

This article, written by ex England international walker Bryan Hawkins, tells the story of his walking career and his wider life. It was passed onto me by English athletics writer and historian Bob Phillips....Tim Erickson, 4 January 2012-01-04

International race-walker still competing up to his 70th birthday ... Wembley ball-boy ... newspaper and magazine cartoonist ... water-colour painter ... stand-up comedian and joke-writer for Tommy Cooper ... small-group drummer ... prolific autograph collector ... always so many interesting things to do

Bryan Hawkins tells the story of his remarkably varied life

During the year 1928 Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin, ten-shilling notes came into circulation, cricketer Jack Hobbs scored his 100th century, and Sir Malcolm Campbell broke the land-speed record. Way down the list of major events of that year, one item of great importance and joy to my parents occurred on 16 April, the day I was born in Hackney, East London. My earliest recollection is running around the local park pretending to be a railway engine !

My parents moved to North Wembley when I was four years old, and later, during the war, I had the great thrill of being a ball-boy at three international football matches. I was football-mad and every Saturday would go to one of the London games armed with pens and cigarette-cards in the hope of getting them autographed by the players after the match. While out on a Sunday stroll with a couple of friends, the lone figure of a race-walker came into view. It was Harold Whitlock out on a training spin. We knew at first sight who it was as Whitlock was in one of our favourite cigarette-card sets – “Churchman’s Kings of Speed”. Anyone who appeared on a “ciggy card” was a sporting hero, and we looked in awe as the famous 1936 Olympic champion strode majestically past. Little was I to know that years later he would become my great friend and coach. I began attending athletics meetings at London’s White City Stadium and remember seeing the great miler, Sydney Wooderson. There was often a one-mile walk during the programme, usually won easily by Highgate’s Eddie Staker, who is still going strong at the age of 95 as I write ! .

In June 1946 I joined the Royal Air Force and completed nearly three years’ national service. During this time, spent as a clerk, general duties, I played a great deal of football and ran a few cross-country races. In 1948 I was posted to RAF Halton, and this station had a very good walking team, coached by Flight-Sergeant Lowarch, and including a top junior, George Towers, of Leicester Walking Club. One evening I sauntered down to watch them training and asked if I could join in. After I walked a couple of laps in an old hangar the Flt/Sgt thought I showed promise and said that I would be in the team on Saturday for a five-mile race against Surrey Walking Club and Vauxhall Motors AC. I thought to myself – “Five miles ! The man’s mad. I’ll never last five miles. I’ve only done a couple of laps around the hangar”. When the dreaded day arrived, I had no special walking-shoes and wore a pair of white tennis shoes. The race went off quite satisfactorily and much to my surprise I finished 3rd and was the first RAF walker home.

I was then entered as a member of the RAF team for my first open race, the Highgate One Hour “D” Section, in which I managed to cover just over 6¼ miles. Flt/Sgt Lowarch had already suggested that I contact Harold Whitlock as the Metropolitan Walking Club headquarters was very near Wembley. I met Harold that day and he welcomed me as a new member of the club. He coached me for nine years

and I became club captain and later vice-president. My first race at the White City was in 1950 when I was invited to make up the numbers in the 10,000 metres European Championships trials. I walked just behind Alf Cotton, of Woodford Green, for the entire race. Alf had already gained selection for the 50 kilometres event in the Championships and was a very stylish walker. A few weeks later, on August Bank Holiday, I finished 3rd in a five-mile World record attempt won by Lol Allen, of Sheffield United Harriers

During the next eight years I won 17 Middlesex titles, seven Southern and one Inter-Counties' title, plus three 2nd places in AAA Championships. I also won an international 10,000 metres in 1954 and was 5th in the European Championships in Berne the same year. I had seven wins in the popular London open seven-mile race and I made five appearances for London against Gothenburg, Paris, Prague and Stockholm twice. I was awarded the style prize in the 1953 AAA Championships seven miles and won the Festival of Britain 10,000 metres in 1951 and the Colchester-to-Ipswich in 1956. I was also a member of the winning teams in the 1958 National 20 miles Championship and the 1959 London-to-Brighton.

