

THE 1908 OLYMPIC MARATHON

Bob Wilcock

The marathon was undoubtedly the most significant event of the 1908 Games: it caught the imagination of the press and the public, it had a dramatic and controversial finish, and the distance of the race, 26 miles 385 yards (42.195 km) became the standard Olympic and international marathon distance for the 1924 Olympics and subsequently.¹

The Official Report does not give any explanation as to how this seemingly arbitrary distance was determined, and various explanations have been put forward, either relating to the starting point, or the finish, or both. Some

owe more to a writer's imagination than reality, some are contradictory, all are incomplete. A straightforward answer emerges from surviving contemporary documents and newspaper reports, but the full background is quite complex and fascinating. There are tantalising gaps, but it is possible to amplify and correct the common explanations, and brush away the myths. A reason also emerges as to why Dorando turned right instead of left on entering the stadium, a confusion that perhaps helped cost him the race.

There is only one reference in the British Olympic Council minutes to the staging of the marathon: at the 21 October 1907 meeting a request from Finland that "the marathon race should be run on the road" was accepted. In isolation this seems a strange entry. However, it is apparent that the BOC initially thought that the police would not give permission for the closure of roads; the Reverend Robert Stuart de Courcy Laffan, Secretary to the BOC is quoted as saying this in an interview published in *The Sporting Life* newspaper on 2 August 1907. The newspaper's athletics columnist "Expert" quickly responded

*"quite a storm of adverse comment has been aroused by the suggested elimination of the Marathon Race from next year's Olympic Games, and no wonder! ... Public interest has already been centred on the premier event [and] the reasons adduced for its elimination are suggestive ... of the timidity of a Council unacquainted with the manner in which such an event should be conducted ... The 'traffic' bogey is all nonsense ..."*²

The expert goes on to suggest a "country" route to and



The statue of Pheidippides, according to legend the original marathon runner, presented by the Greek King for the first time donated at the Olympic Games 1906 Athens (*Marathon programme in BOA archives*)

from the stadium, or completely removed from the stadium, such as Epsom Downs race course, home of the Derby. He further suggests

"The Polytechnic Harriers, who organised the last big Brighton walk, could arrange a marathon race I am sure."

Whether as a result of the newspaper suggestion or not, this is exactly what happened: on 1 October 1907 *The Sporting Life* was able to publish draft regulations prepared by the BOC which stated that

"The marathon race of 40 kilometres (25 miles) will be run on a course marked out on public roads by the Amateur Athletic Association ..."

The AAA delegated the task to the Polytechnic Harriers, and the challenge was taken up by Jack Andrew, Honorary Secretary to the Harriers who was also their representative on the committee of the AAA. Jack Andrew is the key figure in the whole story, from the very beginning, to the end of the drama in the stadium. He claimed full credit for selecting the "historic" route³, and full responsibility for lengthening it to 26 miles plus a full lap on the track which was 586 2/3 yards (total 42.3795km⁴). As will be seen, he will not have been responsible for final changes that reduced the distance to 26 miles 385 yards, when the marathon entrance to the stadium was changed. Jack Andrew was at Dorando's elbow as he crossed the finishing line, and he was also at Johnny Hayes' elbow as he finished half a minute or so later.

It should be added that although Jack Andrew claimed credit for suggesting the route, "Expert" in *The Sporting Life* claimed credit for the idea of a route from Windsor to the Stadium⁵. In his column of 2 October 1907 he wrote

"I think a truly classic route could be selected ... from the Royal Borough of Windsor ... to Shepherd's Bush. ... if it could be arranged that the greatest athletic contest of our days should start under the shadow of our greatest Royal home and pass our leading public schools, Eton and Harrow, there can be no doubt that the national interest would be aroused to a far greater extent than a mere 25 mile run on practically unknown roads."

Expert's suggested route was quite similar to the one actually selected. He and Jack Andrew are sure to have been acquaintances or friends, are sure to have discussed the marathon, so who knows who had the initial brain-wave?

The first myth: the start

One of the principal myths is that the 'odd' distance was determined by the position of the start, and it is commonly suggested that the start was moved to the East Terrace of Windsor Castle at the request of the Princess of Wales, Princess Mary, so that her children could have a good view of the start from the nursery windows⁶. No evidence has been found to support this story: nothing has been found in the royal archives⁷, and while Princess Mary started the race, there is strong evidence, as will be seen, that this was a spur of the moment decision, and in any event, her influence made no difference to the distance. It is also sometimes stated that an additional reason for the start on the Terrace was that it could be "coordinated with a birthday celebration for one of the children."⁸ In fact none of the children had a birthday anywhere near 24 July.⁹

On 8 November 1907 The Sporting Life published details of the proposed route:

"... it has not been definitely settled where the race shall start, but the Council of the Olympic Association are endeavouring to obtain permission for it to be in the grounds of Windsor Castle. This would be regarded as a gracious concession by his Majesty, but should the necessary permission not be granted the start will be from either Queen Victoria's or Prince Victor's statue. When this point is definitely settled the course will be accurately measured, but approximately it is 25½ miles, a half-mile less than the [1906] Athens course."¹⁰

Prince Victor's statue is in Thames Street, some 300 yards down the marathon route from Queen Victoria's statue. This statue is at the junction of Castle Hill and Windsor High Street, and became an effective reference point. The initial distance was about 41 km, or 40 km plus a lap of the track.

By 20th February 1908 progress had been made, and The Sporting Life reported:

"So recently as last Friday [14 February] Mr. J.M. Andrew, the energetic secretary of the Polytechnic H., measured with a pedometer, at the request of the A.A.A., the course suggested by the powers that be, and as altered by them from that originally suggested. If the start of the race takes place from the Queen Victoria statue, immediately outside the gates leading up to Windsor Castle, the distance is 26 miles to the edge of the track at the Stadium. If however the start be made from the Terrace of the

historic castle, for which it is hoped that the King will graciously give permission, it is computed that this would mean an additional 700 yards to be covered, exclusive of the lap with which it is intended that the race shall conclude at Shepherd's Bush. Exactly, therefore, where the starting point may be is even now by no means certain, but if it be at the Queen Victoria statue, that may be considered to answer all requirements. In any case, if the present intentions are realised, the race will be well over the 26 miles which was the distance of the last marathon [in Athens]."

Now this report is slightly muddled. The 700 yards added to the course by the anticipated start on the Terrace, plus changes in the approach to the stadium, (detailed below), brought the distance up to 26 miles plus a lap of 586 2/3 yards to the finish, it was not 26 miles from the statue. What is established though, is that it was Jack Andrew and the AAA who were looking to start the race on the Terrace. Jack Andrew seems not to have taken this into account in setting his initial route. When alterations had to be made, Jack Andrew and the AAA, quite possibly after some lively debate, decided to make the distance 26 miles plus one lap.

By 4th April 1908 the starting point had been confirmed as "on or near the East Lawn below the east terrace of the Castle"¹¹ subject to the King's consent.¹² The programme for the Trial Marathon on 25 April states

"It is hoped that the King will graciously consent to the start being made from the terrace of the historic Castle, in which event the distance will be about 26 miles to the edge of the Stadium Track."¹³

Newspaper reports suggest that the reason for this private location was to avoid public interference with the start, and "only those officials absolutely connected with the starting of the race will be allowed to be present"¹⁴ ... This certainly made it easier for Princess Mary and the royal children to be present, but there is no evidence that she had anything to do with the decision. The route had been lengthened from the original 40 km. plus, but the alternative starting point in Windsor Great Park (used for the Trial Marathon) was also 700 yards from Queen Victoria's statue.

The Sporting Life report of 4th April continued that "it is hoped that the King will, if his engagements permit, start the competitors."

The King's engagements did permit, but he did not start the race. The Times Court Column contains an intriguing entry:

"The King will neither start, nor witness the finish of, the Marathon race to-day, nor will his Majesty accompany the Queen when she presents the medals to the winners in the Olympic Games tomorrow."

