

The Brighton Road

The highway from London down to Brighton has seen many challenges, wagers, and sporting endeavours. Roman feet once tramped the London end of the way, where it follows the line of Stane Street, leading to Chichester, but Brighton itself only came into being in the 5th century when Saxon hands built a settlement that came to be a fishing village and market town. Twice burned by the French, occasionally devastated by storms, it was not until the mid-18th century when one Dr Russell took up residence and recommended sea-bathing for the cure of ailments that it became a spa town, and the wealthier set began to visit in numbers. The final seal of approval for the resort came in 1783 when George, the eldest son of George III and later Prince Regent, first visited the town. It was then that the challenges began: to ride or walk or run from London to Brighton – and sometimes back again.

Captain Robertson walked from Brighton to London and back in 45 hours in July 1803 and repeated the feat before the year was out, covering the 53 miles from Brighton to Westminster Bridge in 14 hours. The following year a route from Hammersmith to Brighton was taken by John Bell who covered the one-way distance in 45 seconds over 13 hours. Road improvements made a 9 hours 50 minutes run possible by 1825 and by the time the 19th century was coming to a close, properly authenticated races were being organised for both professional and amateur runners. F.D. Randall covered the route from Westminster in a South London Harriers arranged event, taking just 6 hrs 58 mins 18 secs, while in 1903, one of the leading professional distance runners of the period, Len Hurst, reduced the best time to 6 hrs 32 mins 34 secs. Twenty-one years then passed before a runner again bested the London to Brighton record: the great ultra-distance runner Arthur Newton. He made two attempts, recording 6 hrs 11 mins and 4 secs, and followed up just over a month later with 5 hrs 53 mins 43 secs; he reached the marathon mark during that run in 2 hours, 43 minutes, which was only 1½ minutes slower than the winner's time in the Olympic marathon of that year.

1921 – A successful experiment

By now an idea had germinated in the mind of a member of Surrey Athletic Club. How fast could a team of men operating in relays tackle the route? Mr Edward F. Vowles¹, a leading light and the founder of the club, studied the course and worked out easily manageable sections. Perhaps ten men would be the optimum number, running an average of just over 5 miles each. He estimated an overall time of about 4 hours and 40 minutes and admitted that the primary object of the endeavour was an experiment, and for the club to gain experience before possibly promoting an open team race of a similar character. The plans came together and on the allotted date and time – mid-day on Wednesday, February 16th, 1921 – ten men with three reserves who had undergone rigorous preparation went into action. Traffic was held up for a while in the vicinity of Westminster Bridge, but everything ran smoothly and 4 hrs 39 mins 43 ³/₅ secs later the tenth runner was greeted by about 500 people gathered outside the Brighton Aquarium in Marine Parade. Vowles' predicted time was beaten by just under 17 seconds.

The experiment was hailed as a great success and the running world looked forward to an out and out race over the same course, but the cost of the enterprise had come to around £70, the equivalent of about £3,600 a century later; it was too great a sum for the Surrey club to bear. But the idea did not go away, thanks in large part to the intervention of the legendary Joe Binks², athletics correspondent of *The News of the World*, who managed to persuade his newspaper to consider underwriting the costs.



¹ E.F. Vowles was a remarkable man. Apart from founding Malden Harriers in 1903, based at the Railway Hotel in New Malden, he was behind the change of name to Surrey Athletic Club in 1908 as he felt that the former title was too parochial. The men's section of this club eventually amalgamated with Belgrave Harriers in 1986. Back in the early 20th century there was little for the Race Walkers to take part in during winter months so, in 1906, he organised a 10 Miles Team Race Walk from the Railway Hotel to the Spring Hotel in Ewell. It was so well supported that a meeting was called at the Edinburgh Hotel, Strand, and the Race Walking Association was formed. He later became an official race starter. Starters generally wore white jackets but because these officials needed to be easily identified at large meetings, his wife suggested that he adopt a red jacket, and in 1934 when starting at the White City he duly appeared in this colourful get-up. It proved to be such a success that from thereon the official garb of starters and marksmen became the red coat.

² Joe Binks was one time British one mile record-holder and served as a correspondent for the *News of the World* for 54 years.