Rivalry with George Coleman – several wins but mostly “walked into the ground”

My great rival in those days was the Highgate Harrier, George Coleman. We had many battles on road and track and he was one of the very finest walkers I ever saw. I managed to beat him several times, mostly in hot weather, but he walked me into the ground on many occasions, and it was suggested that if he beat me once more I was going to have to stand on his mantelpiece along with the rest of his trophies. I did, however, manage to beat him in every race overseas. By a remarkable coincidence, his first race was the same as my debut – the five-mile event at RAF Halton. He finished 2nd, representing Vauxhall Motors, where he worked as a pattern-maker. If only he had stuck to his first love, cycling, I would have won a lot more races !

Moving to the south coast in 1958, I joined Brighton & Hove AC as a 2nd-claim member and enjoyed a further 39 years as an active athlete. In 1964 I forsook walking for running and ran every distance from 440 yards to six miles and trained much harder than I ever did as a walker – but I was absolute rubbish, although I thoroughly enjoyed it. Making a comeback to walking the following year, I surprised myself with a 52min 2sec seven-mile road walk at Eastbourne, just 11sec outside my best ever time, set when winning the Met Police Open 7 some nine years earlier. I followed this by winning the Sussex county two-mile championship in 14min 9sec, knocking 22sec off the record that had stood since 1932. After I had won six Sussex titles and represented the county a few times at the Inter-Counties' Championships a brilliant young Brighton walker, Arthur Jones, began to hammer me into the ground and went on to represent Great Britain at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City.

The Scottish international, Alan Buchanan, organised a great number of races for Sussex walkers and also edited the “Race Walking Record” magazine for several years. Without the dedication shown by Alan, Alf Palmer and Harry Tyler, I think it's fair to say that Brighton walking section would have ceased to exist many years ago.

I plodded on as a veteran during my 40s, 50s and early 60s and enjoyed many races, usually finishing a good way down the field. In 1984 the European Veterans' Championships were held at Brighton and I was considered to be the favourite to win the 5000 metres race in the over-55 age group. Everyone seemed to be under the impression that I would win quite easily. How wrong they were ! My old friend and walking rival, Colin Young, who knows the performances and personal bests of every athlete ever born, informed me that a certain Mr Svensson from Sweden would be a very hard man to beat. Never a truer word was spoken. The pressure was on again !

I went into the lead from the start and set a fast pace, hoping to break away from the Swede in the first few laps, but he stuck to me like glue. We were soon well ahead of the rest of the field, and as we approached the bell for the final lap Svensson overtook me and opened up a ten-yard lead. I managed

to produce a fast last lap and passed him over the final 150 metres, bringing the large crowd to their feet cheering. That was a race I shall never forget.

A month after my 60th birthday I broke the 5000 metres veterans' World record with a time of 24min 48sec, knocking exactly 30 seconds off the record held by Lars Nilsen, of Norway. I carried on racing for a further nine years, but my left knee began to give me a lot of pain after every race or training-spin, and so I decided it was time to retire. Looking back on my career, I consider myself a very lucky man to have made so many wonderful friends and raced against some of the World's greatest walkers. I may have been more successful had I trained harder and more often, but there were always so many other interesting things to do. I won 123 races during my career and my best times were as follows: Track – 1 mile, 6:39; 2 miles, 14:05; 5 miles, 36:36; 10,000 metres, 46:18; 7 Miles, 52:26. Road – 10 kilometres, 45:57; 7 miles, 51:51; 10 Miles, 1:15:40; 15 miles, 1:59:30.

When I began race-walking Britain's two leading 10K men were Olympic finalists Jim Morris and Harry Churcher. Morris was a superb stylist and I trained with him many times at Alperton track. Churcher, who broke the five-mile World record and held many national titles, never spoke to me once, even though I partnered him in the match against Gothenburg. He had a short, fast action and his style caused much controversy and he received a caution while competing at the Wembley Olympics. I'm told that photographs have never shown him to be lifting; be that as it may, I always thought his contact was very suspect and his style of walking was certainly no advert for the sport.