The Court Circular from Buckingham Palace dated 24 July give the King's only engagements on marathon day as lunch with the Queen and with Princess Frederica of Hanover and Baron von Pawel-Rammingen (after which the Queen went to the Stadium), and a meeting with Viscount Esher and Major-General Sir Stanley Clarke; their business was not mentioned. (All the King did on 25 July when the Queen presented the medals was catch a train to Sandringham to inspect alterations being carried out on the royal estate there, coming back late in the afternoon.¹⁵) Such an announcement of what the King is not doing is highly unusual. Was it simply to end speculation¹⁶, or was there more to it? The real story perhaps is not why the race started on the Terrace, but why the King did not start it.¹⁷

The Times is said to have reported that the race was started by Queen Alexandra sending a signal by telegraph from the Stadium to the Princess of Wales who in turn instructed Lord Desborough to start the race.¹⁸ It is also suggested that the original plan was for the Queen to send the signal to Lord Desborough, but the plan was modified include the Princess of Wales.¹⁹

However, The Times of 25 July, in a report of nearly a page, merely states that the Princess pressed an electric button for the pistol to be fired. Queen Alexandra could not have taken part in the arrangements: at 2:30 pm when the race started, she was in her carriage en route from Buckingham Palace to the stadium. The Police Report mentions that she arrived at about 2:45 pm.²⁰

To establish how the race was actually started it has proved necessary to look at numerous reports. Those reports lead to the conclusion that the actual arrangements were determined at the very last minute, on the day itself. The Marathon Programme gives no detail at all of the starting arrangements. While there was an advance announcement in the press that the King would open the Olympic Games, there is nothing to be found in the press concerning the start of the marathon until the day of the race itself. The Daily Mail's headline on 24 July was "Today's Great Race – Start by Swedish Crown Prince." On 25 July it was "The Start – Signal by the Princess of Wales"! What had happened? The Court Circular for the day makes no mention whatsoever of the planned presence of the Princess of Wales at the start (nor even of the Queen at the finish), there is simply the notice that the King will not be there.

On the day, the Mayor of Windsor, Mr. E. Bampfylde entertained Lord Desborough and other race officials to lunch in Layton's Restaurant, Windsor. After a toast and short speeches the officials drove up to the start in Lord Desborough's car.²¹

"Shortly after 2:15 p.m. the Princess of Wales, together with Princess Mary, Prince Albert and Prince Henry of Wales, attended by Sir William Carington and Lady Bertha Dawkins, drove up in a royal carriage, and were joined by two nurses bringing the Prince George and John in a bass-

inet. Her Royal Highness was dressed in a blue-flowered white dress, and carried a pink parasol. The Dean of Windsor, in his black attire, and an officer of the Guards, gave picturesque touches to the scene."²² "Prince Albert carried a camera and an autograph album. ... Prince George was lifted out [of the perambulator (bassinet)] as the racers approached."^{23 24}

Now if the royal nursery was by the terrace, as the story has it, why did the Princess and her children arrive by carriage? The reason is that the day before the race the Princess and family went to stay at the royal residence at Frogmore on the far side of the Windsor estate²⁵. They had a mile's drive to get to the East Terrace.

The newspapers then describe what happened:

"As soon as the group [of runners] was lined up in the order of the draw" "the Princess of Wales pressed a button on the table, which by means of an electric cable communicated with Lord Desborough's motor-car." "Lord Desborough (who was standing on the front seat of his car) and Mr. Jack M. Andrew ... each fired a pistol", "while the Crown Prince of Sweden gave them the word to go."²⁶

In this somewhat over-elaborate arrangement, the Crown Prince of Sweden seems to have been delegated to third place; his presence is almost superfluous. The circumstances in which he came to be starting the race are not wholly clear. In 1905 he married Princess Margaret of Connaught, Queen Victoria's grand-daughter by her third son, Arthur. King Edward VII was therefore his uncle by marriage. He was a keen sportsman, and later became Honorary President of the Stockholm Organising Committee for the Olympic Games of 1912. Whether he was invited to start the race initially, or whether he asked to start it, has not been established.

The evidence suggests that the role of the Princess was not pre-arranged, and when she turned up at the start it could well be that the Crown Prince was asked to defer to the Princess, his cousin, who was given the honour of pressing the starting button. The Princess's personal diary says simply "At 2 we went to see the start for the Marathon Race from the East Terrace."²⁷ This seems to reinforce the impression: she went to see the start, not to start the race. It is curious that she does not even mention sending the signal to start the race, but it is consistent with the low-key Court Circulars; starting the race was not seen as a royal event.

The Trial Marathon

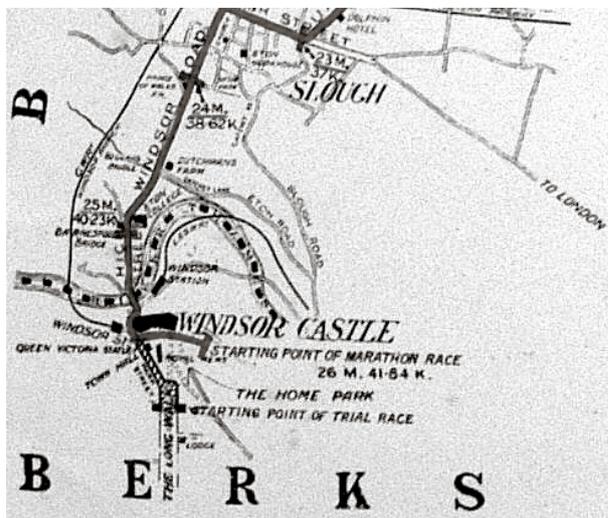
A number of "marathon" races were arranged to be held in England before the Olympics. Writing in the Polytechnic Magazine in January 1908, Jack Andrew reported " ... the Polytechnic Harriers have been asked by the

*A.A.A. to make their 20 Miles Road Race on April 25th the English Trial Race to enable the committee to select the competitors to represent England in the Marathon Race. ... The route will be on the road from Windsor Castle finishing at Sudbury.*²⁸

There was a clear need for a trial race because the last time a race over 20 miles was run near London was 1894 (and previous races were on the track, not public roads)²⁹. Jack Andrew offered to take over the organisation of the trial race in addition to the preparations for the Olympic race; it would be a valuable test of the organisational arrangements as much as it was a selection race.

Barnespool Bridge, crossing a stream on the edge of Eton, at what became the one mile point in the Olympic marathon, was the initial starting point, but the King agreed to a written request from Robert Mitchell, the Poly's Director of Education, for the start to be in Windsor Great Park³⁰. Detailed arrangements were made through the offices of Prince Christian, Ranger of Windsor Great Park, (and he was present at the start of the race)³¹. The finish was extended from Sudbury to Wembley Park (Trotting Track)³², the Stadium not being ready, and so that "traffic would not be impeded in the busy part of the outskirts"³³.

The Trial Marathon started at a point in Windsor Great Park 700 yards from Queen Victoria's statue which was reached via Windsor High Street, and followed the Ol-



Detail from the map with the Olympic Marathon programme, showing the starting points of the Marathon and the Trial Marathon, and also Barnespool Bridge at the 25 mile point (1m. from start).

ympic Marathon route until Sudbury Station after which it proceeded up Blind Lane to Wembley Trotting Track, a total distance, including a lap of the track, of 22 miles 1420 yards (just short of 23 miles, or 37 km)³⁴. Weather conditions for the race were atrocious, and the roads were at times "ankle-deep in cold slush"³⁵. The race was started by Lord Desborough and was won by A. Duncan

of Salford Harriers (in the Olympic race he dropped out at about 10 miles). The race cost £145 to stage. The BOC reimbursed the cost of the maps and direction posts (£55), and the Harriers made a loss of £13 overall.³⁶ The cost of the Olympic Marathon was £160, including 13 guineas to Vaughton for badges, £23 for motor cars, and, intriguingly, £36 for the building of a bridge. Income was £45 from programme sales, and £24 for advertising from Liebig Extract Co (Oxo), Schweppes, Wawkphar & Co³⁷, and Vaughton (advertisement on badges).³⁸ The Franco-British Exhibition organisers were billed £31 for preparation and completion of the marathon track immediately outside the stadium.³⁹ The net cost of staging the marathon was therefore about £126.⁴⁰

Notwithstanding the weather, the Trial Marathon showed the quality of the Polytechnic's organisation. It appears that initially they may have been asked just to select the course. Following the trial race, the role of organising the Olympic event was confirmed as theirs.⁴¹

South London Harriers organised a second trial, over the Olympic course, for invited runners, on 23 May, starting at the first mile-post by Barnespool Bridge, Eton, and finishing near the railway bridge and Norfolk Hotel, Wembley, slightly off the Olympic route, a distance again just short of 23 miles⁴². The winner, J.B. Powell, was not selected for the Olympic race.

The Marathon Route

The British Olympic Council presented their draft regulations to the International Olympic Committee meeting at The Hague, 23-25 May 1907, and the proposals as sanctioned by the IOC were published in the Times on 29 June 1907.⁴³ It states: "Marathon Race (25 miles) (40 kilometres); Maximum number of Competitors from each Country, 12".

