

George Knott

1948	Olympic Games	London	10,000m	6 th in heat
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George Knott, born 19 August 1910, was one of five children born into a sporting family in Melbourne's inner suburbs. During his childhood, the family moved from Park St. Abbotsford to North Richmond and finally to Lithgow St. in Collingwood.

He tirelessly played cricket and football in the street with his siblings and friends, including Collingwood football great Lou Richards.

The three boys all excelled in sport. Alan was a top athlete with Collingwood Harriers and a highly regarded VFL footballer with Fitzroy and St. Kilda, Dan played VFL football for Collingwood and Richmond and George excelled in athletics, joining the Collingwood Harriers on 2nd December 1929 and initiating an athletics career that lasted some 70 years.



George competed in many events as most did then, but preferred middle distance and pole vault. In 1930 he had his first race walk in a club championship and, from then on, mixed running and walking.

Coached by lifetime friend Bill Tunaley, George improved his times and finally won his first championship medal in 1936 – 3rd in the Victorian 1 mile walk. He followed this up with a win in the Victorian 1 mile walk event in 1938 and placed second to Athol Stubbs in the inaugural Australian 10,000m walk championship in 1939 in the good time of **46:06**. With this success highlighting his rapidly rising star, he then won the local double in 1940 (the Victorian 1 mile and 3 mile track walk titles).

By 1940, George was VAWC club captain and Victoria's top walker but the increasing effects of the war saw competitions stopped, the VAWC disbanded and his career on hold.

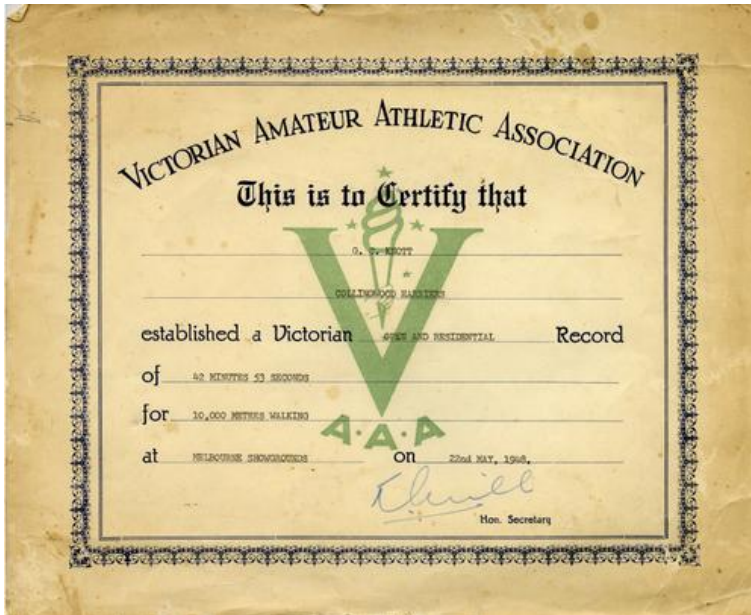
It was not until 1946 that re-establishment occurred and, after things settled down, he was once again in top form.

He won the 1946 Victorian 1 mile and 3 mile titles and upped his distance to win the Victorian 10 mile title. Then in 1947, he won the Australian 1 mile (**6:31.4**) and 10,000m (**49:08**) titles to stake his claim as the top Australian sprint walker.

However, it was in 1948 that he really set the crowds talking with wins in the inaugural Australian 2 mile track walk (**13:37.2**), the Victorian 1 mile track walk (**6:23.2**) and the Victorian 10,000m track walk (**42:51.6**). His Australian 2

Mile walk win was in record time even though he had lost a shoe mid race. His 1 mile time was less than one second outside Bill Murray's Australasian record and his 10,000m time was a staggering world best. It was nominated for world record status but was not accepted due to technical deficiencies in the running of the event. It did however qualify as a new Victorian record, a record that lasted until 1979 when it was finally beaten by Willi Sawall with a time of 42:25.8.