Walkers whose technique I admired, other than Jim Morris, were Lasse Hindmar (Sweden), George Coleman, Eric Hall, Stan Vickers, Pino Dordoni (Italy), Peter Marlow, John Webb, Arthur Jones, Ian McCombie, New Zealander Mike Parker and Roger Mills. Britain's greatest all-round walker was former boxer Paul Nihill, who was World class at all distances from one mile to 50 kilometres and won a European gold and Olympic silver. Tom Misson was one of the greatest walkers never to win an Olympic medal and his Metropolitan clubmate and rival, Don Thompson, nicknamed "The Little Mouse", must rate as one of the greatest distance-walkers of all-time. His London-to-Brighton record is just amazing.

I take very little interest in race-walking now and have not seen a top-class event for years. During the years I competed the roads were not jammed full of traffic, and 200 or more walkers would compete in the London Open 7s. There were no such luxuries as two warnings from the judges and disqualification on the third. In the good old days there were no warnings in domestic competition. If a judge wasn't happy with your walking, your number was called and you were out straight away. Not too many of today's walkers would get past a strict judge like Harry Evans, known by all as "The Battersea Dentist" because he was good at "pulling them out" ! During the first 200 yards of a race Harry and other judges would be heard shouting out more numbers than a rapid bingo caller ! Come back, Harry, all is forgiven. The sport needs you !

My races during the season 1950-51

1950

- 14 Oct: Chippenham-to-Calne 6 miles, 6th.
- 18 Oct: Highgate Open 7 miles, 18th.
- 11 Nov: Enfield Open 7 miles, 14th.
- 25 Nov: Belgrave Open 7 miles, 11th.
- 9 Dec: Metropolitan WC v Highgate 7 Miles, 3rd.
- 16 Dec: Cambridge Open 7 miles, 5th.
- 30 Dec: Metropolitan WC v Polytechnic H 7 miles, 1st.

1951

- 13 Jan: Metropolitan Police Open 7, 7th.
- 3 Feb: Garnet Cup 10 miles, 4th.

17 Feb: Metropolitan WC v Enfield v Cambridge 10 miles, 1st.
 3 Mar: Middlesex championship 10 miles, 3rd.
 10 Mar: Metropolitan WC v Metropolitan Police 10 miles, 1st.
 17 Mar: National championship 10 miles, 13th.
1 Lol Allen (Sheffield UH) 1:15:41, 2 George Coleman (Highgate H) 1:17:48, 3 Harry Churcher (Belgrave H) 1:19:08.
 31 Mar: Southern championship 7 miles, 5th.
 26 May: Middlesex championship 7 miles, 1st.
 2 Jun: Middlesex championship 2 miles, 1st.
 13 Jun: ? 10,000 metres, 3rd.
 16 Jun: Kinnaird Trophy 2 miles, 2nd.
 4 Jul: Tooting Bec inter-club 2 miles, disqualified.
 14 Jul: AAA Championships 7 miles, 5th.
1 Roland Hardy (Sheffield UH) 51:14.6, 2 Allen 52:54.4, 3 Churcher 54:04.0, 4 Coleman 54:36.0, 5 Hawkins 54:52.6.
 18 Jul: Metropolitan WC v Highgate 2 miles, 1st.
 6 Aug: Chertsey Open 5 miles, 2nd.
 25 Aug: Barnet 10,000 metres, ?
 1 Sep: WEDDING DAY.
 26 Sep: London v Gothenburg 7 miles (White City), 4th.
1 Knut Arne Börjesson (Gothenburg) 52:04.2, 2 Churcher 52:28.0, 3 F. Zackrisson (Gothenburg) 52:37.0, 4 Hawkins 53:33.2.

Note: there were three other big sports meetings during the early 1950s: the Kodak Sports at Harrow, the Lyon's Sports at Alperton and the Watford Sports. I always competed in the 2 miles walk handicap. My annual total of races was about 27 to 30.

Season 1951-52

1951

1 Dec: Metropolitan WC v Enfield 7 miles, 1st.
 15 Dec: Cambridge Open 7 miles, 3rd.
 29 Dec: Metropolitan WC v Highgate 7 miles, 2nd.