This distance continues to be quoted widely right up to marathon day itself, but by early 1908 it had increased to 26 miles (41.84 km) to the stadium entrance, plus a lap, then part-lap to the finish.⁴⁴

The Sporting Life announced on 1 November 1907 that the marathon route had been determined and published a plan and description on 8 November. Just as the start was uncertain, so also was the finish. The length was about 25½ miles. The November 1907 route remained the actual route until Harlesden Clock Tower was reached at about 23½ miles. Initially a shorter, direct route was proposed with runners turning left to follow the tram lines to Harrow Road, then turning sharp right, the road leading "direct into Wood-lane for the Stadium."⁴⁵ It was envisaged from the outset that the race would finish with a lap before the crowds in the stadium.⁴⁶

While the route was praised in general, the last few miles came in for immediate criticism. Even before the map was published, Expert in The Sporting Life expressed concern that

"it will follow the electric car route for the last

mile or two, and that class of traffic can hardly be held up."⁴⁷

There was concern about the stone cobbles on the tram-line sections.⁴⁸ J.R. Barnes Moss, secretary of the Middlesex Walking Club walked the route and felt that the route was unsuitable after Sudbury Station (at about 20 miles) and suggested a major deviation.⁴⁹ These concerns were acknowledged but

*"whether the route ... will be deviated from in the least will depend upon where the entrance to the Stadium for the runners is to be."*⁵⁰

At that time, the end of 1907, plans for the stadium and the Franco-British Exhibition were still in a state of flux.

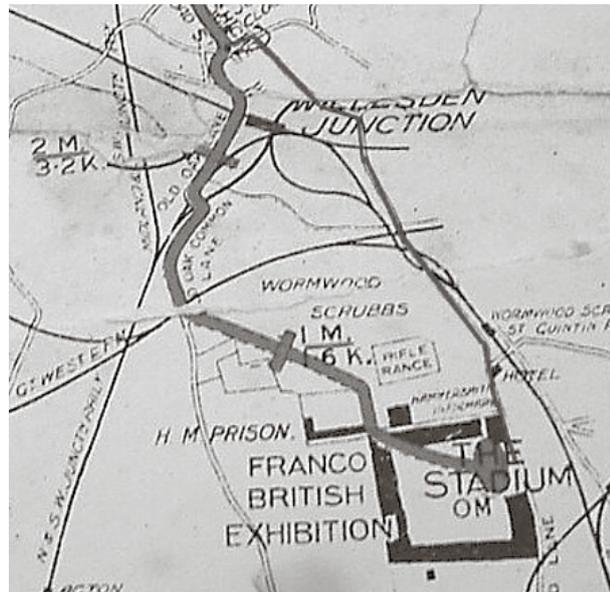
The objections were heeded, and by 20 February 1908 The Sporting Life was able to report:

*"it may be stated that a deviation from the course originally mapped out for the Marathon Race is quite certain, and the competitors will turn right on reaching the Clock Tower at Harlesdon, into Station-road and cross the railway bridge outside Willesdon Junction proceeding to Old Oak-lane, and passing under the G.W.R. the route will then be continued across the fields [of Wormwood Scrubs] to Ducane-road, which is directly in the rear of the Stadium, and thus the runners will be brought to the proper side of the grounds, so as to reach the track by passing immediately beneath the Royal Box, to finish by covering one lap of one-third of a mile."*⁵¹

A map was published in April 1908 with the programme for the trial marathon, which also contained a full distance table. The original route had been about 25½ miles, but the deviation plus the 700 yards at the start brought the distance up to 261/3 miles, that is 26 miles to the entrance to the running track plus a full lap (42.3795 km.). Neither the description of the route nor the distance table indicate the precise entrance to the stadium, but the map clearly shows "OM", confirming the 20 February description *"to reach the track by passing immediately beneath the Royal Box"*.

By the time of the Trial Marathon the distance had been fixed at 26 miles to the stadium entrance, and it would appear that the distance markers had been put in place, or at least their location determined. Reviewing the contemporary evidence it would appear that this distance was the simple consequence of the confirmation of the planned start 700 yards beyond the reference point at Queen Victoria's statue, and the diversion to meet the objections to the original route.

However, many years later Jack Andrew is reported to have said that *"after having settled upon his route, he*



The April 1908 Trial Marathon map showing the lengthy detour across Wormwood Scrubs, entry to the Franco-British Exhibition at the north-west corner, and entry to the Stadium at gate 'OM', the royal entrance; the original route is highlighted by the author (University of Westminster Archive Services)

*learned that the London 'Evening News' was going to promote a professional race over the same route and, in consequence, he changed his finish and altered the distance to the now famous figures of 26 miles and 385 yards."*⁵²

This explanation, which is occasionally repeated⁵³, has always struck the present author as odd. The finish was not altered, although the route to it was lengthened before being altered again (as explained below), and the Evening News marathon was run over exactly the same distance and route, except that it started in Windsor Great Park, and nearer to Queen Victoria's statue because 1½ laps were run in the Stadium, the corresponding number of yards being taken off the start.⁵⁴ There may have been a thought that professionals would not want to run the extra distance, but the evidence is that that was a consequence of the increase, not a reason for it.

The change to the Marathon Entrance

One last change became necessary. The descriptions of the route published in the press in the days leading up to the race, and in the programme, show the marathon entrance to have been changed to 'QQ.RR.SS' and the distance cut to 26 miles 385 yards, *"part of one lap"* being run.⁵⁵ A full map is appended to this article.⁵⁶

The route continued to cross the rough land of Wormwood Scrubs, and instead of going straight across Ducane Road into the Franco-British Exhibition, proceeded along the road to *"the playing fields of the Latymer Schools and Kings College Club...the competitors entering the Stadium Grounds just opposite."*^{57 58}

The present author has not traced any announcement

of the change, but reasons seem not hard to find. For the marathon runners to have used the royal entrance would have prevented the Queen and other dignitaries from leaving for two hours or so. The royal entrance was also raised and decorated to permit carriage access, and had been since the Opening Ceremony by the King on 13 July⁵⁹; if carriages were accommodated, runners could not be. So the marathon entrance was moved to a block opposite the Royal Box, the route being adjusted so that the distance remained 26 miles to the entrance to the Stadium.

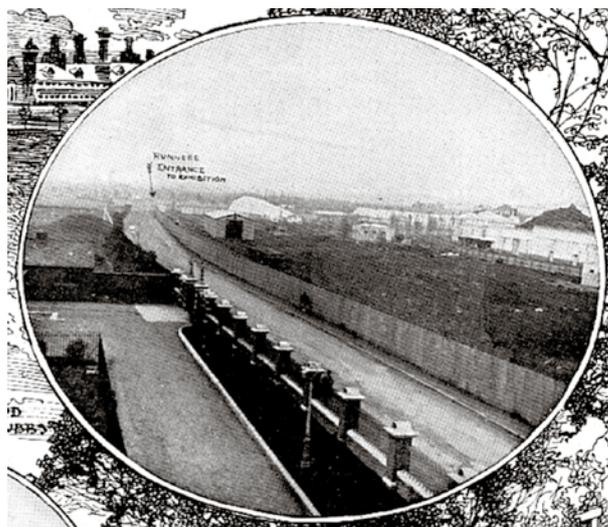


The actual finish, from the map published with the Marathon Programme (AAA Archive held by Birmingham University)

The finishing point on the track

There was one further, perhaps crucial change, not mentioned in the published rules for the race. A consequence of the change to the marathon entrance, it is clearly stated in the Stadium Programme of the day. This continues to quote “40 kilometres” but adds a note “*The direction of running [for track races] will be left hand inside, except in the case of the Marathon Race.*” This exception was not included in the general regulations for athletics⁶⁰, the change being made quite late in the day. More importantly, it is not mentioned in the official Instructions to Competitors and Rules of the Race set out in the Marathon Programme, nor in the official description of the route. It is not known how and when it may have been communicated to national bodies and to competitors, although the *Sporting Life* reported that Jack Andrew had invited all entrants to meet him in the stadium on Monday 20 July, four days before the race.⁶¹ The only positive evidence found is the description of the finish published in the *Sportsman* newspaper:

“The runners will enter the Stadium at Section QQRSS on the Wood Lane side. On entering they will turn left and make a half circuit of the cinder



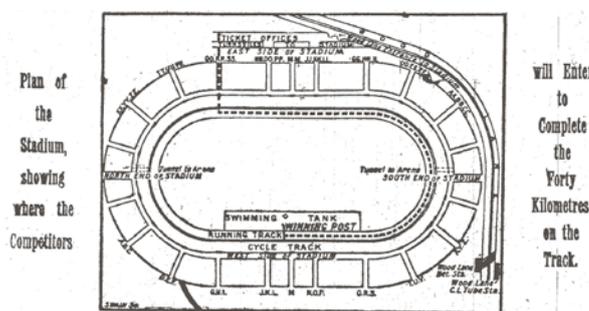
Ducane Road, with the “Runners Entrance to Exhibition” marked. (Illustrated London News)

track, finishing opposite the Royal stand⁶²,”

and even clearer, a plan published in the *Daily Telegraph* on the day of the race⁶³:

It is also interesting to note that, the Trial Marathon itself finished with a full lap of Wembley Trotting Track “right-hand inside”⁶⁴. Neither the Programme nor the Instructions to Competitors for the Trial Marathon included this information, and the preview of the Olympic Marathon in the programme showed it to be concluding with a full lap of the track, and the accompanying map showed the marathon entrance to the stadium to be “OM”, under the Royal Box thus implying a normal anti-clockwise lap.