Westminster to Brighton – 1924 to 1931

By October 1923, *The Sportsman* newspaper was able to announce that the Southern Committee of the Amateur Athletic Association had granted the *News of the World* Sports Club a permit to promote an invitation relay race from London to Brighton. The event was planned to be held on January 5th, 1924, and soon the sports columns were devoting space to the entries from sixteen clubs – all of them from the Southern area. Belgrave Harriers did not warrant an invitation. Due to an objection by the police, the course was to be some two miles further than the trial run three years earlier and, avoiding Croydon, took a different route out of the metropolis, joining the earlier course at Purley.

The organisation was superb. Changing accommodation was at the Westminster Baths, Great Smith Street, and nine motor coaches had been hired to carry the runners for each stage to their starting locations. The field was to be headed by an official car and at every point where a corner was turned, a man holding a *News of the World* fingerpost was positioned to direct the runners along the correct route.

Long before the 11 am start on race day, enormous crowds had gathered in the roadway from Westminster Abbey along the riverside, to watch the first stage runners set out, and they were rewarded with the sight of a runner from Cambridge Harriers making an early bid for the front. Brighton & County led at Wandsworth Common Station, but Surrey AC was handily placed and soon took a lead that was not to be relinquished over the remaining 49 miles. Hordes of onlookers greeted the runners along the course and the sporting press rightly praised the winners and the new chapter that had been opened in the sport of running.

In retrospect, organising a race of such length in early January was a risky affair, and a few days after the 1924 event some of the heaviest snowfalls in years were recorded over much of the country. No surprise, then, that the 1925 race was switched to a time of year that became a more traditional spot for 'the longest relay' – April – and even then, strong south-westerly gales and driving rain faced the 17 starters as they lined up at Westminster. Changes had been made to the course, giving a total distance of 53 miles 1,432 yards, and for a decade this became the basis for future runs over the Brighton Road, although occasionally the route was varied by a few hundred yards on certain stages. Another departure was an invitation to a team from outside the Southern area; thus, Birchfield Harriers, team winners of every National Cross-Country Championship since 1920, took their place on the start-line. With all but two of their squad international runners, the Midland club did not disappoint. From the instant that their lead runner, Blewitt, set out in the drizzle, negotiating slippery tramlines and heavy traffic, they took a lead which was held from start to finish and beat the second-placed team to the South Coast by well over seven minutes.

1926 – Enter the 'Bels'

Having progressed to a stage where Belgrave had taken their first Surrey County Cross-Country title the Club was deemed worthy of an invitation to compete in the 1926 'Brighton Relay,' and great was the joy expressed by members of the day when Harry Bruce took Belgrave colours to the start-line in Palace Yard. A love affair with the 'Brighton Relay' and subsequent National Road Relay had begun. A final place in the top dozen had been hoped for, which would achieve automatic qualification for the following year's race. Harry made a scintillating start, but a setback was awaiting the Bels when an injured reserve struggled badly, and much time was lost. Both Jimmy Flatt and Bert Footer ran second fastest on their stages, the latter covering the stiffest part of the race where the route climbed to the top of the South Downs at Pyecombe. But overall consistency was lacking in this first attempt and a final place of 14th had to be settled for.

Confusion was rife at several of the takeovers where official vehicles and crowds of supporters hindered proceedings. Footer had to leap across the bonnets of a couple of cars before setting out on his stint. Earlier, just beyond Mitcham on the third stage, the Birchfield leader found a railway level-crossing gate shutting in his face as he approached it. Disregarding safety he quickly vaulted the barrier and set off again. Behind him, the Surrey AC runner did likewise and barely got across the railway track as an engine pulled away from the 'halt.' No other runner could get over until the train had passed, for the Surrey man had cut it very fine. At Brighton itself, a mile-long procession of cyclists and cars accompanied Birchfield's last man as he approached the finish. Despite all this, the first two clubs finished well inside the record time. After hot sea-water baths at Brill's Baths³ and their first formal 'tea' as guests of the *News of the World*, the Belgrave boys looked on with envy during the presentation as Birchfield Harriers received their gold medals. A strong assertion was made that one day the Bels would win those prizes, but it would be a little while yet.

³ *Brills Baths* opened in August 1869 and was once one of the most fashionable of bathing places. It was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott – famed for prominent public buildings such as the Albert Memorial and the Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras Station. The building was demolished in 1929.



