

Civil Service Athletic Association

(in association with the Civil Service Sports Council)

After being given a photocopy of the Civil Service Sports Programme for 1901 I thought it would be interesting to document some of the early history surrounding the present day Civil Service Athletic Association and the types of event held plus some of the personalities who attended or competed.

Early Civil Service Track & Field Championships

The CSAA held its first Championships in 1864 when they were simply known as the Civil Service Athletic Sports. The events contested in this year were: 100 Yards, Hurdle Race, Quarter-Mile, Half-Mile, 1 Mile Challenge Cup, 3 Miles Walk, High Jump, Broad Jump, Pole Leaping, Cricket Ball, Putting the Stone, Throwing the Hammer, Hopping 50 Yards and Consolation Race 200 Yards.

In the next few years additional events such as 220 Yards Challenge Cup, 250 Yards, 300 Yards Handicap, 600 Yards Maiden Race, 2 Miles, Steeplechase, Vaulting and Strangers Race were added, but not always contested.

According to 'The Official Centenary History of the AAA' by Peter Lovesey the Civil Service held these first sports on 22nd and 23rd April at Beaufort House in West London. With regard to the development of athletic meetings in the late nineteenth century members of the Stock Exchange, Civil Servants, army officers and solicitors competed regularly at Brampton, Hackney Wick and Bow.

In 1880 the Amateur Athletic Association was established and is stated to be the world's oldest national governing body. Obviously the CSAA pre-dated this event but was not a 'national' governing body. However, it is clear that Civil Servants were instrumental in the development of athletics in the following decades as the AAA was managed by a General Committee that was composed of representatives from various bodies including the Civil Service Club.

An interesting fact from 'The Official Centenary History of the AAA' states that "in 1868 Bram Stoker, the author of Dracula, came to London and competed in the Civil Service Championships. He finished first in the 5 mile walk and was only disqualified afterwards, presumably by a judge who preferred to remain anonymous." A footnote to the CSAA results from 1868 confirms that the 3 Mile Walk was in fact 5 miles and that A Stoker and R M Williams, who came first and second respectively, were disqualified.

A programme from the 38th Annual Civil Service Athletic Sports states that the meeting was held at Stamford Bridge, Fulham Road on Saturday 27th July 1901, under the Management of the Civil Service Athletic Association who were affiliated to the AAA with the Bicycle Race under NCU Rules. At this time the President of the Association was Field Marshal His Royal Highness The Duke of Cambridge.

Departments listed in the Programme included Savings Bank, London Postal Service, Central Telegraph Office, Money Order Office and Receiver and Accountant-General's Office. The competitors instructions were: "*Competitors to meet in the Pavilion ten minutes before the time fixed for each Race, and answer their names to the Clerks of the Course, from whom they must obtain numbered badges. A Competitor over-stepping his mark before the pistol has been fired will be put back one yard for distances up to and including 220 yards; 2 yards up to and including 440 yards; 3 yards up to and including 880 yards; and 5 yards for up to one mile or more. Penalties to be doubled on second offence; and disqualification to follow a repetition of the same offence. One caution only will be allowed in the Walking Race. No caution in the last lap.*"

By 1901 the number of events had increased and competitors could enter: 100 Yards (Members), One Mile Bicycle Handicap, Boys' Race 120 Yards (open to sons and brothers of Civil Servants over 10 and under 15 years of age; 5 yards start allowed for each year under 15), 120 Yards Handicap (Members), Putting the Shot, 120 Yards (Strangers' Race), Half-Mile Handicap (Members), Two Miles Walking Race, The Princess Mary Adelaide Cup Veterans Race 150 Yards open to members of 40 years and upwards, 1¼ yard start allowed for each year above 40, winners of the last three years penalised. This was in commemoration of Her Royal Highness' visits to the Civil Service Sports in 1879 and 1880.