Why was the change made? Clearly there was no question of moving the finishing line from in front of the Roy-



al Box (where all races finished), but if the runners went the normal way around the track they would only pass in front of one third of the crowd. Changing to clockwise meant that two thirds of the spectators could share more closely in the excitement.

Did the change affect the outcome of the race? Probably not, but Dorando was clearly running by instinct and pure determination at the end, and instinct would have told him to turn right, as he tried to do, and in being re-

directed left he stumbled. Dorando is quoted as saying, through an interpreter

*“It was not until I saw the big stadium that the weakness came over me, and then, as I had no attendant, I became confused. If I had had my attendant to guide me and give me such aid as I was entitled to, I could have finished without falling again, but they would not allow my attendant to come into the stadium with me.”*⁶⁵

The Race Route

The progress of the race and how the various runners fared is well recorded, from the Official Report onwards, and will not be repeated here. This section describes the route. Marathon races today are run on tarmac roads, and the major races are run in large cities. It was very different in 1908. The chosen route avoided major roads as far as possible, and much of the race was in open country with many un-made-up roads. The surface turned to mud during the Trial Marathon, and had to be watered to minimise dust on the hot day of the Olympic Marathon. The Times described the road surfaces in general as *“beautifully firm [though] the surface may be a trifle hard.”*⁶⁶ The Times continued that after leaving the Castle grounds (through the Sovereign’s Gate) *“the first short burst down the steep-cobbled street past the Castle walls will be rather trying.”* Neither slope nor surface would be likely to find favour today.

After leaving Windsor and Eton the road was rather flat (Eton Dorney Rowing Lake, to be used in 2012 is now close to the route).

The route undulated gently for the next 20 miles, after a rise at 4 miles (Langley). The Uxbridge Road was described as *“rather uninteresting”* with houses *“not lovely to behold.”* From the 22nd mile marker (4¼ miles from the start)

“the road winds between high hedges and under

lofty elms through a typically beautiful stretch of real English country. Here and there old cottages and barns and inns nestle among the trees, and wide, level hayfields stretch far on either side. And always there is – for the runners – the grateful



Thomas Jack on the dusty road from Eton (from a postcard)

shade of all manner of trees ... forming archways across the road, and the cool green of the bracken, and the scent of the pines and the wild flowers.”

Then, with 20 miles to go, the runners were out in the sun again, passed through the streets of Uxbridge and up onto “the high flat table-land of Uxbridge Common.” Then in a series of switch-backs the road ran down to Ickenham,

“into real country, with lines of willows fringing little streams of no importance, and past orchards fragrant with the scent of hay and meadow flowers, a grateful relief to the wearied, dusty runners in the race.”



Racing towards Queen Victoria’s statue down the steep cobbled Castle Hill; Longboat is first in view, Dorando third (From a postcard by J. Russell & Sons)

Ruislip marked the half-way point. The first of four refreshment points was here, the booth outside “The Poplars” a hotel that was also the headquarters of Polytechnic Harriers.⁶⁷ Eastcote was still in the country, then, at Pinner, *“the first sign of London, a great gas works”*. The road was bad here, *“heaped with stones for remetalling.”*⁶⁸

Round Harrow’s wooded hill *“a long stretch of*

the road is thick with dust, as the surface has not been prepared for motor traffic.”
At Sudbury station,

“five miles from home, where the tram-lines begin, the runners [met] the severest test of their endurance. Because of their inelasticity, wood blocks are particularly trying to the feet”

and glitter from the shiny surface dazzled the eyes.



“The hills, though none of them are really severe, are steeper and longer than anywhere else on the course, and the 22nd, 23rd and 24th miles [were] by far the most punishing of the course.”

Price, leading the race, drops out at rural Eastcote (postcard)

After the Jubilee Clock Tower the road dropped once more

*“and the final run in across Wormwood scrubs and down a lane to the back of the stadium [was] easier going.”*⁶⁹

The Runners' Perspective

Some of the runners spent the night before the race in Windsor, including the much fancied Canadian Indian, Tom Longboat; others arrived by special train.⁷⁰ When they arrived at the station they were given a medical check in the stationmaster's room by a team of doctors,

including Dr. Michael Bulger, Chief Medical Officer for the marathon, and member of the British Olympic Council. The various waiting rooms in the station were used as changing rooms.⁷¹

*“From the station the racers went to lunch. Some took steak and eggs. None drank alcohol; many drank nothing at all; none smoked.”*⁷²

The athletes prepared themselves in the station: a number were

*“rubbed down with embrocation, or with plain cold water. Others put Vaseline or powder on their feet and in their socks and footwear.”*⁷³

They then walked up Castle Hill, accompanied by vociferous cheers from the crowd,⁷⁴ and passed through the Sovereign's Gate to the East Terrace of the Castle. There they lined up in four rows, in the order of the draw, ready for the start. Some wore hats or caps as protection from the sun; Dorando had a knotted handkerchief on his head,

*“but the majority have nothing on their heads. Their hair, plashing with sweat, shining in the sun, tells its tale of the race.”*⁷⁵



Hayes passing the Jubilee Clock Tower at 5:14, 4 minutes after Dorando; note that the runners were largely kept away from the tramlines (Postcard by Robinson Bruder)

Dorando also had a cork or cane grip in his right hand; other runners will also have followed this practice, considered at the time to aid style and concentration in distance running.⁷⁶

The runners were quickly out of the Sovereign's Gate again, and into their first challenge, the steep cobbled descent of Castle Hill. For the first few miles they ran without their cycle attendants, then at five miles

*"the cyclist-attendants ... were now allowed to joint their men, most of whom seemed to rely on beef extract, but Duncan's man carried muscatels and distilled water. One man was told off [sic] to refresh Dorando with a wet sponge. Baker (South Africa) had a special bottle of calf's foot jelly and lemon, while Lind (Russia) was to take new-laid eggs in tea and grapes."*⁷⁷

The winner, Johnny Hayes, told the Daily Mail

*"I took nothing to eat or drink on the journey. I think to do so is a great mistake. Before starting I partook of a light lunch consisting of two ounces of beef, two slices of toast, and a cup of tea. During the race I merely washed my face with Florida water and gargled my throat with brandy. ... I am a non-smoker, and drink only in moderation."*⁷⁸

He also wore shoes with "O'Sullivan Live Rubber Heels" and wrote or ghosted a publicity pamphlet after the race, and appeared on a number of publicity postcards.

William Sherring, winner of the 1906 Athens marathon, and trainer to the 1908 Canadian athletics team said he was not

*"a great believer in taking ... food or drink while actually running but for those who require a little stimulant "a little Mariani wine is as good as anything. It is refreshing to suck an orange, but I think an occasional rub with a wet towel is all that is required."*⁷⁹

He did not believe the runners should run a full marathon before the race, though he had them walk the course two or three times. His runners did a 15 mile spin, then 10

miles but rested the day before the race. They had a steak and a cup of tea three hours before the race. The Canadians wore boots *"to give better support to the ankles."*⁸⁰

At about the half-way point the runners reached the Poplars at Ruislip, and the first of four refreshment booths. The booths were erected and managed by 'Oxo', the official caterers for the marathon. As well as supplying their beef drink they supplied rice pudding, raisins, bananas, soda and milk. Eau de Cologne and sponges were available as well as stimulants for cases of collapse.⁸¹

There were three further booths, at Harrow railway bridge (17½ miles), the Swan hotel at Sudbury (21 miles), and Harlesden Jubilee Clock Tower (23¾ miles). The Instructions to Competitors also list 6 hotels *"where Competitors and Attendants will find accommodation ... for a wash etc."* It is not known if any runner took advantage of the facilities for a comfort break.

