the wrong day. However, almost imperceptibly the tide turned; the excellent changing facilities provided at County Hall helped competitors to prepare in comfort and by the stroke of six there were only four absentees from the programme line up.

Briefly the story of the race was quite simple; Dave Boxall of Brighton set the ball rolling but once over the river Peter Hodkinson moved ahead and despite a gallant attempt by Jake Warhurst, the holder, who cut Hodkinson's twelve minute lead at Bolney to eight by Brighton, there was no denying the powerfully built policeman. Steve Till took third, cruising through the field, but he was forced to hustle the last few miles by a strong finishing Nolan Simmons. With three in the first six, the Club easily won the team race. But this was not so much a race, it was more a parade of individuals demonstrating their belief in the Brighton and giving encouragement to the Club to persevere and safeguard the future of the race. Thirty walkers completed the course and on a day when the weather buffeted and impeded them at times, they were all heroes.

Peter Hodkinson

He maintained his 100% record, having won the only other Brighton in which he had competed in 1976. He deserved to win for his courage in going to the front inside the first mile and holding it despite having little racing this year. He did, it is true, win the Police Barking to Southend race in May in very similar conditions; he puts his strength to good effect on such occasions and adds weight to the saying "when the going gets tough the tough get going".

Jake Warhurst

It would be difficult to imagine a more honest competitor than the little Yorkshire terrier. He made the long trek down from the north to defend his crown and did not let it go lightly. Jake (John) is a true sportsman and a credit to the sport of race walking. Tonsorially, however, he remains a nightmare but, to be fair, Jake had long hair before the Beatles and can never be accused of following fashion.

Steve Till

Bionic Quadrathlon man Till, just two weeks after finishing sixth in what u/as billed as the world's toughest event, showed absolutely incredible powers of recovery to walk virtually untroubled to Brighton in a personal best time. Nobody does this naturally. It takes a great deal of time, effort, dedication and guts to reach that kind of high standard of fitness.

Nolan Simmons

Our Captain was in absolute torment for the first twenty miles or so, his pre-race insulin injection for his diabetes appeared not to be working, but when the correct balance was achieved he sprang to life and went from strength to strength and ensured that Steve Till earned the Dithy Cup for first Club man home.

Shaun Lightman

By his own high standards, Shaun would probably not rank this Brighton as one of his best, but his presence in Surrey teams is invaluable. He often scores in our teams as on this occasion, but he is just as likely to deliver the goods in the open Sevens, a true all-

rounder who, though no longer at the very top of the tree, still retains all the enthusiasm and displays the same 100% effort as he did when representing his country in the Olympic Games. I think it true to say that one or two people were sceptical when Shaun moved across from Metropolitan, but his whole-hearted commitment and support for Club races have dispelled any anxieties.

Sandra Brown

Without a doubt the discovery of 1983, this young lady gains new admirers with each race. Sandra joined us in May and after her sterling performances in the Plymouth to Dawlish, Manchester to Blackpool and Hastings to Brighton, only a fool would have bet against her completing the Brighton. She did so with style and won the Cousins Bowl into the bargain. She possesses good technique, an abundance of stamina and is pretty good on the eye too. Sandra likes to attack and has little respect for reputations - Shaun found himself trailing her at Coulsdon. These are early days and one does not want to bring unnecessary pressure to bear on her, but Sandra has talent and at her current rate of progression could make a name for herself in this sport.

Peter Hannell

After duelling with the leaders for the first twenty miles Peter faded, as his previous form suggested he would, but he stuck to his task gamefully and beat ten hours, which for a first Brighton is most creditable - and remember, too, this was his first race beyond 20Kms. He only knows one way to walk and that's at the front for as long as possible. He must have known that he would suffer and he did, but the experience will stand him in good stead.

Graham Peddie

Unlucky to just miss the ten hour mark, he was always in control. Graham remains completely unruffled in temperament if not appearance, and these races such as the Brighton seem to take little out of him - he would have been tailor-made for the old Brighton and Back race. Whilst most people dream of a good soak in the bath or a long cool drink to keep them going over the last few miles, Graham anticipates a large ice cream cornet and makes straight for the kiosk once over the line.

John O'Sullivan

John had planned to do the journey with Steve Wynn but was forced to travel alone when Steve failed to show. Either Steve had been asked to turn out for Millwall or someone had spiked his twelve pints the night before. Whatever, John put his head down and got on with the job, and with little racing or training to support him, apart from one or two sponsored charity efforts, he did remarkably well to tick up another Brighton.

Hew Neilson

The most heart warming performance of the day undoubtedly was that of Hew Neilson. He has often been maligned in recent years for stretching the patience of the timekeepers and partly for this reason had not walked a Brighton since his 33rd in 1972. This year his entry was accepted on the understanding that no competitor would be timed in after twelve hours. Hew's son-in-law, Brian Ficken, thanked us with what I would suspect was a touch of sarcasm. As it turned out, all our fears proved absolutely groundless. John Morris of Belgrave kept him company as far as Croydon before retiring as forewarned suffering from a heavy cold. From here Hew could have caught cold too, for he never saw another competitor again. He knew the way, naturally, but it is a lonely trek at the back of the field. He battled away stubbornly and finished in style over twenty one minutes inside the deadline.

