

EDITORIAL

This issue is notable in at least two respects: we are pleased to present the first contribution by a woman member - a most scholarly one too - and the first in a series of interviews with members of the organisation. The subject of this first one is Melvin Watman, a founder member and editor of the first issue of NUTS NOTES way back in July 1959. We hope to include in succeeding issues interviews with two other "veterans"; Bob Sparks and Stan Greenberg.

FROM THE SECRETARY

Fourteen members attended the 'crisis' meeting held in London on January 25. The idea of the meeting was that with people like Bob Sparks, Stan Greenberg and Martin James finding themselves unable to do the NUTS as much time as they would like we were faced with the possibility of not having enough members to do the compiling work. However, the meeting came up with some good ideas - using outside London compilers and getting a piece in *AA* about difficulties facing the organisation. As a result of this there are now 8 list compilers instead of 5. Melvin's piece in *Athletics Weekly* brought in 25 (yes, twenty-five) offers of help. These have all been acknowledged and we are sifting through them. I think we will find some promising members and the future looks assured.

I must apologise to Graham Tanner. Due to "printing difficulties" he did not get credit for the article "How bright is our athletics future?" in our last issue.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Flying Officer P.S. Mackenzie, Old Pound, Partridge Green, Horsham, Sussex.

NOTEWORTHY PERFORMANCE

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MISCELLANY

We welcome as a new member John Lusardi, 24 London Road, West Croydon, Surrey. John is well known as Editorial Assistant of *Athletics Weekly*, and as such is interested particularly in young athletes. His primary function in the organisation will be to help Ian Smith with his junior and youth lists.

"Outlook Two: A Careers Symposium" was published recently; among the contributors is John Kithling ("On Interviews"), still 7th best UK javelin thrower in 1965. He is a marketing director with Standard Telephones and Cables Ltd.

INTERVIEW WITH MEL WATMAN - No.1 in a series

You have always been a professional journalist, firstly with the *Potters Bar Gazette*, which has, like many other local newspapers in recent years, ceased publication, and then as editor of *World Athletics* and assistant editor of *Athletics Weekly*. How do you think British athletics writers compare with their opposite numbers in other countries, and do you consider the training of journalists should be given much more attention in this country?

By and large, I would say that British trackwriters are no better or worse than their foreign counterparts. The majority (lets say 80%), and I'm referring here specifically to correspondents of the national dailies and Sundays plus the two London evenings, are competent journalists writing attractive and interesting copy for a basically uninformed public. A handful of writers (10%), mostly employed by the more sober of our newspapers are outstanding in terms of craftsmanship and knowledge; they compare favourably with any trackwriters in the world. At the other end of the scale, another segment of about 10% do the sport no credit at all, although in fairness to them athletics may be only their third or fourth-string sport and in the absence of any specialised knowledge they may seek to justify their existence by searching for "sensations". The economics of the newspaper world are such that a man cannot be employed solely to cover athletics and as a result the term Jack of all trades and master of none is applicable to some sportswriters. If the standard and extent of athletics reporting in this country is not as high as could be desired, I think the blame rests on

the sports editors, to whom athletics is a major sport only at Olympics time or when the cricket is rained off. They are the men who dictate the space, prominence and -in some cases- the attitudes an athletics story shall receive, and I am constantly shocked by their poor judgement and glaring insularity.

Journalism is a responsible profession, so of course training is of the utmost importance. Local newspapers are the usual introduction for beginners and most of them participate in the national training scheme for journalists, by which juniors are released for studies at a local polytechnic to supplement the practical work they are doing on their newspaper. However, a "nose for news" - the journalist's most valuable attribute - cannot be acquired. I believe good reporters, like sprinters are born rather than made.

With two books under your belt - "The Ibbotson Story" (1958) and the "Encyclopaedia of Athletics" (1964) - you are at present doing research for a third: what will the subject of this be?