1952

12 Jan: Metropolitan Police Open 7, 3rd.
 19 Jan: Metropolitan WC v Enfield 10 miles, 1st.
 16 Feb: Cambridge H v Metropolitan WC 10 miles, 1st.
 1 Mar: Middlesex championships 10 miles, 2nd.
 15 Mar: National championship 10 miles, 4th.
1 Hardy 1:13:15, 2 Allen 1:15:28, 3 Coleman 1:16:58, 4 Hawkins 1:17:37.
 23 Mar: Metropolitan WC v Metropolitan Police 10 miles, 1st.
 29 Mar: Southern championship 7 miles, 1st.
 3 May: Middlesex championship 7 miles, 1st.
 17 May: Middlesex championship 2 miles, 1st.
 31 May: British Games 7 miles (White City), 4th.
1 Hardy 49:28.6 (British record), 2 Allen 50:46.6, 3 Coleman 50:51.6.
 7 Jun: Southern championship 2 miles, 2nd.
 14 Jun: Kinnaird Trophy 2 miles, 3rd.
 21 Jun: AAA Championships 7 Miles (White City), 4th.
1 Hardy 50:05.6, 2 Allen 51:29.2, 3 Coleman 52:24.6, 4 Hawkins 52:51.0.
 25 Jun: Middlesex v RAF 2 miles, 1st.
 5 Jul: Triangular International Invitation 10,000 metres (White City), 3rd.
1 Hardy 45:30.2, 2 Allen 46:39.8, 3 Hawkins 47:52.2, 4 Coleman 49:46.6, 5 Churcher 50:59.6.

9 Jul: Belgrave 5 miles, 1st.
12 Jul: Eton Manor 2 miles, 2nd.
2 Aug: Chertsey 2 miles, 1st.
23 Aug: Basingstoke 2 miles, 1st.
30 Aug: London Fire Brigade Sports 2 miles handicap (White City), 7th.
17 Sep: London v Paris v Brussels Invitation 5 miles (White City), 2nd.
1 Coleman 36:42.8, 2 Hawkins 37:00.0.

Season 1953-54

1953

26 Sep: Highgate 1 hour, 2nd.
3 Oct: Metropolitan WC v Enfield 7 miles, 1st.
11 Oct: Metropolitan WC v Highgate v Sussex 5 miles, 1st.
24 Oct: Highgate Open 7 miles, 4th.
7 Nov: Enfield Open 7 miles, 8th.
28 Nov: Belgrave Open 7 miles, 3rd.
5 Dec: Metropolitan WC v RAF Halton 5 miles, 1st.
12 Dec: Cambridge Open 7 miles, 2nd.
27 Dec: Metropolitan WC v Highgate 7 miles, 1st.

1954

9 Jan: Pewsey Cup 7 miles, 1st.
16 Jan: Metropolitan Police Open 7 miles, 1st.
23 Jan: Metropolitan WC v Enfield 10 miles, 1st.
13 Feb: Metropolitan WC v Metropolitan Police 10 miles, 1st.
20 Feb: Middlesex championship 10 miles, 1st.
6 Mar: National championship 10 miles, 7th.
1 Hardy 1:14:16, 2 Allen 1:15:44, 3 Coleman 1:16:11, 4 R. Holland (Sheffield UH) 1:17:58, 5 Bob Goodall (Woodford Green AC) 1:18:14, 6 Joe Barraclough (Lancashire WC) 1:18:27, 7 Hawkins 1:19:28. Note: there were 216 competitors !
27 Mar: Southern championship 7 miles, 1st.
3 Apr: Metropolitan Open 15 miles, 8th.
24 Apr: Middlesex championship 20 miles, retired injured at 15 miles.
22 May: Middlesex championship 2 miles, 1st.
? : Middlesex championship 7 miles, 1st.
30 May: Sussex v Metropolitan WC 5 Miles, 1st.
5 Jun: British Games 7 miles (White City), 2nd.
1 Hardy 53:41.4, 2 Hawkins 54:25.2, 3 Barraclough 55:09.0, 4 Coleman.
9 Jul: AAA Championships 7 miles (White City), 2nd.
1 Coleman 51:22.8, 2 Hawkins 52:26.4, 3 Goodall 54:18.4, 4 Barraclough 54:47.8. Hardy disqualified.
10 Jul: Belgrave 4 miles, 1st.
14 Jul: Southern championship 2 miles, 1st.
24 Jul: Kinnaird Trophy 2 miles, 2nd.
2 Aug: International 10,000 metres (White City), 1st.
1 Hawkins 46:16.0, 2 Coleman 47:12.8, 3 Fritz Schwab (Switzerland) 47:17.6.
26 Aug: European Championships 10,000 metres (Berne), 5th.
1 Josef Dolezal (Czechoslovakia) 45:01.8, 2 Anatoliy Yegorov (USSR) 45:53;0, 4 Sergey Lobastov (USSR) 46:21.8, 4 Ake Rundlöf (Sweden) 46:48.8, 5 Hawkins 46:52.8, 6 Gabriel Reymond (Switzerland) 47:09.8 ... 9 Coleman 47:43.4.
25 Sep: Highgate 1 hour, 3rd. *Note: there were more than 200 competitors !*