1926, and Belgrave's love affair with the long road relays begins. Wearing B1, and sixth runner from the left, Harry Bruce makes a bold start from Westminster's Palace Yard. Twenty-six years later, in 1952, Harry's son Arthur 'Boofer' Bruce duly took up his place in the pantheon of Belgrave road relay runners

1927 - Hopes and reality do not readily coincide

The London to Brighton Relay was truly catching hold of the public's imagination by 1927. Newspaper correspondents wrote about the race in terms similar to those used for the Varsity Boat Race, the Grand National, and other major events in the sporting calendar. It was an era of record-breaking and human endeavour. Malcolm Campbell had improved the British-held world land speed record in February, taking his motor-car Bluebird to over 174 miles per hour for a flying mile on Pendine Sands, Carmarthen; in the United States the Wood brothers were gearing up for a crack at the world water speed record. So, just how fast could a team of ten men run the 50-odd miles from the capital to Brighton?

The *News of the World* stepped up the organisation of the relay to another level. A magnificent silver trophy gilded with gold and valued at 100 guineas (approaching £7,000 today) was now to be presented to the winning team and medals would be awarded to the first four teams. That trophy, minus its lid and now almost devoid of its gilding, is still presented to the winners of the National 12 Stage Relay today.

In Belgrave circles, hopes were high for an improved placing at the Club's second attempt and after finishing 2nd to Slough Athletic Club in the trial at Mitcham, again a top twelve position was being predicted. But as has often been the case over the years in the long relays, hopes and reality do not readily coincide. The selected first stage man 'Micky' Pyer had to pull out on the day, reporting a 'crocked' leg. All was not over yet, however, as from Mitcham to Purley in much poorer conditions and over a slightly longer course 'Alby' Smith almost matched his blistering run of a year earlier; he set the third-best time of the day in taking the Bels up to 9th. Bill Rice held the position but, sadly, from there on it was a slow and miserable slide down to 17th. Descriptions of "depressing," "disappointing" and "a sorry show" were later mentioned in the Club's newsletter. But the runners were not down for long, enlivened by the fun of the team bus breaking down on the way home; and they showed signs of possessing melodious voices – no doubt

lubricated by the refreshment imbibed at a hostelry on the way back to London, a tradition continued for the next four decades.

1928 – Meticulous preparation begins to pay dividends

With the 'Brighton' trial race successfully won – by over 2 minutes – a third attempt was thus earned for the main event a month later. Attention was turned to thorough preparation. A private 'bus was engaged to transport the team and supporters, and with the copious use of claret and gold paper to screen the windows and with a curtain installed to partition off the changing area, it was transformed into a dressing-room. Each runner would now be able to receive attention from the 'trainer' before and after his effort. The top of the bus was used as a grandstand for supporters. So, Belgrave team members would be among friendly faces right up to and after race-time, rather than sitting on the official bus carrying all the other runners for just the one stage.

For a change, race day dawned fine. As the first stage runners lined up, The Lord Mayor of London, Sir Charles Batho, handed a letter to the Birchfield man for it to be relayed down to The Mayor of Brighton. Sir Charles had obviously studied the formbook, for the man he chose to carry the message set about smashing his own stage record for the initial relay leg and his club were barely troubled all the way to Brighton. It was Birchfield's third win in four years, beating the Hallamshire team by a couple of minutes. Midlanders Tipton Harriers – a club to feature highly in the years ahead – made a fine debut in 9th. Traffic congestion was still causing the odd problem, for at Horley, on the 5th stage, the timekeepers' car was held up and they arrived at the takeover behind the leading runner who was denied a record as a result. There was nearly chaos, too, at the finish. Great crowds were assembled as normal but as the lead runner from Birchfield neared, a fire engine dashed through with bell a-ringing, scattering the unwary, en route to attend a blaze.

Much pre-race talk had been of the 'running order' and it had still been felt that several of the stronger runners should be kept back for the last few stages. The Bels had done well with most men enjoying the favourable conditions to improve on previous best times; but of course, the conditions benefited all teams so the advance after careful planning was not as dramatic as was intended. Nevertheless, a position of 12th on the seafront ensured automatic qualification for the following year's race and the team had run their best time by over eleven minutes. Outside of Belgrave Harriers, too, it was noted that the Bels were setting their sights on 'the Brighton' in serious fashion, and applications for membership were soon received from Arthur Allum, formerly of Surrey AC, and from brothers T.J. 'Joe' and Jack Flower, both resigning from Kensington AC (a third brother followed a year later). These three supported the team hugely until the war years, and their additional talent encouraged the team management to do what some had been carping on about for some time – start strong and make sure that the squad remained in contention until the gaps opened, giving a buffer over chasing clubs.

