

Frank Hewitt

c1845-1926

Millwall

Early life.

Frank was born in 1844 in Millwall but came to reside in Sheffield. (*Census returns indicate he was born in Limerick-Ireland*) Sheffield was a place he subsequently became so closely attached to by ties of friendship and pedestrianism. His long and continuous residence here might reasonably entitle him to be included among those runners of Sheffield who have so frequently and meritoriously added distinction to a reputation, worldwide in popularity and public esteem.

His parents were seldom referred to in general conversation although his father was a captain in a well-known infantry regiment. His unswerving consideration for his mother, coupled with his superior education and high musical qualifications always stamped Hewitt as being above the average of those with whom he was generally associated. His ever erect, clean built and muscular form of 5 foot 9 inches was most noticeable and easily secured that favour that so materially helped him in the attainment of what seemed the ever present object of his youth; to be a perfect runner of a perfect race.

Early athletic career.

As a youth Hewitt was never once beaten on the track and yet his reputation was one of quiet and unobtrusive brilliance. He was never the boy to talk much, but rather given to quietly "take down" those who were more frequently heard to boast and brag of their achievements.

His promising abilities as a really classical runner were quickly recognised by Mr Joseph Mellor of Sheffield, who took a very active and personal interest in having Hewitt quietly but professionally prepared by Fleming of Walsall. Hewitt ultimately returned to Sheffield and resided with Mr J Peach at the White Hart, Waingate (Harry Shaw's old house). He trained at Hyde Park under Joe Haigh until it was thought advisable to go to Henley near Huddersfield where he would be unseen by those at home and unknown by those abroad.

Cobbler Wood gets his just desserts!

While training at Hyde Park Hewitt was often the "butt" of Cobbler Wood, an undoubted flier at the time. Wood had won a Sheffield Handicap and was now in training with Hewitt. Whenever an opportunity occurred this man seemed to take every chance to insult and abuse Hewitt. He was giving vent to that spirit of jealousy which had grown keener and keener every time the pair met.

One day things came to a climax and by permission in the stripping room Hewitt had such a superior knowledge of the use of ungloved hands that Cobbler soon sustained the severest chastisement that he had ever been subjected to since the days of his cradlehood. Ever afterwards the 2 men became inseparable pals and the most congenial of companions. More remarkable still was the match made between the 2 runners for 350 a side over 140 yards at Hyde Park. Laddie Ledger tossed up with Tom Sherdon, a winner in 1860 and who had defeated Tom Wilkinson. The men were dispatched to a perfect start before a very select and private audience. Hewitt won in the easiest possible manner by yards and in breaking the tape vaulted a perfect somersault to the utter astonishment of the whole assembly.

Other races.

After this remarkable victory Hewitt (who never run for less than 350 a side) went to the Manchester Royal Oak Grounds where he met Jimmy Rothwell of Bury who had three times come 2nd in the Sheffield Handicaps. Hewitt won this easily.

His trained continued in Sheffield and the next match was over 400 yards against J Nuttall of Manchester who had twice won the Sheffield Handicaps. This took place in Hyde Park and again Hewitt won. A month later he beat Ridley of Gateshead on the same track over half mile.

Hewitt then entered the Great All England 205 yard Handicap during the Doncaster race week in September 1865. 110 competitors were drawn from all parts of the country.

Hewitt was soon installed as favourite and had a walk over in his heat. He won the final the following day from D Morton and J Simmonite.

He then won a great mile race in Scotland against Bird of Sheffield. When he returned to Sheffield he received numerous invitations from all parts of the country.

Australia.

About that time he was staying with George Mode on Langsett Road (next to the Queens Grounds) and he was introduced to a stranger. After carefully considering his invitation Hewitt accepted the conditions to go to Australia along with Bird of Sheffield and George Topley of London. Laddie Ledger accompanied the trio there. The entire party was invited to Coppin's Theatre, the largest hall in Melbourne. During the evening all three were introduced from the stage to the audience whose reception of the athletes knew no bounds. After order had been restored in the building it was announced that Mr Frank Hewitt, the English Champion from 100-1,000 yards would favour with a banjo recital. When concluded such a scene was enacted by the hearers as could never be compared to another of the kind. The people were almost frantic and the cries of encore were terrible for fully 20 minutes. In order to appease the clamour of an almost wild assembly he sang "Sally in the alley" and later followed with "Pilgrim of Love."

Afterwards Messrs Joe Barney and Jack Thompson stood in with Mr Coppin and Mr Pickersgill at the various expenses of all the athletes. They assumed directorship for several years of all their athletic engagements in the Antipodes.

It was at the great athletic meeting of Littlewood in Australia on 1st September 1871 that Hewitt reduced the Australian record of 1 min 55 for the half mile to 1 minute 53 seconds. This is a professional record unbeaten to this day. At the close of the tour Topley returned to England but died soon afterwards. Hewitt and Bird decided to remain in the country of their adoption but Ledger returned home to Sheffield.

About 6 years ago Frank Hewitt passed away from scenes of life in Melbourne. Bird, who resided in Sydney for many years, soon followed him.

There are many articles about Frank Hewitt in newspapers of the time about his athletic and other activities.

An 1882 report on a pigeon shooting match in West Maitland, Australia. Mr Bussell had a publican's booth on the ground and it appeared to be busy dispensing his liquid wares. He also provided a capital luncheon. There were no games of chance on the ground but a couple of bookmakers-one of whom was Frank Hewitt of pedestrian renown-did a good deal of betting.

He is also on some of the Victorian census returns.

1861 Census. Frank is aged 15 and living at 22A Military Road, Chatham, Kent. His birthplace is stated as Limerick. At home is his mother, Sarah, a merchant's widow and his sister Georgina aged 18.

Postscript

Sydney Morning Herald 8th May 1922

"The well known ex-champion athlete Frank Skurry Hewitt will celebrate his 77th birthday... Mr Hewitt, although advanced in years is hale and hearty."

Hobart Mercury 12th June 1926

There is a report on the death of Frank Hewitt, the English runner in Sydney a few days ago.



FRANK SKURRY HEWITT.
Frank Hewitt (Sydney Referee 1908)

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