Interestingly, his 10,000m Victorian record was not ratified as an Australian record either, for the same reasons. Thus other walkers chipped away at the Australian record with slower times – first Don Keane in 1952 (45:51.0), then Don Keane again in 1956 (43:38.2) and then finally Willi Sawall in 1976 (43:35.9). It was not until 1979 that an Australian finally bettered his 10,000m track time, when Willi won the Victorian 10,000m track championship with 42:25.8.



THE LOSS OF A SHOE did not prevent George Knott from winning the Australian two-mile walking title yesterday. And he won in record time.

*Left: George wins the 1948 Australian 2 Mile Track Championship after losing a shoe mid race
George's Victorian 10,000m Track Championship record of 42:25.8 was not bettered until 1979*

These outstanding performances gained him selection for the 1948 Olympics in London. There he finished 7th in his heat in the 10,000m walk and just missed out on qualifying for the final (only the first 5 in each heat made it through), just shy of his 38th birthday.

This effectively marked the end of George's career as a top walker. He had other things to do with his life. However, he continued to race A grade at Interclub for many years, and would step in when the team was short of a walker, and he continued in the lower grades until the 1970s. There wasn't a trick that George didn't know and he taught the other Collingwood walkers how to use them to the club's advantage. To confuse the opposition, he would take the front row and just before the gun he would give his mate an almighty shove in the back so that he would find himself way out in front with George hot on his heels.

In veteran competition George and Bill Tunaley would line up for field games, jumps, steeplechases and walks, as they had done in their youth. George won medals and set Victorian and Australian masters records from M70 to M85 in events as varied as High Jump, Triple Jump, Discus, Javelin, 110m Hurdles and Steeplechase. Consider a few of his racewalking times and records: M70 3000m walk 19:09.0, M70 5000m walk 30:24.5 and M85 10km walk 1:28:29.

George was a member of VAWC from the early 1930s onwards and was one of the stalwarts over many years, racing with the club until his late eighties. His life membership was awarded in 1964 but he remained an active member of the club throughout his life.

His activities were not restricted to VAWC. He was also awarded life memberships of Athletics Victoria and Collingwood Harriers and was awarded an Australian Sports Medal in 2000. The George Knott Athletics Track in Clifton Hill is named in his honour.

George had a high profile career outside athletics as well as within. He was for many years the proprietor of the Yorkshire Stingo Hotel in Hoddle St, Abbotsford, represented Victoria Ward in the Collingwood City Council for over 15 years and even served a stint as Major of Collingwood in 1963-1964. He was a proud Labor man who mixed easily with the working classes of that inner city area.



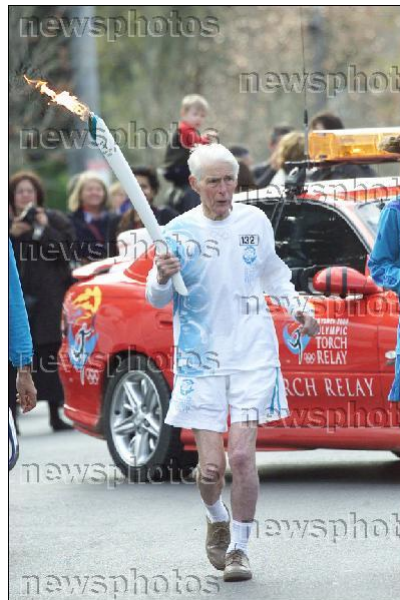
George Knott – Collingwood city councilor and Lord Mayor

One story springs to mind from George's time as Mayor of Collingwood, when he took two promising junior Collingwood walkers to Adelaide for the South Australian Championships. They travelled in the Mayoral car, with the overnight stopover spent just off the road with the boys sleeping in the car and George under the stars. Hey, sometimes a job does have its perks!



George serving behind the bar in the Yorkshire Stingo Hotel in Abbotsford.

One of his last public activities was his participation in the 2000 Olympic Torch Relay.



George died in early 2001 at the age of 90, leaving a legacy of 70 years of involvement in athletics as both a fierce competitor and as an official.

Athletics Victoria now recognises George's enormous contribution to Victorian athletics by awarding the George Knott Trophy annually to the winner of the AV 5000m Track Walk for men. Duane Cousins was the inaugural winner in March 2002.