Editor's note: results of major events added to Bryan Hawkins's data.

My life away from race-walking

From a very early age I was always drawing, and my father, a very talented artist, encouraged and helped me a great deal. During 1940 there was a variety show at our local scout headquarters and I performed a lightning cartoon act. Armed with an easel, large sheets of paper and coloured chalks, I drew caricatures of Winston Churchill, Hitler, Baden Powell, Laurel & Hardy and Charlie Chaplin. I was very nervous, but my act went down well and I received a big round of applause. My parents loved the music hall and would often take me to the Harrow Coliseum and the Metropolitan Theatre, Edgware Road. I loved the atmosphere in the theatres and enjoyed seeing the famous comedians of the late 1930s and early 1940s.

A morning paper-round and Saturday morning butcher's round, plus cutting up newspapers in the butcher's shop every Thursday evening, brought me in the tidy sum of £1 a week, plus half-a-pound of sausages ! Having saved for many weeks, I bought a second-hand drum-kit and the manual, "The drummer's daily dozen". Much to the annoyance of my neighbours, I would practise my paradiddles, rolls and rim-shots in my quest to be another Gene Krupa ! Later I joined a trio and we played at local youth-club dances.

I always loved comics, and sitting up in bed with a newly-acquired pile of "swaps" was absolute bliss. I dreamed of one day being a full-time staff artist on one of the popular weekly comics, but years later I learned to my great disappointment that drawing for comics was a poorly-paid grind. My last published comic drawing was a two-page "Pop, Dick and Harry" strip in one of the Beezer Annuals. Over many years I have attempted to collect at least one copy of every British comic and have amassed several hundred, dating back to the Victorian era. This includes 140 first issues (Number 1s), plus the free gifts that were given away from time to time to help boost sales.

At the age of 14 I passed the entrance exam for Harrow College of Art and was a student there for three years. On the very first day I sat next to a very attractive student named Ena – we were married nine years later and moved into a flat in North Wembley. Our son, John, was born in 1956 and, God willing, we shall celebrate our Diamond wedding in September 2011.

After leaving art college, I obtained a position as junior artist in a small busy studio at the rear of Chancery Lane, in London, and most of the artwork produced there was for the general printing trade. I began to send cartoons to various magazines and was offered a job in the art department of Norman Kark Publications in Grand Buildings, Trafalgar Square. They produced three monthly magazines – "Band Wagon", "Courier" and "Photo World" – and I really enjoyed the few months I was there before my National Service call-up papers arrived. During my time with the publications company I was often given complimentary tickets for jazz concerts and big-band shows and was allowed to stand in the wings making sketches of the musicians. It was thrilling watching the drummers, including the great Jack Parnell.

After National Service, setting up in business as a cartoonist

My RAF service was fairly uneventful, except that I had become a very keen race-walker. During my six weeks' paid demob leave, I decided to try my luck as a freelance artist and managed to rent a small room at 148 The Strand, in London, for the princely sum of two pounds ten shillings (£2.50) a week. Can you imagine how much one would have to pay for that room today ! It was very close to Fleet Street and I began bombarding newspapers and magazines with cartoons. By 1950, the year I made my race-walking debut at the White City, I was producing 30 to 40 cartoons a week, every week, often working late into the night. My favourite time for creating cartoon ideas was on the train journey to work every morning.