Notwithstanding the rural nature of the route, virtually the whole length was lined with spectators. It is reported



Dorando passing Pinner Gas Works, Longboat behind. (from a postcard)



No. 60, Fred Appleby (GBR) passing an Oxo booth (Illustrated London News)

ed that the runners were obstructed by cyclists at Ruislip, but they were resolutely dealt with by the police.⁸²

At the finish the runners were in various states of fitness, as may be imagined. At 25 miles Hefferon (2nd) felt his leg go like a shot, and had to hobble the last mile. He is reported as saying he made the mistake of accepting a glass of champagne from a spectator, and then suf-

fering cramps.⁸³ William Clarke (12th) had to walk the last two miles as his rheumatic knee “*positively refused to support [him].*” Emmerich Rath of Austria (25th) finished with a great sprint, then took a dive into the swimming tank for a refresher! He reportedly practiced in bare feet but wore open sandals in the race.⁸⁴

The Excitement of the Race

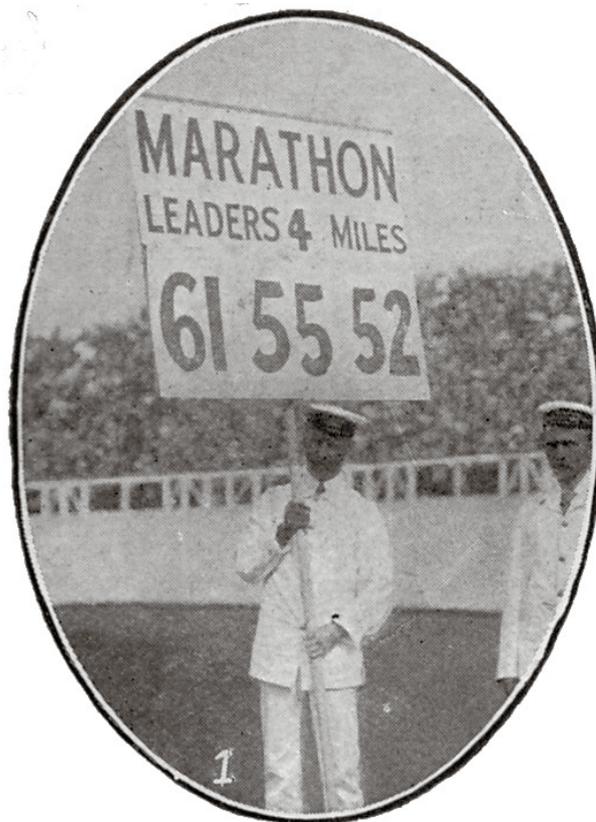
The finish is the most famous marathon finish in Olympic history, and the dramatic detail of Dorando Pietri’s agonising progress to the tape is widely reported. A clear impression of the excitement the race generated can be gleaned from the newspaper reports the following day. The 2008 Olympic marathon will be covered in minute detail by numerous fixed and mobile TV cameras, there will be giant screens in the stadium, and quite likely at strategic points en route. The race will be followed from start to finish not only by the crowd in the stadium but by billions of viewers worldwide thanks to TV and the internet. Coverage will be infinitely more complete than in 1908, and any drama will be seen as it unfolds. There will not however be the same sense of eager anticipation felt by the 90,000 or more spectators who filled the stadium in 1908. The largest crowd ever assembled in one place at the time, how were they kept informed of the race progress? All they had in 1908 was the telephone, the human voice, and fireworks!

The race started just after 2:30, Queen Alexandra and the royal party took their seats about 2:45, and the first news of the race reached the stadium shortly before 3 o’clock:

*“What a shout went up when in stentorian tones the message was delivered through the megaphone “One mile Clarke, of Great Britain, leading ...”*⁸⁵



The City Toastmaster (*Illustrated London News*)



(*Illustrated London News* photo)

It was shortly after this that the crowd in the Stadium heard that the Princess of Wales had started the race.⁸⁶ As speculated above, this was probably news to one and all, and will no doubt have intrigued those who had read that the Crown Prince of Sweden was to start the race, and delighted almost every one.⁸⁷

The official announcers, led by the City of London Toastmaster “*resplendent in scarlet evening-dress ... kept all on the tiptoe of expectation.*”⁸⁸ From time to time two men marched around the arena with boards showing the numbers of the leaders, but spectators were saved the trouble of looking them up in the programme “*by Mr. Davis, who, with his megaphone and the full power of his fine baritone voice, explained the figures ...*”⁸⁹

The report at 4 miles announcing that the Englishman Thomas Jack, No. 61, was leading, brought more cheers and increased the sense of excitement and anticipation of an English victory. It was an anticipation that was to be frustrated, but no one could have guessed that the drama of the finish would more than make up for English disappointment.

Incidents at Ruislip

Ruislip marked the halfway point in the race, and

“from all the country around, sightseers flocked to the exhilarating scene. By motor and horse carriage they came. Country folk in parties drove in their farm carts; cyclists from near and far rode awheel. Never, probably, was Ruislip in such a

state of tense excitement. Two cinematographs ... stood within a few paces of each other ... and there were cameras by the score in the hands of spectators. ... How [the plague of cyclists] all got upon the route before and while the race was in progress was a puzzle. ... They got on the wrong side of the road, they got in the way of competitors, they left the track most reluctantly, [and] the resoluteness with which the police turned these thoughtless wheelmen off the route ... supplied quite a plentiful crop of heated episodes for the sightseers ...

... About twenty minutes from four o'clock the word went forth in some mysterious fashion [that the athletes were near] and that a couple of Britishers were well to the fore. A cheer away down among the trees that shade the road showed ... that the foremost of the runners were really in sight, and the excitement grew intense. Every neck was craned ... On they came. The mysterious herald was right. A Britisher, Price, was leading, perhaps a couple of hundred yards from Hefferon ... Great was the cheering as they passed, and greater still when it was seen that another Britisher was in third place. This was Lord, flushed and perspiring. Then, in fourth place, came the swarthy little Italian, Dorando, in his bright scarlet pants, his attendant bathing his face with a wet sponge as he went. Price had passed at 3:45. Dorando was about three minutes behind him.⁹⁰

"While the runners were toiling Stadiumwards on their long, hot journey, frequent rounds of applause kept bursting from the audience as they watched the pole-jumpers ... at one end of the course, the high divers shooting gracefully through the air in the centre, and the wrestlers struggling on the mat at the other."⁹¹

Then, "in the centre is a great relay race of swimmers. It sways and vacillates. Red cap wins all the way. Then blue cap closes on him. Within a few yards of the mark they are neck and neck. Blue cap has the staying power. He wins by a length, and shouting comrades drag him from the water. He roars also, like a joyous boy. Only when the British flag is run up on the staff does the crowd gather what it has been all about. Another point for the old country, and Taylor, dripping but exultant is carried with shouts to his quarters."⁹²

But these events "were only interludes". Eyes and ears strained at every announcement of progress in the great race, all thoughts were on the marathon.

"And then comes the long-expected finish. 'Clear the course for the Marathon race' comes the announcement through the megaphone. A policeman is waiting at one of the gangways on the further side of the ground. There is a continual clamour of

tens of thousands of people talking and shouting. The photographers are kneeling on the grass at the edge of the track, waiting for whoever it may be ... There is an incredible thrill of excitement in the air. The judges are clustered round the tape⁹³ in front of the Royal Box.

The people in the top seats at the north-east corner of the Stadium have turned round to look over Wormwood-scrubs. ... The sound of a rocket! Another!"⁹⁴

Wormwood Scrub(b)s

"Wormwood Scrubbs presented a scene of animation and bustle. Crowds of pedestrians flocked to the beautiful heath, resplendent with glorious colour in the brilliant sunshine. There were motor-cars and private broughams, open carriages and the prosaic omnibus – all were moving to a vantage ground from which the closing scene of the great race could be viewed. ... As the time approached for the arrival of the competitors the people became restless and animated. ... at 4:45 a cheer greeted the announcement of an excited cyclist that Price had been leading a quarter of an hour earlier⁹⁵ and from this moment excitement grew.... The crowd had not long to wait. At ten minutes past five the boom of a rocket announced the fact that the competitors were near at hand, and that Wormwood Scrubbs had at last been nearly reached. Picture a crowd, dense, enthusiastic and patriotic; it had been waiting for hours in unfeigned anxiety as to whether one of its own countrymen would achieve first place in the Homeric contest. ... It will be easily understood to what depths all were stirred by the sound of that rocket. The first official car sedately passes by. A few moments elapse, and a second one traverses the course. One of the occupants calls out 'Nos. 8, 19, 26 is the order' – Hefferon, Dorando, Hayes ... but these names have no meaning ... What the people are interested in is the country represented by each of the runners, and they learn with disappointment that England is not among them. There is a second rocket, and yet another, and now a car dashes by, the occupant of which calls forth in stentorian tones, intensified by a megaphone, '19 leads.' Three minutes later Dorando appears to a cheering crowd. He is pale unto death, his eyes are almost closed, yet he totters along as in a dream. The cheers seem to die away as the people realise they have seen almost a ghost. And as he turns into the quiet lane which leads into Ducane-road for the Exhibition grounds one marvels at the endurance which, on so trying a day, has brought him thus far. Three minutes pass by, and Hefferon appears as South Africa's representative, looking fagged, yet running well. Close upon him in rapid succession come

Hayes and Forshaw, bearing America's distinctive badge. They are cheered by their attendants in the peculiar phraseology which characterises American vernacular – 'Rip it, Johnny, you'll get second yet. Go it old boy, and I'll rub you for a week.'⁹⁶

The Climax in the Stadium

"A distant gun was heard. Two dozen guns fired in quick succession. Then [the] rocket burst. Baring his head, the megaphone man raced across the ground, and announced to the royal box that Dorando was in sight.

