

## T. E. (TOMMY) HAMMOND, "WORLD'S BEST"

Thomas Edgar Hammond, born on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1878 in Suffolk, was a tall lanky walker who stood just over 6 feet in height. He first came into prominence in the inaugural 52 mile Stock Exchange London to Brighton walk <sup>1</sup> on May 1, 1903, when he finished third (9 hr 35 min 7 sec) to E. F. Broad and G. D. Nicholas (but well outside Jack Butler's Open record time of 8 hr 43 min 16 sec <sup>2</sup>).



Postcard signed by Tommy Hammond of the Blackheath Harriers & Surrey Walking Club (courtesy and copyright of Mr Gareth Long and used with permission from <http://www.mkheritage.co.uk/wsc/docs/hammondwalk1908.html>)

Taking the pastime up in an enthusiastic manner, he improved very quickly and in April 1904, he won the next edition of the Stock Exchange London to Brighton in a best on record time of 8 hr 26 min 57 sec, over an hour faster than Broad's winning time the previous year and 17 minutes ahead of Butler's Open record.. Making reasonable allowance for the extra 2 miles, we have 50 miles in something like 8 hr 10 min.

A number of his fellow Stock Exchange friends recorded the occasion for posterity by presenting him with a suitably engraved garniture clock which is still in the family's possession



**The garniture clock and engraving to commemorate Hammond's 1904 Brighton walk (photos compliments of Hammond's grandson Adrian Hack)**

- 1 The Stock Exchange London to Brighton walk was first held in 1903 and was confined to members. It then became an annual event and was normally held in May. An Open championship walk from London to Brighton, put on by the Surrey Walking Club, was also on offer. This second walk was not held every year – the first staging was in 1866 and from then on, it was staged as follows: 1897, 1903, 1906, 1909, 1911, 1913, 1919, etc.
- 2 Butler, a member of Polytechnic Harriers, recorded his record time of 8:43:16 in winning the 1903 Open London to Brighton event on March 14 1903.

Soon after this, in June 1904, Hammond joined the Surrey Walking Club (he subsequently went on to become one of the club mainstays, filling at various times the positions of Secretary and President) and over the next couple of years, he competed in various long walks as well as throwing himself further into the administration of the sport, becoming a member of the Southern counties Road Walking Association Committee.

On the walking front, he had some fierce battles with the other famous walkers of the period. Soon after the Brighton win, a track 50 mile event was staged and Hammond was beaten into second place by F. B. Thompson in a new record. Then in a subsequent 50 mile track race in June 1905, Jack Butler regained his 50 mile record with an amazing **7 hr 52 min 27 sec**. Then on Sept 22, 1906, Butler beat Hammond by over 10 min in the London to Brighton race, finishing in a record time of **8 hr 23 min 57 sec**.

Finally, on Good Friday 1907, Hammond gave people a further taste of his quality as a genuine ‘World’s Best’. On this occasion, he walked from London to Oxford, a distance of 54¾ miles in **8 hr 51 min 14 sec**. A correspondent of the time noted

*I affirm that this was as fine a piece of walking as it has ever been my privilege to witness. There was no hurry about it. There were no patent “bad times”. The style was delightful to watch, precisely because it did not require an expert eye to appreciate it. It was walking, in the plain undiluted meaning of the term, without any artifice whatever. A more striking combination of ease and efficiency one could hardly imagine. The record breaker was quite fresh at the finish.*<sup>3</sup>

Three months later, on 21-22 June 1907, Hammond was back on the roads and once again left the field in his wake in winning the London to Brighton and Return walk. His time for the 104 mile distance was an amazing **18 hr 13 min 37 sec** and broke H. W. Horton’s course record by over 2 hours. He covered the 62 ½ miles (over 100 km) to Brighton in 10 hr 30 min 36 sec and passed the 100 mile mark in **17 hr 25 min 22 sec**. Second place at the end of the race was over 2 hours behind him. Pundits of the day thought that this record would be unbeatable.<sup>4</sup>

The course for that event was described as follows

*The race was walked from The “Swan and Sugarloaf”, Croydon, to the Clock Tower, Westminster Bridge, 10 miles 3 furlongs; then right face and back to Brighton, 51 ½ miles more, making a total of 61 miles 7 furlongs. Then, wheeling around once more, back to the “Swan and Loaf”, thus completing the double journey of 103 miles.*



**Hammond on the London to Brighton Rd and cooling off in a horse trough in the 1907 race**

<sup>3</sup> My reports on many of these early races are taken from the meticulously kept scrap book of W. (Bill) Brown, himself a noted long distance walker of the period. Bill, born 17<sup>th</sup> December 1878, lived to the ripe old age of 100, thus becoming a centurion in age to match his centurion status in having walked 100 miles in 24 Hours. His scrap book was passed onto Bert Gardiner, a family relative and has been given to me for safe keeping by his son Bob, a former Australian Olympic racewalker. It is indeed an invaluable resource.