The project on which I am at present working is a short history of UK athletics - the First (unless I am pipped!) since the McWhirters' classic "Get to your Marks" some 15 years ago. The book will run to a little over 200 pages and I hope will do for British Athletics what Roberto Quercetani's work has done for the placing in perspective of world achievements. Inevitably, in such a short book, the treatment will be superficial but I shall endeavour to make some of the great names of the past "live" again. I consider it important that each new generation of athletes and athletics followers should remember the trailblazers of the past. This book will have taken over a year of my spare time before it is finished (my deadline for handing over the manuscript to the publishers is October 1966), and all being well should make its appearance in the spring of 1967. I shall later be collaborating with our President on another book; so that will take care of my winter evenings next year!

In 1964 you crossed the United States from east to west and back in a Greyhound bus: could you recall your outstanding moments of what must have been an intriguing journey?

I have always suffered from a travel bug and for many years I had dreamt of a coast-to-coast tour of the USA, a country of which I had many fond memories - having spent a wonderful two weeks in New York in February 1958. As I was not expecting to go to Tokyo, I drew up my plans during the winter of 1963/4 for a whirlwind dash across America. Perhaps I have seen too many Westerns, but the lure of travelling westward across a whole continent was very strong in me. California - that was my objective. Well, the trip indeed proved to be fabulous; all I expected and more. Admittedly, travelling some 8000 miles by bus is not everybody's cup of tea, but it suited me just fine for that is the best way (a) of seeing the country and (b) meeting people from all walks of life. My transcontinental excursion began and ended at Montreal (reason: the cheapest transatlantic air fares are to Montreal) and my itinerary took me through such places as Toronto, Hamilton (scene of the first Empire Games), Detroit, Chicago (tried to locate Willye White during my stopover but no luck - curses!), Omaha, Cheyenne, Laramie (and not a six-shooter in sight), Salt Lake City, Reno, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego (and a flit over the Mexican border to a hell-hole of a place called Tijuana), Grand Canyon, Albuquerque, Oklahoma City, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, New York, Buffalo and back to Toronto and Montreal. All in three weeks.

Highlights, from a scenic point of view, were the Grand Canyon (together with two English girls and an Australian bloke, I walked several miles around the rim in 90-plus temperatures; trust the mad British!) and San Francisco, for my money the most beautiful city on earth. Athletically the Coliseum Relays in Los Angeles was a memorable experience, as was the AAU marathon at Yonkers, N.Y. I got a tremendous kick out of passing through towns whose towns had long captured my imagination, like Kalamazoo and Terre Haute. Best of all were the social contacts; meeting up again with old friends like Dick Bank (with whom I stayed in LA) and Elliot Denman; getting acquainted with long standing pen friends like the Nelson Brothers and Dick Drake (I even visited the renowned PO Box 296) and making a host of new friends and meeting many of the great names in athletics. Truly a memorable experience. That travel bug is still with me, and I'm longing for the day when, once again, I have only the bus to ride.

What do you consider the future prospects for specialist athletics magazines in this country: do you, for instance, envisage 'Athletics Weekly' expanding on the lines of 'Leichtathletik'?

The future looks reasonably secure for the two remaining specialist magazines in this country. I cannot speak for Arena, but not a year goes by without an increase in AW's circulation, the figures having shot up from around 6000 to 10000 in the past five or six years. Clearly, with anything from 30 to 50000 active athletes in Britain - plus ex-athletes, coaches, fans, etc. - there is plenty of scope for future expansion.

Over the years, AW has evolved from a rather parochial publication to what I hope is a magazine of international scope. I am well aware that not everybody shares Jimmy Green's enthusiasm for cross-country and road running and so I feel that the winter issues, in particular, are far better balanced than in the past. This is reflected in the circulation figures; our winter readership is now usually identical to that of the previous summer whereas once we used to lose several hundred readers.