The first appearance from the outer world was an



Dorando on the specially prepared track from Ducane Road to the Stadium, a few paces from the marathon tunnel. (Photo by A. Croce, Milan)

anti-climax. Longboat, the Red Indian, was led in by two friends and fell full length on the grass. He had been brought in a motor-car." "Close on his heels follow Lord Desborough and the members of his council."⁹⁷

"Then the great moment arrived. ... But what an appearance it was! The great Olympic cheer for which everybody had been waiting was throttled at its birth. Through the doorway crawled a little, exhausted man, with a livid face, his figure scarcely noticeable but for the red breeches he wore. He seemed bewildered by the immensity of the crowd. He turned the wrong way – not as one who made a mistake, but with the dreamy air of one whose faculties were absolutely exhausted."⁹⁸

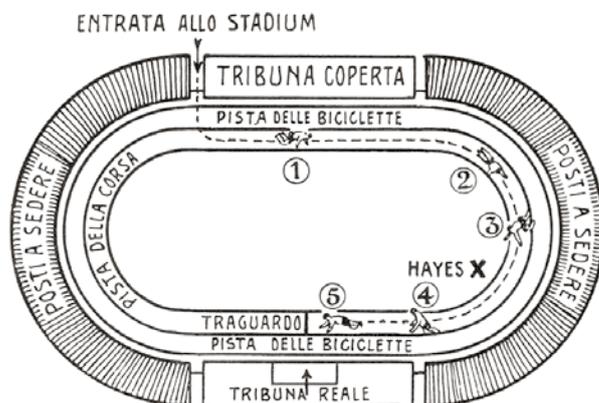
What happened next, Dorando's agonising progress "the wrong way" round the track is prosaically told in this Italian map, the numbers showing where Dorando stumbled or needed assistance.⁹⁹

The Finish

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle takes up the story after Dorando's first bewildered fall:

"Thank God, he is on his feet again – the little red

legs going incoherently, but drumming hard, driven by a supreme will within. There is a groan as he falls once more, and a cheer as he staggers again



to his feet. It is horrible, and yet fascinating, this struggle between a set purpose and an utterly exhausted frame. Again, for a hundred yards he ran in the same furious and yet uncertain gait. Then again he collapsed, kind hands saving him from a heavy fall.

He was within a few yards of my seat. Amid stooping figures and grasping hands I caught a glimpse of the haggard, yellow face, the glazed, expressionless eyes, the lank, black hair streaked across the brow. Surely he is done now. He cannot rise again. From under the archway has darted the second runner, Hayes, Stars and Stripes on his breast, going gallantly well within his strength. There is only twenty yards to do if the Italian can do it. He staggered up, no trace of intelligence upon his set face, and again the red legs broke into their strange automatic amble.

Will he fall again? No, he sways, he balances, and then he is through the tape and into a score of friendly arms. He has gone to the extreme of human endurance. No Roman of the prime ever bore himself better than Dorando of the Olympic of 1908. The great breed is not yet extinct.

After this supreme epic all is anti-climax, but who can speak without a thrill of the splendid running of the Americans and Canadians?

... To those who saw it, when all other memory of the great race of 1908 has passed away, there will still remain the vision of that swarthy face, those dead eyes, and the staggering red legs which carried Dorando to victory. Even as I write there comes the rumour that he has been disqualified. If true, it is indeed a tragedy. But there are prizes higher even than the oak branch and the medal. The Italian's great performance can never be effaced from our records of sport, be the decision of the judges what it may.

P.S. – The rumour then is true. I confess that I cannot see how the judges could have come to any other decision. It was, as matters stood, a fair and square win for the American, since, without help, Dorando must have lain senseless on the track. And yet the tragedy remains.”¹⁰⁰

The Conan Doyle myth

The above report puts an end to the myth that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was one of those who assisted Dorando to the finish. Authorities agree that the person holding Dorando’s arm as he approached and crossed the line was Jack Andrew, and he admitted as much in the *Polytechnic Magazine* in August 1908. It is the burly person to the right of the picture who is often identified as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, but who is in fact Dr. Michael Bulger. This can be established visually from the arm band which reads “Medical Attendant”¹⁰¹ and in writing by a Member of the American Olympic Committee who wrote categorically:

“The man, or the two men, who lifted Dorando up when he fell thirty yards from the tape were Mr. Andrews ... and Dr. Bulger.”¹⁰²

The question can be put beyond doubt by Dr. Bulger’s own words:

“I was first called to Dorando in the passage leading to the Stadium. He was in a state of absolute collapse, and quite pulseless. In a short time he recovered sufficiently to enter the Stadium, and to proceed some distance ere falling again. The same process was gone through on several other occasions, and when he made a last effort to reach the tape, I, as a member of the medical profession, exercised my right in having precaution taken that he

should not fall again. Hence the slight assistance rendered by Mr. J.M. Andrew just before the goal was reached. I was afraid that a heavy fall might have resulted in his death.”¹⁰³

Jack Andrew is quoted as saying:

“I followed the instructions of Dr. Bulger in rendering aid to the Italian ... and my own instincts as a human being. ... I may also say that I assisted Hayes, the American, in the same way.”

As the photograph shows, Jack Andrew is indeed there, but his hand is behind Johnny Hayes elbow, not grasping it as with Dorando. All this time, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, was sitting in the stand, writing his report.¹⁰⁴

The Outcome of the Race

The instant the leading runners had passed the post, the flags were run up, with the Italian Flag above the American, but the US and South African protests were quickly resolved, and Johnny Hayes was confirmed as the winner, with Charles Hefferon second, Joseph Forshaw (USA) third, and the flags were reversed.

The following day Hayes proudly received his gold medal from Queen Alexandra, in company with all the other champions.

Hayes was also presented with the mighty statue of *Pheidippides*, presented by the Greek Olympic Committee to the IOC to be given to each Olympic marathon winner, to be kept just for the Olympiad.

The man of the moment however was Dorando. Before race day was out, at the Government banquet to the Olympic athletes at the Grafton Galleries, London, Lord Desborough announced, to large cheering, that Queen Alexandra was moved to present Dorando with a special cup. Dorando himself was given the news that evening by

Count Brunetta d’Usseaux. The cup was presented to Dorando by the Queen the following day, in between presenting Hayes and others with their Gold Medals, and presenting the Challenge Cups and Trophies.