<sup>4</sup> *The Centurions – A History*, 1997, p7



**Hammond passing through Redhill on the return journey after completing 90 miles.**  
Published with permission - <http://www.oldredhill.com/?goto=londonroadredhill>

There was heated discussion as to whether a long distance walk should feature at the 1908 London Olympics but the discussion was lost and only two track walks featured – a 3500m and a 10 mile walk. Hammond was duly selected to represent Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the 10 mile track walk and thus had the honour of being one of the inaugural Olympic walkers. Unfortunately, being engaged in long distance training at that time, he did not prove fast enough to get into the final although the papers commented that he walked in beautiful style.<sup>5</sup>

Long distance walking had a high profile in those days and it was not surprising that in the post Olympic euphoria, a 24 Hour Track Walk race was set up by Middlesex Walking Club. This was reminiscent of the great ultra races of the previous century and it provided a perfect opportunity for Hammond to set even more records. The date was the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> of September 1908 and the venue was the White City Stadium, Shepherd's Bush. 42 of the leading long distance walking exponents toed the starting line.

The fiercest competition for Hammond was expected to come from Butler who still held the best track 50 mile walk time and the record for the London to Brighton walk. Expectations were realized when Butler went to an early lead which he maintained for the first 10 miles before others caught and passed him. In a huge upset, he was forced to retire at the 24 mile mark just as Hammond was starting to come into his own. Walking splendidly, he took the overall lead just before the 5 hour mark and was never headed from then on. He covered the first 50 miles in 8 hr 36 min 31 sec and his 12 hour distance was an astounding 68 miles 325 yds. Powering on with no signs of slowing, he created a new 100 miles track record of **18 hr 4 min and 10 ½ sec** and eventually finished with an incredible **131 miles 580 yards** in 24 hours. This remains a distance that few walkers have been able to beat in the nearly 100 years since.

The local newspaper described the finish as follows and published the photo below as part of the article.

*As it got to minutes instead of hours, the very large crowd, who were now thronging the stands, were aroused to the highest pitch of excitement. They cheered Hammond to the echo but this does not mean that they forgot to encourage other heroes, of whom perhaps Gillespie and Sampson were next in favour. Hammond now, though striding out grandly, was doubtless anticipating the end of the contest as keenly as any of those present.*

*A continuous roar heralded the announcement that the last 5 minutes had been entered into. Even the weariest of the competitors seemed to be infused with some of the enthusiasm of the onlookers and when, at last, amid indescribable enthusiasm, Mr J. Daffern fired the pistol announcing the termination of the great "twenty four", there were none of the pitiable breakdowns so much in evidence at the finish of the "marathon" race.*

*Hammond intended to go on and complete the 132<sup>nd</sup> mile but even the Stadium authorities could not prevent the crowd breaking into the enclosure and they surged across the grass in a manner which precluded the possibility of any further walking.*

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5 He came 6<sup>th</sup> in Heat 1 in a time of 1:23:44.0 but only the first 4 from each of the two heats advance to the final.



The crowd of 20,000 very badly wanted to carry Hammond around the track after he had finished. Hammond, in typically modest manner, had other ideas. With the band playing “See the Conquering Hero Comes”, he walked across to the dressing room arm in arm with Horton – past and present London to Brighton record holders. It just seemed the appropriate thing to do.

The next year saw Hammond dominate another London to Brighton walk. The date was 1 May 1909 and the occasion was the Surrey Walking Club’s “Dithy Club” race from Westminster Bridge to the Royal Aquarium in Brighton. Hammond had been keen to have one final go at Butler’s record and this proved the occasion. His time of **8 hr 18 min 18 sec** for the 52 miles broke the record by over 5 minutes. Brighton residents in their thousands lined the final miles to witness the performance.

But if Hammond thought that he could go out on a high, he was soon to have a rude awakening. On 4 September 1909, only five months after his walk, H. Ross, in his first 50 mile race, won the Polytechnic Harriers London to Brighton race in an even better time of 8 hr 11 min 14 sec. Hammond had lost his record!

It was a time in which every athlete wanted to be a long distance walker and the cream of athletics vied for the honour and notoriety associated with winning such classic events. In this climate of one-upmanship, events tumbled on one after another.

Two weeks after the Polytechnic Harriers event, Blackheath Harriers hosted yet another 24 hour walking race, at the White City Stadium. By now the incessant racing was taking its toll and the retirees included Hammond, Butler and Ross. Tom Payne of North Shields, a member of the Lancashire Walking Club, won with a distance of 127 miles but the general disappointment was paramount – the favourites were nowhere to be seen and the records did not tumble.



**The starting line for the 1910 24 hour walk.**

This effectively marked the end of Hammond’s walking career. From now on, he turned more to the administration of the sport. In 1910, he took on the role of President of the Surrey Walking Club <sup>6</sup> and in 1911, he was one of the group who set up the Centurions <sup>7</sup>. This group took on the role of recognizing the feat of those

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6 See <http://www.surreywalkingclub.org.uk/>



walkers who walked 100 miles within 24 hours. He became the inaugural Secretary/Treasurer for the organisation and was Club Captain for an incredible 36 years from 1911 to 1946.