My cartoons were published in many popular magazines, trade journals and newspapers, including the "Evening Standard", "Daily Sketch" and "Sunday Pictorial". The RAF Association magazine, "Air Mail", published some of my drawings and I wrote and illustrated a children's story for BBC Television. A film magazine published three of my cartoons every month for 12 years, and I drew a family cartoon strip for a ladies' magazine.

I decided to send jokes to various well-known comedians, and a very popular comedian at the time was Derek Roy, whose name I knew well as he appeared in a weekly strip cartoon in the comic, "Radio Fun", and I had seen him perform in a show at Wembley Town Hall. He liked four of the batch of jokes I sent to him and returned a postal-order for ten shillings (50p) ! Years later I began writing jokes for two great comedians, Max Wall and Tommy Cooper, and I got to know them both very well – they were the funniest men I ever met. Although I wrote gags for Max, I had more success with Tommy if I told him the jokes, but when it came to parting with any money from either of them it was like getting blood from a stone. I was more successful selling collections of jokes known as "gag files" by advertising in the weekly theatrical newspaper, "The Stage".

A few years later the rent of my studio shot up and I moved to a rather seedy little room in Soho. In the adjoining room was an ancient shoe artist who was older than God and who may have drawn the original shoes worn by the great Captain Robert Barclay prior to his 1000-mile walk in 1809. The room below was occupied by a plump middle-aged prostitute named Rose and every morning at 10.45 she would tap on her ceiling to let me know it was time to pop down for a coffee and a chat before she started work ! Sometimes her afternoon work could get quite noisy, but luckily I had a radio, and "Music While You Work", "Mrs Dale's Diary" and popular melodies from various orchestras drowned the sounds coming from below ! One morning my father decided to visit my Dickensian studio and passed fifty-bob Rose on the stairs. He enquired of me who she was and I said, 'That's Rose. She's a chiropodist'. He remarked, 'My God ! I would not want her touching my feet !'

During the 1954 British Empire Games Jim Peters collapsed near the end of the marathon and the "Daily Express" held a design competition for a Jim Peters medal, for which I luckily won first prize, but by 1956 I gave up the dicey world of freelancing as my wife wanted to eat regularly and said it was high time I got a proper job. I became a local government draughtsman the Monday following the National 10 Miles Championship in Regent's Park in which I finished 3rd. That was a race in which three men clocked inside 76 minutes for the first time in the National Championship – Roland Hardy won and George Coleman was 2nd.

Success as a comedian and a chance to audition at the Windmill

The longing to perform on stage kept returning from time to time and may stem from the fact that one of my old aunts had been an Edwardian Gaiety Girl and another was a professional singer. My mother's grandparents were a pearly King and Queen and would sing and dance while playing the spoons and bones. So I decided to try my luck one evening at the Nuffield Centre, which was a club for members of the armed forces, and where anyone could get up on stage and entertain. There was no fee involved, but there was usually the odd agent or two in the audience looking for new talent. My 10-minute spot went down very well and a leading London agent named Issy Bonn, who had once been a top-of-the-bill comedian, came to see me after the show. He thought that I would be just the type of comedian that would be a success at the Windmill Theatre and said that he would take me there to meet the owner, Vivian Van Damm. The show at the Windmill began to 1.30 p.m. and continued non-stop until 11.20 p.m six days a week, and as I now had a regular job that I enjoyed, plus the fact that I would hardly ever see my family, and I would be a non-starter at any future walking races, I thanked Mr Bonn and turned down his kind offer.

On 1 January 1960 I started work at the Brighton Borough Surveyor's Department and stayed there until I retired as chief draughtsman in March 1990. During this time I returned to my love of collecting autographs and this developed into a major hobby. I would write to famous celebrities requesting signed photographs and hunt through antique-shops for old signed documents and letters. My boyhood

hobby of obtaining autographs on cigarette-cards and trade-cards continued for many years and eventually I had the grand total of 1000 of these delightful signed miniature portraits. I would often send First Day covers to be signed and my favourite one is a 1936 Berlin Olympic First Day cover that the great athlete, Jesse Owens, autographed for me in 1971.