At the reception later, more than a few of us could feel lumps in our throats as Hew entered to a standing ovation. This was the fiftieth anniversary of his first ever Brighton. He has been a most marvellous campaigner and still is, of course, the world record holder for 24 hour track races. The distance he set at Walton - 133 miles 21 yards - has

now stood unbeaten since 1960.

The Brighton Victory Cup eluded Hew, although he came very close in 1955. In that year he won the Brighton and Back and the Hastings to Brighton. He walked a great race in the Open to finish in 8 hours 13 minutes, but was pipped by a little chap named Thompson, who won his first Brighton. Nobody else was to get a look in for the next seven years and by then Hew's chance had disappeared

Surrey Walking Club are extremely grateful to Hew for his patronage of the Brighton all these years and also equally for the most sporting manner in which he has always conducted himself. He has been a great walker, respected by his contemporaries, an inspiration to a great many walkers, and a friend to everybody connected with the sport.

Carry on Hew.

Phil King

His first attempt at the Brighton, or any distance race come to that, Phil was very pleased to finish. Unfortunately he strayed off course at Three Bridges and added a little more to the distance. A very likeable fellow, Phil is comparatively quiet for a man of his strong looking physique. With a little more aggression to his walking, I am sure he could substantially reduce his time

Before concluding I'd like to thank , on behalf of the Club, Janos Korcsok from Hungary and Paul Toporek from Austria for providing the overseas flavour to this year's race, and the Masons and Vales for kindly playing hosts to our visitors.

On the non-domestic front, John Keown of Belgrave completed his 25th consecutive Brighton and was well within ten and a half hours. Peter Worth, now in his fifties, clocked a superb sub nine hours time, whilst regulars like Eddershaw, Weston, Baker, Boxall and Emery all added another Brighton to their belts. It was refreshing too to have a team from Basingstoke close in and one of their members, Sandy Johnston, was the only double Brightonian (Stock Exchange and Open) this year

The reception held for the first time at the Royal Escape was, on balance, a success. Refreshments were not really sufficient but this obviously can be improved; the room provided was very suitable and the staff most helpful and considerate. Peter Selby is to be praised for the contacts he has made here.

As I said at the beginning of this long report, the future of the Brighton before this year's race looked bleak, but at the end of the day all our spirits had been revived. Peter Worth, in a vote of thanks to the Club, implored us to carry on and when you think about it, don't we owe it to the Peter Worths, John Keowns and even Hew Neilsons? They put more into this sport of ours than they ever take out.

Time will tell

Results:

	Position	Initial	Surname	Club	Hour	Min	Sec
1	P.	Hodkinson	Cambridge Harriers	8	28	17	
2	J.	Warhurst	Sheffield Utd. Harriers	8	36	37	
3	S.	Till	Surrey W.C.	8	47	06	
4	N.	Simmons	Surrey W.C.	8	50	39	
5	P.	Worth	Enfield Harriers	8	52	59	
6	S.	Lightman	Surrey W.C.	9	06	14	
7	J.	Eddershaw	Sheffield Utd. Harriers	9	12	19	

8	D.	Boxall	Brighton & Hove A.C.	9	18	34
9	E.	Holmquist	Highgate Harriers	9	33	38
10	M.	Lewis	Trowbridge A.C.	9	29	05
11	J.	Korcsok	Hungary	9	30	34
12	C.	Weston	Highgate Harriers	9	32	00
13	Sandra	Brown	Surrey W.C.	9	37	35
14	P.	Hannell	Surrey W.C.	9	54	46
15	G.	Peddie	Surrey W.C.	10	01	58
16	J.	Bellwood	York Postal	10	06	35
17	P.	Toporek	Austria	10	17	00
18	H.	O'Neill	Enfield Harriers	10	25	01
19	J.	Keown	Belgrave Harriers	10	25	25
20	F.	Baker	Highgate Harriers	10	32	05
21	P.	Emery	Enfield Harriers	10	45	27
22	J.	O'Sullivan	Surrey W.C.	10	54	08
23	E. J.	Winyard	Watford Harriers	10	54	25
24	W.	Lawrence	Basingstoke A.C.	11	04	49
25	P.	King	Surrey W.C.	11	08	27
26	G. T.	Davies	S.Devon and Dawlish	11	11	28
27	A. H.	Johnston	Basingstoke A.C.	11	14	14
28	G.	Robinson	Leicester W.C.	11	22	09
29	J.	Wrey	Basingstoke A.C.	11	31	06
30	H.	Neilson	Woodford Green A.C.	11	38	39

	Team	Position	Club	Points
1			Surrey	13
2			Highgate	41
3			Enfield	44