1929 – Most improved team

At last, it all started coming together. New man Jack Flower was entrusted with the first stage and with the Belgrave bus waiting at Clapham Common, the crowd on the top deck were delighted to see that the bunch of four runners, some eighty yards behind the Birchfield leader, included the Belgravian. Jack had had a fine run and as he handed over to brother Joe, was found to have beaten the previous Club best by 24 seconds. The Club had occupied 5th spot before at the end of the opening leg but had never been so close to the main contenders. With the bus waiting for Jack to be hauled aboard, it was a while before the leaders could be brought into view again, but what delight, then, to find that a trio were catching the leader, among them our Club mile-champion Joe Flower. Soon Hallamshire's Griffiths and Joe were side by side as they swept past the Birchfield man and into the lead. At Mitcham Common Griffiths had got the upper hand, but only 12 seconds later came 'our Joe' in 2nd, smashing the Club Record by nearly two minutes.

It was Alby Smith's fourth time at adeptly handling the run from Mitcham to Purley, and by the time he sent new boy Arthur Allum away to set the team's third Club Record of the day, and he in turn handed over to Bill Mitchell, the Bels were solidly occupying 4th place with the 5th team nearly a minute behind. Bill, our 10-mile Champion, took on an international line-up including Tipton's Jack Holden, yet he managed to move up to 3rd and set yet another record. So, at 26½ miles – roughly halfway – the Bels were 2½ minutes ahead of the Club's previous best time. It surely could not last. But even with an unfit Micky Pyer, and the Club's popular Hon Secretary Wally Bayliss pushed out onto the A23 – albeit with 21-year-old future international Arthur Penny sandwiched between them – 4th spot was still being held. Bert Footer unfortunately had a poor day by his standards, slipping to 6th, and Running Secretary Ernie Duffett lost one further place, to South London Harriers, as he entered Brighton.

It had been a cracking race up front as well. Birchfield had regained the lead on stage three and held it all the way to the outskirts of Brighton where they were overhauled by Hallamshire. Times for the full distance were slow, due to a persistent cold head wind, but whereas many teams were four to nine minutes down on 1928, the Bels were just 11 seconds adrift. The fine performance of the boys in claret and gold brought them their first set of medals for the event

– those awarded to the most improved team. It was a day not to be forgotten, and further enlivened by the lively banter and taunts exchanged along the King's highway between the occupants of the buses of the Bels and Herne Hill Harriers.



This shot, at the second takeover area at Mitcham in 1929, gives an idea of the confusion that had to be overcome by the runners. Hallamshire H and Belgrave H have already gone through. Surrey AC are in 3rd place as R.E. Hipperson (T7) hands over to Sgt. J.M. Flanagan (T1), with Aldershot Command almost beside them in 4th, Pte H.C. Wakefield (A2) handing over to Pte L.C. Lucas (A3). The race numbers visible all tie up with newspaper reports except for T7 which should have been worn by Cpl. A.P. Whale – so either Hipperson was wearing the wrong number, or Surrey AC had switched their running order.

If the runner standing to the left of the car is wearing Belgrave uniform – he is wearing white shorts with what looks like a dark vest with lighter hoop – then it could be Joe Flower, who has completed his super run taking the Bels up to second place and is now waiting to be picked up by the Belgrave bus.

1930 – Fourth place medals

There was no doubt now that the race was drawing the pick of the country's running teams and was to all intents and purposes a national championship. Birchfield Harriers were the National Cross-Country Championship winners, while Hallamshire (Northern Champions) and Tipton were second and third in the same race. South London Harriers were the Southern Champions and Cwmbran the Welsh Champions. All took their places on the start line in Westminster Palace Yard for the 1930 'Brighton'.

As was now the custom, the message from the Mayor of London to the Mayor of Brighton, carried in a gaily decorated baton, was entrusted to the lead-off runner of the previous year's winning team. But by now the practice also was for any runner overtaking the leader to attempt to wrest the baton from his hands. Often the runner so caught was not inclined to hand it over – perhaps he felt he was not 'done in' yet. Add to that the fact that the baton may well have been slipped into the carrier's singlet, and we had the making of some amusing tussles along the way.