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Continuing the events were: One Mile Strangers Race (max handicap 150 yards), 120 Yards Hurdle Handicap (Strangers), 300 Yards Maiden Race, 440 Yards Handicap (Strangers), High Jump, 600 Yards "Strathcona" Challenge Cup which was presented by Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal K.C.M.G in 1901 and is now awarded to the winner of the Men's 1500m present day. Boys' Race for 6 to 10 year olds, 880 Yards Relay Race, Mile Race (Members) and finally the 300 Yards Invitation Race.

The meeting was due to start at 14.30 and conclude at 18.15 with the Presentation of Prizes by Lord and Lady Strathcona and Mount Royal. (Note: This title was created in 1900 for the Scottish born Canadian financier and politician Sir Donald Smith). There was also a Programme of Music performed by the Blue Viennese Band commencing at 14.30 with 17 items listed including pieces by Elgar, Strauss and Verdi. As this was the 60th year of Queen Victoria's reign a Diamond Jubilee Challenge Cup was instituted based on performances in nominated events. The Programme also lists all the previous event winners since 1864 with various footnotes regarding records and points of interest.

From 1880 the names of those who presented the prizes were added and they include: Mrs W E Gladstone, The Duke and Duchess of Connaught, The Earl and Countess of Granville, Montague Sherman (competed in the first ever international match on 5/6/1876), The Speaker of the House of Commons and Mrs Peel and The Duke and Duchess of York.

In 1882 Walter G George set a mile record of 4 min 19.4 sec and had won every honour open to him in the amateur ranks, holding the world record from 1 mile to 10 miles. The following year William Snook, Mosseley Harriers, took the Open Handicap Mile title. Snook also won eight AAA titles and was a National Cross Country Champion but was also the first man to be suspended by the AAA! Others who competed in the 1876 international also competed in Civil Service Sports events around this time.

Other Sources of information

From a History of the County of Middlesex a section on athletics includes the following:

"Another old and still prominent club holding its meetings at Stamford Bridge is the Civil Service Athletic Club, whose members are drawn from the various branches of His Majesty's Civil Service. This club held its first meeting in 1864 at Brompton and, like the L.A.C., moved to Lillie Bridge in 1869, and finally to Stamford Bridge, where it held its forty-fourth meeting in June 1907. The Civil Service Athletic Club includes several open events in its programme which always attract good entries from the best athletes of the day."

From George R. Sims (ed.), Living London, 1902

"Of the more strictly athletic meetings, that promoted by the members of the Civil Service stands pre-eminent. Not only is it one of the oldest annual gatherings in the country (it dates back to 1864), but there is always a likelihood on these occasions of a record being broken, either by a member of the promoting club or in one of the strangers' races. These latter usually attract a number of the best athletes of the day, so that good performances are far from uncommon. Thus, to quote only a few, in 1874 Mr. W. Slade made the then record for the distance in the mile "strangers" race, while three years later, in the first heat of the "strangers" 150 yards, Mr. J. Shearman accomplished a similar feat. A few years later even finer performances were recorded, Mr. W. G. George making a fresh mile record of 4 min. 19 2/5 sec. in the Open Handicap at that distance in 1882, while Mr. L. E. Myers, in 1885, won the open 440 yards in 48 4/5 sec. In 1888 and 1893 Messrs. Tindall and Bredin won the 600 yards race in 1 min. 12 3/5 sec. and 1 min. 11 2/5, sec. respectively.

It should also be remembered that several amateur champions have been members of the Civil Service, and that the ranks of the cross-country clubs are largely recruited from that body, so that it will be readily admitted that the "closed" races possess an interest far greater than that which usually attaches to club events."

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Sources:

CSAA Programme 1901

The Official Centenary History of the AAA' by Peter Lovesey 1979

A History of the County of Middlesex 1911

at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22199>)

George R. Sims (ed.), Living London, 1902

at <http://www.victorianlondon.org/entertainment/athletics.htm>

Nick Hume

CSAA General Secretary

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