Another Olympic champion, Harold Abrahams, who was immortalised in the film, "Chariots of Fire", sent me a signed photograph and on the reverse he wrote, "To Bryan Hawkins, who probably covered more miles in one race than I did in my entire career". He also enclosed the badge he wore in the 1924 Olympics. Emil Zátopek autographed a 1948 Olympic cover that I took with me when I competed in Prague in 1956, and when he later sent me his international vest badge his wife, Dana, signed the envelope. Paavo Nurmi signed a very nice 1952 Olympic cover – this was the year he carried the torch into the stadium and lit the Olympic flame, and it was a great honour which many people in 1948 at Wembley thought should have been awarded to Sydney Wooderson.

During the years spent hunting in antique-shops I have found two Olympic medals, a large amount of badges, and the cap worn by the British team-manager at the 1928 Olympics. In one shop I found a 1908 Olympic judge's badge and another from the 1912 Games. In various old bookshops I have managed to buy the Official Reports for the Olympics of 1908, 1928, 1932 and 1936. Harold Whitlock very kindly gave me quite a few interesting items, and some of my old walking rivals have generously given me the numbers they wore when competing in Olympic, European or Commonwealth Games. These items I really treasure, but a few years ago I sold my collection of autographs, with the exception of sport and aviation.

Long before Hughie Green appeared on TV with his show, "Opportunity Knocks", Carroll Levis was touring the theatres with his "Discoveries" show, and when he duly arrived at the Brighton Hippodrome for a week I knocked on his dressing-room door one evening and asked if he needed a comedian. He sat down in a large armchair and said, "Make me laugh !" I told him a few gags, and he smiled and said, "I'll put you on tomorrow night". I did two performances, and the star of the show, a comedian named Arthur Haynes, liked my jokes and asked if I would write some gags for him. I never contacted him after the show but was sad to hear he died about two years later.

By a stroke of luck I was invited to perform a 10-minute spot in Brighton's very popular weekly show, "Tuesday Night at the Dome", which is a wonderful theatre that holds 1500 people and was the venue for the European Song Contest that was won by Abba. I performed many times at the Dome over a period of 10 years, often as compere, and during the summer it was always a full house with regular patrons and hundreds of happy holiday-makers. It's a wonderful experience when your act goes well and 1500 people are laughing and applauding. The applause seems to engulf you like a gigantic wave and is something I shall never forget. I also began appearing in cabaret at various hotels and also Stag and Hen nights. The compere/comedian really works hard at a Stag show because if you had three strippers doing two spots each the comic ended up belting out gags for nearly 1½ hours ! I only performed at a few Hen nights because the male strippers were the stars of the evening and the women were certainly not interested in comedians !

I gradually retired as a comedian, and looking back I know that I just had to go on the stage for a while and get it out of my system. Now I find it hard to believe after all these years that I ever performed on stage. I was soon very busy working on aviation paintings and various water-colours of some of Brighton's lovely old buildings and antique-shops, and having for many years collected First Day and commemorative covers I decided in 1980 to draw my own and have now produced just over 400 cartoon covers and give displays at various stamp-clubs in Sussex.

I did, however, go back to drumming for a short while in a Sunday-night club and a holiday-camp in Bognor. My eldest grandson has a superb modern drum-kit and when I visit my family I usually pick up the drum-sticks and have a session, but my old style of drumming doesn't impress my grandson and as he looks on I'm sure he's saying, "Poor old soul. He's hopeless !" Despite that, I'll never forget

the evening at Battersea Town Hall when I played drums with the well-known pianist, Russ Conway, and a brilliant young lady clarinettist who was about to join Ivy Benson's All-Girl Showband.

My youngest grandson is sport-mad and recently won the 100 metres, 200 metres and high jump at his school sports. He's a member of Worthing Harriers and I look forward to watching his progress.