For the Bels, injury had ruled out a couple of the selected 'ten,' including Bill Mitchell who had run so well the previous year, but three new men were making their 'Brighton' debuts – Frank Webb, Syd Warboys and Bill Rice. The Flower brothers were again entrusted with the opening two stages. A little jiggery pokery with the first two stage lengths affected the returned times but although Jack again handed over in 5th, just 22 seconds behind South London H., who were leading, brother Joe could not repeat his previous run and the Bels had dropped to 8th at Mitcham. Ernie Duffett recovered a spot but with a quarter of the race gone the team time was nearly 1½ minutes slower than in '29.

Undaunted, Arthur Allum set about the field ahead of him on the stretch from Purley to The Feathers Hotel at Merstham. Soon he was pulling back the opposition and when he ran out of road he was up to 4th. His time for the 5 miles 1232 yards run stood up as the fastest of the day, something no Belgravian before him had achieved. It was the first of five Club Records set on this day and there was not long to wait before the next, as Syd Warboys, a member for barely a year, ran down the Highgate man ahead of him and then started tearing into the Hallamshire team who were a few hundred yards up the highway in 2nd. Syd was just five seconds slower than Webster of Birchfield who were in the lead. Bill Rice hung on to 3rd with another record run, but South London Harriers were making advances behind and then an unfit Alby Smith, brought in at the last minute as reserve, had a torrid time as the 'Irrepressibles' worked their way past him. Gratefully Alby gave way to Arthur 'Nutty' Penny who set off with Aldershot Command and Highgate on his heels. With two of the Club's toughest runners on legs eight and nine, there was no need to worry. Both Arthur and Bert Footer rewrote the Belgrave best times for their stages and put minutes between the Bels and their pursuers; nothing could be done about S.L.H. up ahead. It was left to Frank Webb to run on to the Brighton front and claim the medals on offer for 4th team.

It was a great achievement in the Club's fifth attempt at the event and the team were not the only ones to hope for more in the years ahead. *The South London Harriers Gazette* reported:

"... this year's race gives us cause to think that in the near future, instead of clubs competing for third place to Birchfield and Hallamshire, Birchfield and Hallamshire will compete for third place to S.L.H. and Belgrave."

A letter from the organiser Joe Binks was received, an extract of which read:

"... I would like to offer the boys my most sincere congratulations upon their great race on Saturday last in the London-Brighton Relay. It is certainly the Club's greatest running effort, and I am hoping to see next year the great improvement maintained sufficiently to see you win the race. At full strength and with some more improvement you will do it yet. The South are gradually getting nearer the two leaders, and it will be a great thing when one gets its head in front."

Yours sincerely, Joe Binks.

1931 – Injury forces a step backwards

Sensing the possibility of a further advance of the Belgrave team into the top three places by the time the South Coast was reached, Club supporters were out in force. Claret and gold rosettes, ties, scarves, and even berets, were prominent; and the noisy ringing of handbells from arms thrust through the open windows of the team-bus exhorted those 'Bels' on the road to do their absolute best.

A fine run came from Jack Flower who sent away 19-year-old Alfred Kench, a new member and in his first big race. It was an 'ordeal by fire' for the youngster who gave everything of himself but had to relinquish six places by the time he reached Mitcham.

Things were considerably worse for the Brighton & County team, however. Their runner on stage two was struck by a car and had to be taken to hospital with a fractured ankle. Given dispensation to continue from Mitcham, they were then disqualified when their next runner set out too early, having heard a cry of "Go!" in the melee. Happily, they were later reinstated.

The leaders now, after an exceptional performance by Tommy Kay, were Tipton Harriers, with other rivals strung out after the 'Whippets' at even intervals. For the Bels, the actual distance lost was not huge and Ernie Duffett soon picked up three places, but in the cut and thrust he also lost two, while Birchfield H. underlined their reputation as 'favourites' by taking a lead they were not to surrender.

All was set now for Belgrave 'big gun' Arthur Allum to smash the Club's fourth stage record, run down the opposition – all neatly strung out at 20-to-30-yard intervals – and bring the Bels into second or third. Four positions were pulled back within 2½ miles, and more were surely to come when – misfortune struck! Arthur had run to 9th place in the International Cross-Country Championship in Dublin two weeks earlier but had injured an ankle in doing so. All had seemed fine in the days before the relay, but the damaged ligaments now gave way and it became an agonising stretch over the North Downs to Merstham, and of course no more gains could be made. As a badly limping Arthur struggled to keep going, he was caught and repassed at the finish by two of those he had overtaken earlier. Far from being in the vanguard the Bels were now 7th.

