

MINUTES OF THE 85th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO ON WEDNESDAY 24th FEBRUARY 2016

Present: - Rupert Clark – Chairman & Treasurer
Peter Cole - Secretary.

1. Chairman's Report

In last week's Banbury Guardian, Peter Smith was featured; he was presented with the French Legion d'Honneur by the Lord-Lieutenant of Northamptonshire for his service during the D-Day invasion and subsequent liberation of France in 1945. He was our very first speaker in 2007, when he told us how he had restored the Ice House at Aynhoe Park.

2. Secretary's Report

A copy has been obtained of the proclamation sent by King Charles to London and Westminster when he spent a night here at Aynhoe Park after the Civil War battle of Edgehill on October 24th 1642. It had previously been thought that he came here immediately after the battle, but the document is dated 27th October, and further investigation revealed that it was not until three days later that he and his army left the site for Aynho.

Peter had managed to find a photograph of a particular locomotive, which had done construction work on the new line from Aynho to London in 1906, and had then gone on to work in Wales, which had been requested by a society there interested in old railway lines in that area.

3. "The 1948 London Olympics, its impact then and now" by Mike Martineau

This is all about social history – 1948 the year that Britain hosted the Olympic Games. Mike's father, Herbert A Martineau, participated in the Games in the 50 Kilometres Walk. Mike produced his Olympic vest, bronze medal, his letter of selection, photographs and his certificate for taking part. Each British participant in the Games was given a bronze medal, if you also happened to come third in your event you received a second!

The King opened the Games on the 29th July. The temperature was 93 degrees, and this was the hottest day in England since 1911. It had the Hallelujah Chorus as its main theme. For those who followed their sport on the radio, for the legendary Kenneth Wolstenholme, this was had his first major commentating job.

Mike's dad had taken part in all sorts of athletic events, long-jumping and running, but in 1935 he entered a walking race for the first time. It was the Surrey Walking Club novice's race, and he won quite easily, so from then on this was his main event. His athletic club badge featured the swastika, within months this was dropped due to the rise of Hitler. Herbert worked during the week for the Radio Times, and at the weekend for the News of the World. He was a Trades Unionist, very left-wing and didn't like management. He ended his career working for Maxwell and Murdoch. He detested them both. When Maxwell died, he said "One down, one to go!" He only had one day off per week, and that was after a Saturday night shift from 6 pm till 7 am is when he did his training. In his words, "he would put on a pair of slacks, and stroll down to Brighton", He lived in Clapham: that was his long-distance training. The News of the World finally realised that one of their own was going to feature in the Games, so they sent a photographer round to picture him at work. Herbert's colleagues threw him out, saying that if the bosses wouldn't give him a night off just before the Olympics, they weren't getting a photo.

The 1948 50 km race was won by John Ljunggren, a Swede. The Swedes ended up second in the medals table. Some think that this was because they were neutral in the war, so their training programme wasn't disrupted. They would have won another gold medal but for the fact that the equestrian rider who won the event was disqualified as he wasn't an officer in the Army, just a sergeant. Herbert finished a very respectable 5th particularly as the temperature in the stadium hit 91 degrees. Nowadays races start at 9 or 10 in the morning, well before it gets too hot. They hadn't cottoned onto this in 1948, so the race didn't start until it was really hot at 1.50. Furthermore there was no great understanding of the needs of the body, so unlike today, where there are water stations every mile, hardly any water was available en route.

A number of household names were in the British team; Harold Abrahams, the ex sprinter was team manager. During the 50 Kilometres, another athlete, Jack Braughton from Sidcup, who is still alive at 95, was competing against Emil Zatopek in the 5,000 metres. Jack was a builder, and he wasn't given time off to compete. He had to take the day off unpaid, and he didn't appear on the team photo, because he couldn't afford to take another day off unpaid. Another athlete there was Bill Nankeville, better known as the father of comedian Bobby Davro. An Iranian boxer, who had never previously left his country, discovered the fleshpots of London, and disappeared for two days before his first bout. He was knocked out in the first round, and later emigrated to America, where he became the father of tennis player Andre Agassi. Sidney Wooderson had set a new mile record in 1937, the half mile in 1938 and the ¾ of a mile in 1939. But for the War he would almost certainly have got an Olympic gold. He chose not to compete in the 1948 games, as he had other priorities then.

Before the 2012 Olympics the doomsters predicted that we would never be able to get everything ready in time, and it turned out to be a great success. Exactly the same thing happened in 1948. Nobody believed for a minute that we could successfully stage an Olympics, somewhat surprisingly the Games made a profit of £30,000. The 2012 Olympics featured the Queen appearing to parachute into the arena with James Bond. There was a link to Bond in the 1948 games, as an American weightlifter there was Harold Sakata, who went on to play "Odd Job" in Bond movies. There was only one black face in the British team photo, McDonald Bailey, a West Indian sprinter. How different from today.

Although the Olympic movement was founded in 1896, it wasn't until 1928 that any ladies were allowed to take part, then only in 5 events. Even in 1948 there were only 9 events, as opposed to 23 for men. Fanny Blankers-Koen from Holland had set several world records in 1936. In the 1948 Games, as a 30 year old mother of two, she won four gold medals, 100 metres, 200 metres, 80 metres hurdles and 4 by 100 metres relay. She would have won more, but she was limited to four events. Less than 10% of competitors in the Games were women.

In 1948 Britain only won three gold medals, two in rowing and one in sailing. One of the winners of the rowing pairs was Randal Laurie, father of Hugh Laurie. The Germans weren't there of course, but in a way they made their presence felt, as the Olympic Way up to the Wembley Stadium was in fact built by German prisoners of war.

4. Forthcoming Meetings

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| March 30 th | "Out of Tragedy came forth liberation" - civilian and military evacuation in World War 2 |
| April 27 th | "The Mary Rose, a window into Tudor life at sea" |