

THE POSTMAN'S WALK - A POTTED HISTORY

The following information on the Postman's Walk is sourced from the British Postal Museum & Archive website - see <http://postalheritage.wordpress.com/tag/race-walking/>

The British Post Office has had a long history of participation in sports – much of which was initiated as a way of coping with split shifts. Postmen in the late 19th Century worked long hours, and often found their duties split into three or four attendances in a single day – meaning that many would start work at 6am and not finish until 10pm. Whilst some postmen took to the pub, others took up sports.

By the 1930s, most large towns had Post Office football, cricket and tennis teams and were starting to develop the more recent spread of sports and recreation Associations.

In 1952, Mr. K. A. Richmond, Night Telephonist (London Telegraph Region Directory Enquiries) was selected for the Heavyweight Wrestling at the Helsinki Games and took a bronze medal. Richmond was a former whale ship crewman in Antarctica, turned wrestler, with another significant claim to fame: he was the shirtless man seen banging the enormous gong which preceded the opening credits of the Rank Organisation's films, such as *Great Expectations* and *Kind Hearts and Coronets*.

Race walker Ray Middleton, of Golders Green sub-district Office, competed in the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, finishing 12th in the 50km walk. Ray was a notable Post Office athlete, with a career spanning the 1960s and extending into the 1970s, during which he won 2 golds, 8 silvers and 4 bronze medals in British Championships and represented England internationally on 11 occasions. He won silvers at the 1963 Lugano Cup and the 1966 Commonwealth Games and was the first winner of a postal sporting event that has taken place annually since 1962: the Postman's Walk.

The Postman's walk is a competitive racewalking event which is open to postal workers across the UK, from novices to trained athletes. Covering laps of a one mile circuit around Coram's Field near Mount Pleasant in London, participants originally wore full uniform and carried a sack. Nowadays, the rules are a little more relaxed – the sack is no longer required and shorts and trainers are allowed.

In 1970, 35-year old Ray Middleton led a team of British postmen to victory in the European Postal Road Walking Championship at Crystal Palace – beating teams of competitors from 13 other countries. An article in *The Daily Mirror* celebrated the success, whilst Ray was later named as one of the top celebrities of the year by comedian Charlie Chester. In September 2011, Middleton attended the 50th Annual Postman's walk, seeing Dave Allen win for the sixteenth time – making him the most successful competitor in the event ever.

Yes, Postman's Races were a regular fixture in UK and Europe and there were even European Championships held in the sixties and seventies.

While Postmans Uniform Walks are still held each year in the UK, the last annual British event was last held a quarter of a century ago. Since 2012 marked the fiftieth anniversary of that first Postman's Walk in London, a special once off British Postman's Walk was held in Douglas on the Isle of Man on October 21st 2012. It was open to postmen and postwomen across the country and 80 people participated, with women walking over 3 miles and men walking over 6 miles. Postal teams from York, Isle of Man, Edinburgh and London were present. Ray Middleton, the winner of the inaugural event in 1962, was on hand to welcome the finishers. You can read about it at <http://postalheritage.wordpress.com/2011/09/26/50th-annual-postman%E2%80%99s-walk>. And you can see the results at http://www.racewalkuk.com/EventDetails.asp?id=4505&race=Isle_of_Man_Postmans_Walk.

It is hoped that it will now become a regular fixture once again.

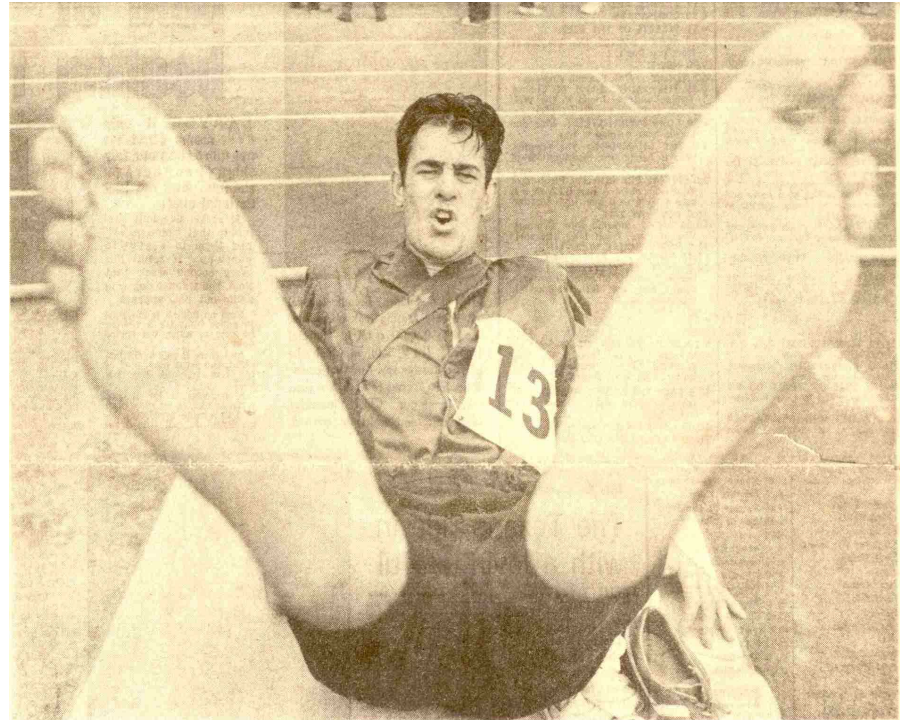
To finish, a couple of items related to past European Postman's Walks.

Ray Middleton, the winner of the inaugural 1962 event, won the European Postman's Walk Championship in 1970. That win was captured by a very nice article in the *Daily Mirror* on Wednesday 16 September 1970 .

Britain's postmen show that they have the fastest feet in the West

The fastest postman in Europe is Ray Middleton. He has had his eye on the title for years. Ray is so keen on walking that he regards his daily postal round as no more than a stroll. Yesterday in London, 35-year-old Ray led a team of British postmen (see photo below) to victory in the Postman's Walk – postal code for the European Postal Road Walking Championship. They took on the cream of postmen from thirteen other countries. For nine

and a quarter miles, they walked around the Crystal Palace circuit in full uniform. Ray took his win modestly. He examined his feet for sores and went home to Hendon. His daughter Lesley was much more excited. She was seven yesterday and Daddy's win was as thrilling as a birthday parcel.



The champion takes a rest: after the race Ray Middleton—lucky 13—comforts a postman's best friend, his feet.

In 1971, the European Postman's Championships were held in Stuttgart in Germany with a track walk over 10,000m. The photo below show eventual winner Len Duquemin of Guernsey leading while Ray Middleton is in third place. But I am a bit disappointed that they were all wearing normal racing gear rather than postal uniforms - very bad form, guys!



Len Duquemin on his way to a win in the European Postman's Championship in Stuttgart in 1971