As the unfortunate Allum was carried to the bus by colleagues, unable now to bear his own weight upon the injured ankle, Syd Warboys set off on a mission to recover the Club's fortunes. Hallamshire and Surrey AC were swept up, and then a second fastest stage (and Club Record) from Joe Flower reeled in Highgate and Tipton. Footer, too, was

on a charge and ran faster between Crawley and Handcross than any Belgravian before him but had to give way to the resurging Tipton and Surrey teams.

Arthur Penny closed to within half a minute of South London H., with sixth placed Hallamshire now 3 minutes in arrears, and then another youngster, 20-year-old C. Mains who came into the squad as a reserve, was given the task of ascending the South Downs with the culmination being the climb of Dale Hill. Mains had a super run, but the gaps had now opened, and no further positions could be reclaimed. Of Belgravians, only Footer in his pomp had run this stretch faster. Promising newcomer C.T. Carter was given the run into Brighton, but with the nearest rivals three-quarters of a mile behind and half a mile ahead, it was an uneventful performance.

Of course, there was a little disappointment, but on reflection the team's performance was seen to be at least on a par with that of the previous year. But for the bitter blow when Arthur Allum was in full flight, that elusive spot in the first three would surely have been attained, and three new young runners, including future international Tom Carter, had been introduced to the blue riband event of road running.



Westminster Palace Yard and the start of the 1931 race. While a mounted Richard the Lionheart looks on, twenty runners set off on stage 1. Behind the runner in the hooped vest, prominent near the front, is Belgrave's Jack Flower.

