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LONDON TO BRIGHTON WALK

The great race

Early in 1903 William Bramson, a member of the London Stock Exchange, had the idea that the Exchange should join the current craze of pedestrianism, and that members of the House and their clerks be persuaded to attempt to walk from Westminster Bridge to the sea front at Brighton, a distance of 53 miles, in a time of 12 hours and 30 minutes.

Bramson consulted with a few friends in the Market and subsequently a committee was formed and the organisation of the race was put into motion. Some 94 years later members and clerks of the Stock Exchange are still attempting to do the same.

The idea of such an event caught the imagination of the House and soon they had 110 entries. It was decided no charge would be made for entries and that the first man to complete the course would receive a gold medal, value 10 guineas, with second and third medals to the value of five guineas each. It was also agreed that there would be a sealed handicap race with a silver cup to the value of 10 guineas to the winner, with prizes to second and third, and that Bramson would be responsible for the handicapping. Because of the amount of organisation required, it was agreed that the race should be held on 1 May, that being a Stock Exchange holiday. Entrants started training, some even employed professional trainers, and mem-

bers were sighted striding through the country roads most weekends.

Near the date several sweepstakes were organised in the House, the largest being in the Kaffir market with a first prize of £350. By the eve of the race bets of several thousands of pounds were made and it was reported some market pitches resembled miniature Tattersalls.

On the day of the race the weather was wet and windy. The race had had much publicity and it was reported that 30,000 spectators were in the Westminster Bridge area. Because of the crush, the competitors failed to reach the start line at the official time and the race started with the bulk of the competitors three minutes late. A large number of mounted and foot police were required to clear a passage through the human mass to allow the 87 official starters to proceed the first few miles.

Prominent companies were present on the road advertising their wares. Among the most popular were the OXO cars, who handed competitors refreshments which included OXO, hot or cold, OXO and Champagne, OXO and soda, rice puddings, cheese, biscuits, bananas and apples.

The winner of this first race was E F Broad, a clerk with the broking firm of Marsden & Co, who completed the course in nine hours 30 minutes one second, and the winner of the sealed handicap was S E Knight in 10 hours 8 minutes 30 seconds. Of the 87 starters, 77 completed the

course in the allotted time. In 1910 the Stock Exchange Athletic Club was formed and has been responsible for the organisation of the races since, although the second race was not until 1912.

This year's race will be held on 1st May and is the 74th walk. The winner of the race will hold the William Bramson Perpetual Challenge Trophy for the inter-firm team race and the H A Dunkley Cup for the sealed handicap, and several other trophies present a magnificent display of silverware.

Since the first race 1,184 Stock Exchange members and clerks have completed the course in the allotted time. To date only one lady has been successful, Miss Louise Clamp in 1993 in a time of 11 hours 28 minutes 10 seconds. All walkers who complete the Challenge are entitled to wear the Stock Exchange London to Brighton tie – it is maroon, with the Stock Exchange crest and the Brighton Corporation crest upon it.

Stock Exchange walkers have represented Great Britain in Olympic and European championships and various other International competitions. The most successful being S F Vickers who won European Gold and Olympic Bronze medals at 20 kilometres, R C Hall and D Tunbridge, European championships at 50 kilometres, R E Green in the Milan 100 kilometres, D Harman and A James in International matches at 20 kilometres. □

Brian Ficken, Keith Bayley Rogers

This could be the last time that the race is held due to lack of support. Any walkers should contact the Stock Exchange Athletic Club Committee.