Despite the improvement in AW, I am aware of its shortcomings and shall strive - together with my colleagues - for constant improvement. A magazine on the lines of Leichtathletik would certainly make a worthy and formidable objective, but it must be pointed out that Leichtathletik enjoys far greater resources (technically and financially) than AW is ever likely to, and that Athletics is a booming sport in West Germany with many more participants than in Britain. What AW suffers from is shortage of space; an extra four pages each week would help, for much interesting 'copy' is either severely cut or omitted altogether. Results - the prime function of AW - must always take preference. The key to a larger, more comprehensive magazine is, unfortunately but inevitably greater advertising revenue. An extra couple of pages of ads each issue would work wonders and this is what Jimmy Green is striving for.

THE TAILTEANN GAMES by Maeve Kyle

This most ancient of Assemblies is well recorded in 'The Annals' which are the accepted histories of ancient Ireland. There are many references in both history and legend, and two long poems were specially composed - one in 885 and one in 1007 AD. I have delved into various writings, both in English and Irish, and have tried to give here an account of interest to the average HUF! Statistics have largely been omitted - due to lack of sufficient evidence!

The location of the Assembly was in the most historical part of Ireland - the region of Tara, where the High Kings resided and the home of the major arts of an ancient civilisation. Considerable archeological work has been carried out in this part of Co. Meath, only thirty miles north of Dublin, as it was the centre of the Royal burial mounds (several of which have been opened to reveal a complex system of passages and inner tombs, as well as relics associated with both the living and the dead. The actual venue of the Assembly was on the plain of Meath, a place now occupied by the townland of Teltown. The River Blackwater winds across the area from NW to SE and the Assembly took place in the area on the North Bank. Here there are various earthworks - first the Knockans, or earthen ridges, used for several purposes, but chiefly as a primitive grandstand, for the nobility. There are no less than six 'Raths' or burial mounds - Rath Dubh being the largest - 112 paces round and some 20' high. There are six empty artificial loughs, which seem to have been specially dug out for the water spouts. There are two wells, one a 'marriage well' and the second associated with Christian times and reputed to have miraculous properties. Perhaps the most interesting remains of all are those of the paved road (now known as Cromwell's Road, and the uppermost layer attributed to his road-building); this is a straight way of paving, which seems to have been the path of victors to receive their awards and the plaudits of the Assembly.

The plain on which the games were held is level and was cleared of trees by their founder - Tailtiu, last Queen of the Firbolgs, or 'Water-Carriers', an ancient Irish tribe.

The origin of the Games is part legendary, part historical, but this is the generally accepted version. Tailtiu was wife of Eochaidh, last King of the Firbolgs, and on his death in battle, she married his conqueror, Eochaidh of the Tuatha De Danaun tribe and became a very powerful ruler. She had the Plain of Meath cleared of trees and a great space made for chariot and foot-races and feats of strength on land and

in water. Indeed one story relates that she died of over-exertion (such dedication!!). Be that as it may, she died and funeral games were held in her honour, which lasted for thirty days - from mid-July to mid-August, a time of the year given to festivals in many parts of Britain, to celebrate the fruition of the harvest. This was in the year of the world 3770!! - making the games one of the, if not the, most ancient on record.

The form which the Assembly took was complex, but subject to certain basic rules. The games were presided over by the Ard-Rí, or High King, and were opened with an elaborate ceremony, with men in gorgeous robes - music, poetry and a ritual feast of special wild foods - fish from the Boyne, venison from Luibnech, fruit from the Isle of Man and bilberries from Longford - eaten by the Ard-Rí.

The Aonach (or Fair) continued for thirty days - and many and varied activities went on day and night. There were highly organised sports, feats of strength and skill on land and in water. Wrestling, weight-lifting, stone-throwing, foot races, swimming, up-hill races were contested by individuals; horse-swimming races, horse-racing, and 'faction-fights' - organised teams from tribes with a grudge, settled their differences on the fair green, under the eye of the elders and the court.