1921	-	-	16 Feb (Wed). Alternatively described as 52¼ miles or 52 miles 200 yards. Teams: Surrey AC 4:39:43 ³ / ₅ . No other team ran as this was a trial event.
1924	-	-	5 Jan. Probably 53 miles 1,432 yards. Teams: 1 Surrey AC 4:50:00 ¹ / ₅ ; 2 Highgate H 4:59:25; 3 Royal Corps of Signals 5:04:05; 4 Woodford Green AC 5:04:47; 5 Brighton & County H 5:05:03; 6 Cambridge H 5:06:19; 7 South London H 5:08:09; 8 Queen's Park H 5:17:44; 9 Essex Beagles 5:18:19; 10 Irish Fusiliers 5:19:10; 16 teams ran; Belgrave H were not invited to take part.
1925	-	-	18 Apr. 53 miles 1,432 yards. Teams: 1 Birchfield H 4:50:52 ² / ₅ ; 2 South London H 4:58:19 ² / ₅ ; 3 Surrey AC 4:59:10 ⁴ / ₅ ; 4 Royal Corps of Signals 4:59:55 ¹ / ₂ ; 5 Highgate H 5:00:36 ² / ₅ ; 6 Cambridge H 5:05:19 ¹ / ₂ ; 7 Herne Hill H 5:07:37 ³ / ₅ ; 8 Hampstead H 5:09:13; 9 Essex Beagles 5:09:59 ² / ₅ ; 10 Woodford Green AC 5:12:04 ² / ₅ ; 18 teams entered, 17 ran, Belgrave H were not invited to take part.
1926	14th	5:06:48	10 Apr. 53 miles 1,432 yards. H.W. Bruce 24:48 (5th team, 5th fastest on stage), J. Harris 26:48 (11, 12), A.E. Smith 28:59 (9, 11), J.G. Flatt 31:33 (7, 2), G. Easton 39:33 (16, 18), M. Hasler 30:56 (17, 17), W.L. Bayliss 25:59 (16, 12), A.D. Pyer 33:15 (16, 9), H.E. Footer 28:58 (14, 2), K.B. O'Kell 35:59 (14, 17). Teams: 1 Birchfield H 4:45:34 ¹ / ₅ ; 2 Hallamshire H 4:50:10; 3 Highgate H 4:52:43; 4 South London H 4:55:49; 5 Hampstead H 4:56:01; 6 Cambridge H 4:58:43; 7 Woodford Green AC 4:59:36; 8 Achilles Club 5:01:55; 9 Essex Beagles 5:02:46; 10 North London H 5:04:40 19 teams entered, 18 started and 17 finished, Surrey AC 4:48:45 ² / ₅ disqualified.
1927	17th	5:07:17	9 Apr. 53 miles 1,432 yards. H.W. Bruce 25:52 (13, 13), F.L. Buckingham 26:32 (12, 13), A.E. Smith 29:35 (9, 3), W. Rice 32:33 (9, 11), J.G. Flatt 35:04 (12, 17), W.G. Dodkin 29:44 (12, 17), W.L. Bayliss 26:51 (15, 17), A. Field 35:22 (18, 19), K.B. O'Kell 30:48 (17, 10), H.E. Footer 34:56 (17, 12). Teams: 1 Hallamshire H 4:41:17; 2 Birchfield H 4:46:48; 3 South London H 4:52:15; 4 Herne Hill H 4:54:38; 5 Surrey AC 4:55:11; 6 Cambridge H 4:59:52; 7 Highgate H 5:00:07; 8 Woodford Green AC 5:01:21; 9 Hampstead H 5:01:53; 10 Slough AC 5:02:47; 20 teams ran.
1928	12th	4:55:41	14 Apr. 54 miles. A.D. Pyer 24:35 CR (13, 13), Jones 26:55 (11), A.E. Smith 30:08 (11), W.S. Mitchell 31:29 (10), A. Robertshaw 33:19 (12), P.N. Khlopin 28:36 (13), F.L. Buckingham 25:48 (14), W.G. Webb 31:47 (13), H.E. Footer 29:37 (12), E.A. Duffett 33:27 (12). Teams: 1 Birchfield H 4:41:48 ³ / ₅ ; 2 Hallamshire 4:43:52; 3 Herne Hill H 4:47:49; 4 South London H 4:49:09; 5 Highgate H 4:52:01; 6 Surrey AC 4:52:16; 7 Slough AC 4:53:03; 8 Polytechnic H 4:53:09; 9 Tipton H 4:54:08; 10 Wycombe Phoenix 4:54:11; 22 teams entered, 21 ran.
1929	7th	4:55:52	6 Apr. 54 miles. J.E. Flower 24:11 (5, 5), T.J. Flower 24:38 (2, 2), A.E. Smith 30:55 (4, 10), A. Allum 31:02 (4, 3), W.S. Mitchell 33:17 (3, 6), A.D. Pyer 28:41 (4, 6), W.L. Bayliss 26:09 (4, 13), A.W. Penny 32:36 (4, 9), H.E. Footer 30:18 (6, 11), E.A. Duffett 34:05 (7, 13). Teams: 1 Hallamshire H 4:48:37; 2 Birchfield H 4:48:58; 3 Surrey AC 4:51:19; 4 Herne Hill H 4:54:39; 5 Aldershot Command AC 4:55:07; 6 South London H 4:55:41; 7 Belgrave H 4:55:52; 8 Tipton H 4:57:22; 9 Polytechnic H 4:58:55; 10 Brighton & County H 5:00:46; 20 teams ran.
1930	4th	4:53:10	12 Apr. 54 miles. J.E. Flower 22:12 (5, 5), T.J. Flower 27:47 (8, 9), E.A. Duffett 31:09 (7, 7), A. Allum 30:26 (4, 1), S. Warboys 32:02 (3, 2), W.A. Rice 28:08 (3, 6), A.E. Smith 26:07 (4, 17), A.W. Penny 31:39 (4, 4), H.E. Footer 28:42 (4, 3), F.R. Webb 34:58 (4, 13). Teams: 1 Birchfield H 4:47:29 ² / ₅ ; 2 Hallamshire H 4:49:07; 3 South London H 4:50:38; 4 Belgrave 4:53:10; 5 Polytechnic H 4:55:16; 6 Tipton H 4:55:17; 7 Aldershot Command AC 4:55:52; 8 Surrey AC 4:57:48; 9 Highgate H 4:58:38; 10 Herne Hill H 4:59:07; 22 teams ran.
1931	5th	4:53:27	11 Apr. 54 miles. J.E. Flower 21:54 (4, 4), A. Kench 28:25 (10), E.A. Duffett 30:59 (9), A. Allum 30:52 (7), S. Warboys 32:16 (5), T.J. Flower 27:33 (3, 2), H.E. Footer 25:43 (5), A.W. Penny 31:47 (5), C. Mains 29:05 (5), C.T. Carter 34:53 (5). Teams: 1 Birchfield H 4:48:58; 2 South London H 4:49:31; 3 Surrey AC 4:49:41; 4 Tipton H 4:51:15; 5 Belgrave H 4:53:27; 6 Hallamshire H 4:54:13; 7 Highgate H 4:55:21; 8 Aldershot Command AC 4:56:30; 9 Herne Hill H 4:57:43; 10 Polytechnic H 4:58:59; 20 teams ran.