“It was during the presentation of the honours that Dorando ... clad in knicker suit and cap of dark grey tweed, appeared.... The air was rent by shouts, shrieking whistles, screeching horns, and the rattling of clappers. Flags



were vigorously waved, hats were thrown into the air, sticks and parasols were held aloft, while tears rose to the eyes of many ladies ... Count Brunetta d'Usseaux, the Italian Secretary-General of the International Olympic Committee, walked across the grass and shook hands with the hero. ... The Queen herself beckoned to him, and the Stadium rang again to deafening cheers. Standing before the Queen, his face beaming with smiles, Dorando received her Majesty's congratulations on his magnificent achievement, and the handsome cup which shone brilliantly in the sunshine. [Not yet engraved it had] a card bearing the words 'For Pietro Dorando. In remembrance of the Marathon Race, from Windsor to the Stadium. From Queen Alexandra''¹⁰⁵

The cup is a classic silver-gilt urn, 15 inches (36cm) high, with two handles, a bowl 5 inches across and 10 inches deep, attached by a short stem to a four-inch-square pedestal. It has a plain lid with a raised central knob.¹⁰⁶ It was made by Carrington and Co. of Regent Street, London.¹⁰⁷

As Dorando left the Stadium

*"A lady among the fashionable crowd ... hurried to the runner's side, fastened [her] bracelet without a word upon his wrist, and, turning quickly away, was lost to sight."*¹⁰⁸

The following night, at a reception at Romano's restaurant

*"the Queen's Cup, my trophy was filled with champagne time after time; over two hundred persons, ladies and gentlemen whom I did not know at all, drank from it, taking a sip in turn ... And the crowd outside! They cheered and cheered, and I had to come out on the balcony and bow."*¹⁰⁹

Dorando captured the hearts of the ladies and received many gifts and, reportedly, proposals of marriage, before leaving England for Turin on 9th August, to face a rapturous welcome in Italy, and Carpi, his home town.¹¹⁰

He also received a considerable sum of money, from an appeal launched by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in the Daily Mail of 27 July. A cheque for £308:15 shillings was presented to him in a ceremony at the Daily Mail offices by Lady Conan Doyle, in a gold cigarette case inscribed "To Dorando Pietri, From Friends and admirers in England. Souvenir of Marathon Race, 1908." Dorando received a gold medal from the Italian Hotel and Restaurant Employees Society, and some £30 also came in from appearances on the music-hall stage. Half of this went to the Italian Hospital in London, half to a hospital or charity chosen by the Daily Mail.¹¹¹

The last words of this review come from Dorando. Af-

ter an excellent lunch on the train journey back to Turin he is quoted as saying

*"I feel so happy after the macaroni and the good Italian wine. If only I had had a dish of macaroni before starting the Marathon Race I am sure I should have arrived a quarter of an hour before anyone else."*¹¹²

While Oxo and Bovril were vying to fill the runners with protein, Dorando was perhaps ahead of his time.

Marathon Myths and Reality

In conclusion, it has to be said that research has shown there to be little or no truth in the three main myths associated with the race; in particular, royal requests did not influence the distance:

1. The start was altered at the request of the Princess of Wales – no evidence: Jack Andrew for the Amateur Athletic Association measured a 25 mile (40 km) course from Queen Victoria's statue. The organisers wanted the start on the Castle Terrace "to ensure [a] degree of privacy"¹¹³, so 700 yards was added to the distance. The Princess of Wales was able to take advantage of this, but did not initiate the change. (Meeting objections to part of the route added another 1000 yards). Furthermore there is strong evidence that the decision to let the Princess start the race was made only after she arrived on the Terrace.

2. The finish was altered so as to be in front of the Royal Box, for Queen Alexandra – not true:

From the outset the finish was to be in front of the Royal Box. When the royal entrance became unavailable for the marathon tunnel, there were three consequences. Firstly the marathon tunnel was moved to the opposite side of the stadium. Secondly the route was altered to keep the distance to 26 miles to the Stadium entrance, and thirdly the direction of running round the track was altered to clockwise so that the runners would race before two-thirds of the crowd; a 5862/3 yards lap to finish was reduced to 385 yards as a result of changing both entrance and direction.

3. In a nutshell, how was the distance of 26 miles 385 yards determined? It was originally agreed with the IOC for a route of 25 miles or 40 kilometres. The first course measured was about 25½ miles. The start was moved to the East Terrace of Windsor Castle for security reasons, adding 700 yards. The final couple of miles were considered unsuitable so a detour was made. The distance became 26 miles to the edge of the track, plus a lap of 1/3 mile (5862/3 yards). The marathon tunnel was to have been under the Royal Box, but it was moved to the far side of the Stadium. The distance to the edge of the track was kept at 26 miles, and the direction of running was

altered to clockwise, so that the runners would pass in front of both stands, to arrive at the planned finishing line in front of the Royal Box. This meant 385 yards on the track. There was no royal influence on the determination of the distance.

4. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was at Dorando's side as he finished – he was not. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was sitting in the stands, as a special correspondent for The Daily Mail.

5. It can also be confidently asserted that Queen Alexandra did not send a telegraphic signal to start the race. Any such plans were not put into effect. There is no mention in any Court Circular, the newspapers changed from reporting that the Crown Prince of Sweden would start the race to that the race was started by the Princess of Wales, a spur of the moment decision, and the Queen was in her carriage en route to the Stadium when the race started.

Even without the myths, there remains much of interest in the story of the 1908 Olympic Marathon. ■

Notes:

- 1 The distance was adopted by the IAAF (now International Association of Athletics Federations) in 1921.
- 2 The Sporting Life 14 August 1907. In the absence of official BOC and AAA records (lost or not retained), newspaper reports, and the Sporting Life in particular, are the best source of information. Some are in the author's possession, the Times is accessible on-line, others are in the Desborough archive, Hertfordshire Archives, ref DE/Rv/F25; The Sporting Life and other newspapers were consulted at the British Newspaper Library, Colindale, London.
- 3 In the Polytechnic Magazine, October 1908 at p.151 he writes: "*The course so admirably chosen has become quite historical, and it is only due to the Poly to state that the honour of selecting this course is theirs alone, as it was first suggested by your representative on the AAA.*" (i.e. himself).
The Marathon route printed in the Trial Marathon programme in April 1908 is shown to be 26 1/3 miles, converted to 42.3795 kilometres which is out by about 5.5 metres.
- 4 The Sporting Life, 24 July 1908:
- 5 "... *the first idea was that the event should start from [the Stadium] and be an out-and-home race around Greenford and Sudbury. It was left to the "Sporting Life" to suggest the now widely known Windsor to London course, for in our athletic column was this line of route first placed before the public and the selection authorities. ...*"
- 6 See for example Mallon & Buchanan, The 1908 Olympic Games p. 64 (McFarland & Co Inc. 2000, ISBN 0-7864-0598-8), and Martin & Gynn, The Olympic Marathon, p. 67 (Human Kinetics 2000, ISBN 0-88011-969-1).
- 7 Letter to the author from the Archivist, 22 March 2004
- 8 E.g. Charlie Lovett, Olympic Marathon – A Centennial History of the Games' Most Storied Race, 1997. ISBN 0 275 9571-3
- 9 Wikipedia and other web-sites relating to the Royal Family
- 10 The 1906 marathon was 41.86 km, 26.01 miles.
- 11 The Sporting Life, 4 April 1908
- 12 The Daily Mail and the Windsor Express both reported that Lord Desborough did not receive the final consent until 6 July 1908
- 13 University of Westminster Archive Services. The programme continues "*These measurements have been taken by Mr. J.M. Andrew, Hon. Sec. of the Polytechnic Harriers, who has been largely responsible for the course so happily selected.*"
- 14 The Sporting Life, 23 July 1908
- 15 The Daily Graphic, 27 July 1908 makes it clear that detailed arrangements had been made, including the addition of a special saloon to the regular train, but nothing suggests that the visit had to be made on that day.
- 16 An unofficial marathon programme names the King as starter, as does a souvenir folder published by OXO; the official marathon programme gives no name at all.
- 17 Mallon & Buchanan suggest that the King was angered and hurt by the American behaviour, and the way they impugned the integrity of British officials, and give this as the reason he did not attend the awards ceremony (p. 13). They do not give the source of this speculation, nor do they say that this was also the reason why the King did not start the marathon. It is plausible, but any such view must have been taken before the "Halswelle Affair" in the 400 metres, the contentious first final being run at 17:30 on the evening before the marathon.
- 18 Michael Sheridan, Good Reasons: 100 Years of the Marathon Race, 1996; ISBN 0 9528192 0 1. Sheridan gives no date for the Times report, but it cannot have been contemporaneous.
- 19 Martin & Gynn, *The Olympic Marathon*, p. 67
- 20 The National Archives, London ref. MEPO 2/1156
- 21 The Daily Telegraph, 25 July 1908. The officials were named as Jack Andrew, Mr. P.L. Fisher, Honorary Secretary of the AAA, and the chief time-keeper Mr. D.M. Barnard, plus two others.
- 22 The Daily Telegraph, 25 July 1908
- 23 The Daily Mail, 25 July 1908
- 24 These reports of the members of the Royal Family present at the start are slightly confusing today – Prince Henry of Wales is not the husband of the Princess of Wales (George, later George V), but her third son. Her husband was not present at the start, nor was the eldest son, Edward (later Edward VIII). Four of the children appear in a photo in 'World' magazine (30 July 1908), Prince Albert and Princess Mary both holding cameras. It is not surprising that John was in a pram, he was just 3, and a delicate child, but George was 5½. It is sometimes said that marathon day was one of the children's birthdays. This is a myth, the nearest birthday was that of Prince John, 12 July.
- 25 The Times, Court Circulars, dated 23 July, published 24 July 1908
- 26 This composite paragraph is made up of quotations and information from The Daily Mail, The Daily Telegraph, World, The Sporting Life, and The Daily Graphic. None of these publications (nor any others consulted) give the full details in their individual reports. The caption of a photo in The Daily Graphic confirms that the Crown Prince of Sweden was standing beside the runners. Per The Times, the Crown Prince was also in the Stadium at the finish.
- 27 Letter to the author from the Registrar to the Royal Archives, Windsor, 3 August 2007
- 28 Polytechnic Magazine, January 1908, p. 191 (University of Westminster Archive Services)
- 29 The Sporting Life 20 February 1908
- 30 Polytechnic Magazine, March 1908, p. 1
- 31 Polytechnic Magazine, May 1908 p. 40. Prince Christian of Schleswig Holstein was the husband of Helena (known as Lenchen), the third daughter of Queen Victoria.
- 32 Wembley Park Trotting Track was on what became the site for the 1924 Empire Exhibition. The then new Wembley Stadium was built for that exhibition on a site adjacent to the site of the Trotting Track.
- 33 Letter of 29 February 1908 from Robert Mitchell, Director of the