We know little of ancient Champions, but there is a legend that Fionn McCuill, as a young boy, challenged the 'boys of Ireland' and won three games. Another ancient hero was Lugaid Laige who won the sovereignty of Ireland by out-running his five brothers in chasing a fawn over three counties, and eventually catching it.

During the Assembly, a truce was observed, all fights, arrests and law-suits were suspended - and certain crimes were completely outlawed - stealing of oxen, killing of cows and the burning of byres. Buying and selling of animals and goods of all kinds went on all day. Marriages were arranged and the marriage was well visited by those concerned; entertainment was provided by side-shows, dancers, singers, storytellers, while actors portrayed the ancient legends of Ireland.

The games continued annually in this form with few breaks until the Norman invasion in 1168, when the last High King of Ireland, Rory, presided over the final Royal Assembly. An Assembly or fair was held in a lesser form until 1770, when the sports were taken across the river. The wrestling, swimming, foot and horse races were held until about 1800 but after this date only the remnants of the ancient traditions survived - the marriage-well, and the horse-swimming - believed to be a protection against disease.

The Assembly never had a religious form, although in Christian times, the clerics usually held prominent positions. St. Patrick is believed to have converted Laoghaire during the Tailteann Games, although he met with fierce hostility from the Assembly.

These ancient games were revived in a modern form in 1924, and held again in 1928. The site was Dublin's Croke Park, and the games were centred on the athletic and cycling events. Swimming and other sports were included in this revival of a National Tradition, but unfortunately it lapsed again until 1963, when the athletic side was held again, in the form of a Junior Tailteann Games. There was a wonderful response from boys under 19 from all over the country, and the organisers were encouraged to continue the Games both in 1964 and 1965. In 1966 swimming is again to be included (open to all age groups) and who knows perhaps in the not too distant future, we will once again see this most ancient of all sporting traditions revived in its fullest form? (P.S. My maternal grandfather was awarded a medal as a member of the organising Council in the 1924 Games - it is one of our most treasured possessions!)

A TIME FOR REFLECTION by Dai Davies

At the end of every year I sit down and study my personal athletic diaries. This is the time when I add up the training mileage accomplished, assess the progress made in each event, and then finally set out the targets for the following year.

It was interesting recently to look back at my diary for 1954. For my thirteenth birthday I was given a stopwatch as a present and my enthusiasm for the sport increased no end. I was fortunate in one respect that I lived on a farm and was thus able to mark out a 220 yard track in the hay field. This track was used so often, particularly during holiday time that my father would often complain about the lack of grass in this field. My eight year old brother was usually my time keeper at the time trials which took place almost every day. Each result would be carefully studied, the lap times calculated, and

numerous graphs drawn.

A few of the records set up in 1954 are listed below :

| | | | |
|-----------|---------|-------|---------|
| 220 yards | 31.4 | 1000m | 3:27.3 |
| 440 yards | 70.4 | 2000m | 7:12.8 |
| 880 yards | 2:34.8 | 3000m | 12:11.9 |
| 1 mile | 5:39.6 | 4000m | 16:22.5 |
| 5 miles | 19:19.9 | 5000m | 20:19.5 |

These times may sound ridiculous nowadays, but eleven years ago, deep in the heart of the Welsh athletics wilderness, where time often seems to stand still, these performances gave immense personal satisfaction.

It is amazing to find now that the half mile graph did not extend beyond 2:10.0 and the mile beyond 5 mins. (this I must have imagined then would be my limit). In 1954 262 miles were covered in training.

On turning the pages of the diary one comes to 1965. A few more miles have been covered in training (3,730 in actual fact!), a few new records have been set up e.g. 1m., 3m., 3000m., and 5000m., but as usually happens each year very few of the targets were achieved.

