

BERT GARDINER: 1901 - 1994

C. H. (Bert) Gardiner was born in England on 26th December 1901. He started his athletics career in 1919 and was both a runner and a walker. In 1921, he and Frank O'Rourke were foundation members of the Victorian Amateur Walking Club and Bert had the honour of winning the first ever race put on by that club – a 3 mile handicap race at Brighton Beach (his records show that in that first VAWC race at Brighton, he and Langtry dead heated for first in the handicap).

In 1923, Bert and Frank helped NSW Walking Club secretary Lawrence Drake to organize the first inter-state seven miles competition. This marked the start of interstate walking. So Bert can truly be said to be one of the founding forces behind modern racewalking in Australia.

Bert had a long and successful career as both a runner and a walker. He ran all distances from 440 yds to the marathon and was runner up in the Victorian marathon in 1926. He walked all distances from 880 yds to the 50 mile. He also won the Victorian 1 mile walk title for 4 years in succession, from 1929 to 1932.



1925 – a young Bert Gardiner in his Moreland Harriers uniform

His proudest victory was the 1925 Australian 7 miles championship, held as a curtain raiser to the Australian Rules football final in Adelaide. This was held in front of a crowd of 60,000 spectators, the largest crowd to watch an Australian athletic championship. The final result shows that he had a narrow 2 second victory over fellow Victorian Joe Mulcahy.

1925 Australian 7 Miles Walk Championship

1.	Bert Gardiner	VIC	57:07
2.	Joseph Mulcahy	VIC	57:09
3.	William Pitt	NSW	58:11

He was a member of RAAF from 1925 to 1929 and won many inter service championships in both running and walking. While in the RAAF, they were part of the Honour Guard at the opening of the first Parliament House in Canberra in 1927. His son Bob remembered Bert telling him that they camped in tents in a snow covered paddock near the new building.

About that time, along with other walkers, he was an early member of the Victorian Ski Club and trips were organised to Mt Buffalo and Mt Buller.

While he retired from top competition in the late 1930's, he continued to compete in interclub until 1952. This was at the time a record term for interclub competition, spanning 33 years from his first interclub in 1919.



Bert (centre) is wins the Australian 7 Miles Championship in Melbourne in 1925

Bert was just as prolific on the administrative front as on the competitive front. He joined the VAAA Council in 1924 and was involved as an administrator for that organization for the next 70+ years. During that time his positions of responsibility were many and varied

- He was registrar for many years
- He was handicapper for 33 years from 1929 to 1954
- He was a member of the Re-instatement Committee for 22 years from 1948 to 1970
- He was a selector of teams for 32 years
- He was on the Executive for 14 years (1943-55, 57-58)
- He was on the Transfer Committee for 13 years from 1940 to 1952
- He was the manager of the Victorian Cross Country Team to Hobart in 1939

He was awarded life membership of VAAA in 1953.

He was a founding member of the Victorian Marathon Club in 1946 and maintained his membership till the club was eventually disbanded in the 1990s. He was granted life membership of this club in 1962 and worked for 2 days a week in its clubrooms for many years after his retirement from work.

He was also a life member of Moreland Harriers and, over the years, held various positions within the club as President, Secretary and Club Captain. He was also the founder of Preston Athletics Club and Moreland Womens Athletics Club.

He was also involved with the sport on the National and International level. The list of achievements in this area just goes on and on

- He was a National Athletic Selector for 20 years (mostly chairman)
- He was accepted in 1952 as a member of the International Athletics Statisticians Group
- He was Chairman of the 1956 Olympic Road Events Committee
- He was the Referee for the 1956 Olympic Games Marathon, 20 km walk and 50 km walk events.
- He was the Athletics Manager of the 1958 Commonwealth Games Team to Cardiff
- He was the Referee for the 1962 Commonwealth Games Marathon
- He was the Chief Judge for the 1962 Commonwealth Games Walks and Marathons
- He was granted the AAU Award of Merit in 1968.
- He was elected to life membership of AAU in 1973
- He was awarded an IAAF 75th Year Commemorative Plaque for the most outstanding administrators in countries affiliated with IAAF.
- He was awarded the Queen's Jubilee Medal in 1977.

But perhaps Bert's greatest contribution was in the capacity as historian and statistician. His collection of Australian almanacs, State annual reports, and walkers club annual reports dated back to the turn of the century. Athletes and officials from around Australia regularly contacted him for information on athletics which he compiled and collected over the years.

Bert was ambidextrous; he was made to use his right hand at school and became equally good writing with both hands. No doubt this kept him in good stead with his ongoing statistical analysis – this was before the days of the computer and he maintained a filing cabinet of cards, exercise books, hand written ranking sheets and such like. It was a monumental task and one that consumed much of his time for many years.

But Bert did not have to rely on his written records. His recall was amazing. There was never a statistic that he was not able to reel off in the blink of an eye. He compiled the first statistical history of Australian and Victorian Championships. He assisted many athletics clubs in compiling their club histories. He maintained his membership of the International Statistical Group for 50 years. He became the unofficial historian for both VAAA and AAU.

Eventually he passed the baton onto Paul Jenes who now fulfils the role as official AA Statistician. Paul was able to build on the vast store of information accumulated by Bert. This has ensured that our athletics records in Australia are second to none.



A fascinating photo from 1966. The caption reads:

Shown here “taking a walk” for old times sakes are GUS THEOBOLD (69) of Victoria, DON KEANE (36) – WA State team member and former Olympian - and BERT GARDINER (64) – an Australian selector for the past 14 years.

He made a comeback to race walking in 1986 and won the Victorian and Australian Veterans 85 years 5,000m walk championships. He was subsequently runner up in the 1987 World Veterans Championships in Melbourne in that age group.

Perhaps Bert's greatest thrill was to see his son Bob selected in three Olympics and one Commonwealth Games. Bert and Bob were the first father son combination to win Australian Athletics Championships and remain the only father son combination to be awarded life membership of VRWC.

When Bert died on 26th June 1994, aged 93, his family arranged for a special medal, called the C. H. (Bert) Gardiner Medal, to be cast and to be presented annually to the winner of the Victorian 10km roadwalk championship, in memory of Bert. It was first presented in 1996 and is still presented annually nearly 20 years later, a fitting reminder of Bert and his vast contributions to the sport of Track and Field in Australia.

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29 September 2015