- Polytechnic, to the Chief Commissioner of Police, Scotland Yard seeking permission to hold the Trial Marathon (The National Archives, London ref. MEPO 2/1156)
- 34 The Sporting Life gives a full description of the route on 1 & 23 April 1908, and the precise starting point “*exactly 290 yards down the famous Long Walk*” on 4 April 1908. The start, but not the finish, of the Trial Marathon is shown on the map on p.432 of the Official Report.
- 35 The Sporting Life 27 April 1908
- 36 Polytechnic Magazine October 1908 p. 153 gives full accounts.
- 37 Wawkphar made ‘*Antispetic Military Foot Powder*’, and offered free sample tins in the dressing room.
- 38 All 4 concerns advertised in the Marathon Programme.
- 39 BOC Minutes 16 October 1908
- 40 BOC Minutes 18 November 1908; net cost to BOC was about £95.
- 41 Polytechnic Magazine, October 1908, p.151
- 42 The Sporting Life 23 & 25 May 1908. For details of other trial races see *Martin & Gynn* pp. 66-7
- 43 Neither the minutes of the BOC, nor the *Revue Olympique* report of June 1907 give full details of the athletics programme. It is set out in the Times, and the article also lists the full membership of the BOC at that date, with the sport each member represented.
- 44 The Official Report takes liberties with the truth when on p. 72 it states “Rules for Marathon race, printed in the programme of the day:
1. The marathon race of 42 kilometres will be run on a course marked out on public roads by the Amateur Athletic Association, and will finish on the running track in the Stadium, where part of one lap will be run. ...”
- The programme actually says “40 kilometres” (BOA archive, and the AAA archive held by Birmingham University)
- 45 The Sporting Life 8 November 1907
- 46 Draft regulations published in The Sporting Life 1 October 1907
- 47 The Sporting Life, 6 November 1907
- 48 In the present day London Marathon matting has been used to cover cobbles by the Tower of London.
- 49 The Sporting Life, 27 November 1907
- 50 The Sporting Life, 23 December 1907
- 51 The Sporting Life 20 February 1908
- 52 A.E.H. Winter “From the Legend to the Living” (Rugeley: Benhill Press Ltd 1969), p. 11 (University of Westminster Archive Services)
- 53 For example, Pat Butcher in the Times of 22 April 1989
- 54 The Evening News 9 & 10 October 1908. Princess Victoria, daughter of Prince Christian started the race, which was won by Henri Siret of France, in a time some 17 minutes faster than Dorando and Hayes.
- 55 See also the Official Report pp. 69 & 72.
- 56 Taken from the Daily Telegraph, it is more legible than that in the Official Report. The contour map and route marker are taken from the Daily Mail.
- 57 Police Report dated 25 July, The National Archives, London ref. MEPO 2/1156.
- 58 Martin & Gynn describe and map a route continuing into Scrubs Lane and Wood Lane. This does not correspond to any of the three published routes, and the police report in particular unambiguously clarifies the final stretch.
- 59 The Sportsman on 13 July describes the royal entrance as “*a platform draped on either side by crimson hangings*” and adds that “*a tree has been removed which would otherwise obstruct the foot-path.*”
- 60 Copied in the Official Report, p.411
- 61 The Sporting Life, 20 July 1908
- 62 The Sportsman, 24 July 1908. Other newspapers did not include any comment as to the direction of running.
- 63 Photograph from microfilm in the British Newspaper Library. Note that the plan still refers to 40 kilometres.
- 64 The Sporting Life, 23 April 1908.
- 65 The Sporting Life, 25 July 1908. The Rules of the Marathon Race stated that “*upon arrival at the Stadium the attendants must leave the competitors and enter at a different gate. No attendant will be allowed on the track.*”
- 66 The Times, 24 July 1908
- 67 Advertisement in the Trial Marathon programme (University of Westminster Archive Services).
- 68 The Daily Mail, 24 July 1908
- 69 The description of the route is abridged from The Times report, 24 July 1908.
- 70 The Daily Telegraph, 25 July 1908
- 71 The Daily Telegraph, 25 July 1908
- 72 The Daily Mail, 25 July 1908
- 73 The Daily Telegraph, 25 July 1908
- 74 The Sporting Life, 25 July 1908
- 75 The Daily Graphic, 25 July 1908
- 76 Roger Robinson, “The Fascinating Struggle” in *Marathon and Beyond* March/April 2007, p.58
- 77 The Daily Mail, 25 July 1908
- 78 The Daily Mail, 25 July 1908.
- 79 The Daily Mail, 21 July 1908
- 80 The Daily Mail, 21 & 24 July 1908
- 81 Instructions to Competitors in the Marathon Programme; Official Report p.71
- 82 The Daily Telegraph, 25 July 1908
- 83 Pall Mall Gazette, 25 July 1908
- 84 The Sporting Life, 25 July 1908
- 85 The Sporting Life, 25 July 1908
- 86 The Times, 25 July 1908
- 87 The fact that the news that the Princess started the race reached the Stadium *after* the report from the first mile post is another factor reinforcing the impression that this was not pre-arranged.
- 88 The Daily Telegraph, 25 July 1908
- 89 The Daily Graphic, 25 July 1908. According to The Evening News 9 October 1908, the Lord Mayor of London’s Toastmaster, and official herald at the Olympic Games, was a Mr. Knightsmith. He was official announcer for the Evening News marathon of 10 October 1908. For that race a field telephone was laid around the edge of the track to get the reports of progress to the megaphone men. No report has been found that there was a similar arrangement for the Olympic marathon.
- 90 The Daily Telegraph, 25 July 1908
- 91 The Times, 25 July 1908
- 92 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Special Correspondent, Daily Mail, 25 July 1908
- 93 The Daily Graphic describes the tape as “*worsted stretched across the cinder-path*”, probably a more accurate description of the material.
- 94 The Times, 25 July 1908
- 95 Price actually retired an hour and a quarter earlier!
- 96 The Daily Telegraph, 25 July 1908
- 97 The Morning Post, 25 July 1908
- 98 The Daily Mail, 25 July 1908

- 99 From www.dorandopietri.it/galleria_en.asp
- 100 The Daily Mail, 25 July 1908
- 101 Robinson "The Fascinating Struggle" published in *Marathon and Beyond* March/April 2007, p. 55
- 102 Quoted in Mallon & Buchanan, Appendix III, p. 339-340
- 103 The Sporting Life, 27 July 1908
- 104 See above. For a full résumé of Conan Doyle's involvement with the Olympic movement from 1908 see *Conan Doyle and the Olympics* by Peter Lovesey in *Journal of Olympic History*, vol. 10, December 2001 p. 6
- 105 Most newspapers report the incorrect surname spelling, and surname first. Verification is needed of what was actually engraved on the cup.
- 106 The Daily Mail, 27 July 1908
- 107 The illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, 30 July 1908
- 108 The Daily Mail, 27 July 1908
- 109 Dorando quoted in the Daily Mail
- 110 The many quotations from the Daily Mail in this article come from a scrapbook kept by a lady, Mrs. Mary Young.
- 111 The Daily Mail, 1 August 1908. The report suggests that all of the money in fact went to the Italian Hospital.
- 112 The Daily Mail, 13 August 1908
- 113 The Sporting Life, 1 November 1907. The full quote is "*to ensure that degree of privacy which is almost essential for a race of this kind.*"