The targets for 1966 have been written down on a fresh page in the well thumbed diary. Maybe, if I achieve these targets this year I shall apply for membership of the exclusive Cromley Striders Club.

HOW TO SPEND A WINTER SATURDAY by Peter Hopkins

Ever thought of becoming team manager for your club cross country team? Let me give you some idea of the problems involved. The whole thing hinges around the number of athletes you have available. I have had too many and too few - the latter is by far the worse situation. If you have too many you can usually select your top team without much difficulty, and you are usually right. But you are supposed to know that Fred would lose his shoe and that Charlie, who is in the B team would finish in front of him.

It's when you have too few runners that your troubles really start! On the Monday or Tuesday before the race you send out about a dozen cards giving the venue and the rendezvous. You ask anybody unable to run to let you know. You rarely get any replies and on the Saturday morning you think "I reckon we'll get a good turn out today" so off you go to the meeting point armed with thick coat (in case it's cold), a plastic mac (in case it rains), cap, gumboots (it's ALWAYS muddy), a board and plenty of paper, several pencils, a supply of safety pins (organisers have a habit of forgetting these, don't they Charlie), a small plastic bag (so that you can keep your recording cards dry), a large plastic bag (to keep the kit in) and a stopwatch.

Four chaps have turned up - it's a six-to-score trophy meeting so why bother to go. Anyway, the chap with the car hasn't arrived, so you can't go in any case. All this after having rushed home from shopping with the wife (you don't mind this, but she does), doing without your lunchtime pint and gulping down your dinner (there is a pretty high ulcer rate among team managers).

These cards you send out are a bit of a laugh, actually: "You have been selected to represent the club in..... Meet..... at.....". What you really mean is "For God's sake turn up and let's get some sort of team out".

Of course, it's not often that bad. You usually get a team out and you arrive at the dressing accommodation (miles from the start), and while the lads change you collect the numbers and declare the team. Then you try to find the boys to distribute the numbers! Some are getting the feel of the course (fair enough, this) some are looking for their shoes (what do you reckon, Pete, spikes or studs), one member has gone home because another team member swore at him (this actually happened to me), and some just disappear completely. However, you manage to round them all up just before the starting maroon is fired. Wallets, loose change wrapped in handkerchiefs, driving keys, even savings books and jack knives are stuffed into your pockets (you must have a coat with enormous pockets), numbers are pinned on and off they go. Runners never seem surprised, or even grateful, that the track suits they peel off at the start of the race appear again at the finish in a plastic bag safe from the rain and the occasional dog. It is the team manager, of course, who lugs it over. Even this simple task is fraught with difficulty. On occasions at 'The National' for example, only team managers are allowed in the starting pens area and only team recorders are allowed in the finishing area. Only one set of badges is issued to each club, and as an assistant is required to look

after the juniors and youths it is essential to procure a spare set of badges. The best way to do this is to keep last years, but some hawk-eyed stewards even see through this. I always rub mine in the mud. That fools them!

IMMEDIATELY the race is over athletes are prone to ask you for their odds and ends back, to make sure you haven't sold the car or nipped round to the local post office and drawn out the last twenty quid the poor lad has in the world.

You might even hang around for hours because one chap hasn't come in. Then he turns up, spick and span in his walking out suit. "I dropped out on the second lap, didn't anybody tell you? Where's my money I'm starving".

Despite all this it's a grand life and an ideal way of spending a Saturday and you feel an integral part of the comradeship that makes cross country what it is.

STOP PRESS Pat Brian has now moved to 28 Studland Road, Byfleet, Surrey and will be pleased to hear from any member as he is now on the telephone - his number Byfleet 42862.

Our other Patrick, Flying Officer P.S. Mackenzie is back in England again after a spell in the Indian Ocean. He can be located at Officers Mess, RAF Andover, Hants.

Congratulations to Bob and Daphne Phillips on the arrival of their daughter, Francesca, born on March 4th whilst a committee meeting was actually in progress