**Tommy Hammond in the 1920s - on bicycle (photo on left) and in the middle back in hat (photo on right)**

And what of his wonderful 1907 'London to Brighton and Return' performance? Finally in June 1926, with a much improved road surface and with a crack field assembled, people finally thought that a new record might be on the cards and so it proved. 14 men completed the distance and the winner, W. F. "Billy" Baker recorded a time of **18 hr 5 min 52 secs** to break Hammond's record by just under 8 minutes. In typically generous fashion, Hammond wrote to the new record holder to congratulate him. The following reply was sent back <sup>8</sup>

26-6-1926

*Mr T. E. Hammond Esq.*

*Dear Mr Hammond*

*It gives me great joy to have received your splendid letter of congratulations.*

*Of all the trophies I have won, there is none I shall prize more than that. In my own heart, I am convinced that your own record is more than equal to the time put up last Saturday, owing to the shorter distance and the better surface of the Brighton road at the present time. But I suppose that this is considered to be all in the luck of the game. I only trust I may be inspired that that wonderful spirit of true sportsmanship akin to your own, when the present record comes to be beaten.*

*I am returning your letter, for you omitted to sign it. Without that, it would not be complete.*

*Pleased to say have now completely recovered from the efforts of last Saturday. Many thanks for your kind words of encouragement during the race.*

*With all good wishes*

*Yours very sincerely*

*W. F. Baker*

<sup>7</sup> Early in 1911, E.R. "Bob" Gillespie, who had walked 106 miles without stopping in the 1908 24 Hour walk, conceived the idea of forming the Centurions and, as a result of discussions held with T.E. Hammond and E.H. Neville, a meeting was arranged of those who were qualified. This meeting was held at the 'Ship & Turtle' in London on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1911. Hammond was subsequently elected as Centurion number 10, recognising his 104 walk of 18:13:37 done in the 1907 London to Brighton and Return. The Centurions still recognise and administer all Centurion performances – see <http://www.centurions1911.org.uk/>

<sup>8</sup> The original of this letter was scanned and sent to me by Hammond's grandson Adrian Hack. It remains in family hands.



**Left: W. F. Baker (left), who broke Tommy's record in 1926  
Right: Tommy in later life in his role as a stockbroker**

Hammond died on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1945 at 67 years of age and the Centurions decided to honour his memory by purchasing a handsome three handled silver cup which would be called "The Hammond Cup". This was to be awarded to the winner of the annual Centurions 100 mile walk. The cup was mislaid in the 1980's and, when rediscovered, it was found to be missing its base and had not been engraved since 1965. A very generous donation of £300 from Richard and Sandra Brown enabled a new base to be purchased and the engraving to be brought up to date. It continues to be presented each year, a lasting memorial to T.E. Hammond.



**The Hammond Cup<sup>9</sup>**

Looking back from our modern perspective, we can still appreciate the wonderful times he recorded on rough roads and with a minimum of equipment and support. He is still be regarded as one of the greatest long distance walkers ever and as the "World's Best" during that exciting era. His shadow still looms large nearly 100 years later.

Hammond's finest walk remains his 24 hour track distance of 131 miles 580 yards, done in 1908. It was not bettered until 1950 when Frenchman Henri Caron managed 132 miles 1320 yards and it was not until 1960 that Hew Nielson, with a distance of 133 miles 21 yards, beat his British record. His track performance remains even to this day the second fastest ever by a British walker.

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<sup>9</sup> At the time of last update in 2010, the HammondCup is currently held by Richard Brown. He forwarded the above photo to me for this article.



**Hammond as he is best remembered – leading on the road with a bevy of attendants**

Finally, there are a great many web reference to Hammond, either extensive or in passing, and to the 1908 Olympic Games in general. Please advise me of any further ones that you find.

<http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes/ha/thomas-hammond-1.html>

[http://www.surreywalkingclub.org.uk/Handbook\\_April06.pdf](http://www.surreywalkingclub.org.uk/Handbook_April06.pdf) (noted in the list of Past Presidents )

<http://www.centurions1911.org.uk/> (Hammond is Centurion Number 10 and a Centurions co-founder)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athletics\\_at\\_the\\_1908\\_Summer\\_Olympics\\_-\\_Men's\\_10\\_mile\\_walk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athletics_at_the_1908_Summer_Olympics_-_Men's_10_mile_walk)

<http://www.bedfordshire.gov.uk/CommunityAndLiving/ArchivesAndRecordOffice/CommunityArchives/Woburn/InnAtWoburn.aspx?ContentisTextOnly=text> (info on the Swan & Bedford Arms & R.T. Hammond)

<http://www.olympics.org.uk/athleterecord.aspx?at=1501>

<http://www.oldredhill.com/?goto=londonroadredhill>

<http://www.mkheritage.co.uk/wsc/docs/hammondwalk1908.html>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/olympics/7355664.stm> (1908 Olympic Photo Archive)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Britain\\_and\\_Ireland\\_at\\_the\\_1908\\_Summer\\_Olympics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain_and_Ireland_at_the_1908_Summer_Olympics)

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-559472/London-1908-Our-FIRST-Olympics-guess-small-profit.html>

<http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=ConObject.8356&objImageIndex=2>

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