Overall Course Lengths and Records

53 miles 200 yards

(1) 1921. Alternatively described as 52¼ miles.

4:39:43³/₅ Surrey AC..... 1921

53 miles 1,432 yards

(2) 1924-1927. Originally recorded as 54 miles 500 yards. However, although stages 1 and 2 were changed in length in 1925, the overall route remained the same and by then it would appear that the course may have been remeasured more accurately. In that 1925 programme, the 1924 course was described retrospectively as 53 miles 1,432 yards. By 1927 the official programme was again referring to the 1924 route as 53 miles 200 yards but by 1930, 53 miles 1,432 yards again.

4:50:00¹/₅ Surrey AC..... 1924

4:45:34¹/₅ Birchfield H..... 1926

4:41:17 Hallamshire H..... 1927

5:06:48 Belgrave H..... 1926

54 miles

(3) 1928-1934. Originally described as 53 miles 1,432 yards but the stage lengths totalled 54 miles exactly and this is the distance subsequently recorded for 1928 in later programmes.

4:41:48³/₅ Birchfield H..... 1928

4:39:52 Salford H..... 1932

4:55:41 Belgrave H..... 1928

4:53:10 1930

4:44:00 1932

54 miles 1,232 yards

(4) 1935.

4:49:59 Belgrave H..... 1935

Stage Descriptions, Stage & Club Records

Stage 1

(1) 1921, approx. 5¼ miles. Big Ben (Palace Yard), via Brixton to Streatham Hill Station.

(2) 1924, 5½ miles. Big Ben (Palace Yard) along Grosvenor Rd., Queen's Rd., Cedars Rd., Clapham Common, Nightingale Lane to Wandsworth Common Station.

28:16 A.T. Muggridge (Brighton & County H) 1924

(3) 1925-1929, 4 miles 1,056 yards. Big Ben (Palace Yard), Grosvenor Rd., Chelsea Bridge, Queen's Rd., Cedars Rd., Clapham Common North Side, crossing Common to Nightingale Walk, then to corner of Nightingale Lane and West Side Clapham Common.

23:53 C.E. Blewitt (Birchfield H)..... 1925

23:25 C.E. Blewitt (Birchfield H)..... 1926

23:14 C.E. Blewitt (Birchfield H)..... 1927

L. Payne (Hallamshire H) 1927

23:11 C.E. Blewitt (Birchfield H)..... 1928

24:48 H.W. Bruce..... 1926

24:35 A.D. Pyer..... 1928

24:11 J.E. Flower 1929

(4) 1930-34, 4 miles 176 yards. Big Ben (Palace Yard) along Grosvenor Rd., Chelsea Bridge, Queen's Rd., Cedars Rd., Clapham Common North Side, right and then first left along The Avenue to the corner with Broomwood Rd., Clapham Common.

21:50 A.W.V. Tebbutt (South London H)..... 1930

21:31 A.W.V. Tebbutt (South London H)..... 1931

21:03 C.K. Allen (Highgate H)..... 1932

22:12 J.E. Flower 1930

21:54 J.E. Flower 1931

21:22 C.T. Carter 1932

(5) 1935, 4 miles 1,408 yards. Big Ben (Palace Yard) along Grosvenor Rd., passing Chelsea and Vauxhall Bridges, to Albert Bridge, then Bridge Rd., Cambridge Rd., Latchmere Rd., Peak Hill, Elspeth Rd. to Clapham Common North Side. Turn left and then first right along The Avenue to the corner with Broomwood Rd., Clapham Common.

Unknown fastest time..... 1935

24:37 W.A. Rice 1935

Stage 2

(1) 1921, approx. 5¼ miles. Streatham Hill Station to Croydon.

(2) 1924, 4 miles 1,232 yards. To Wandsworth Common Station, along St James' Rd., Trinity Rd., Tooting Bec Rd., Church Lane, Mitcham Rd., Fair Green, *News of the World* Sports Ground.

Unknown fastest time by R. Piggott (Highgate H) 1924

(3) 1925-1929, 4 miles 1,056 yards (*see note below*). Clapham Common to St James' Rd., Trinity Rd., Tooting Bec Rd., Church Lane, Mitcham Rd., London Rd., Mitcham Fair Green, to The *News of the World* Ground, Mitcham.

Note: This would appear to be the same route as for (2) except that the earlier Clapham Common start should make it a longer stretch than with the Wandsworth Common start (perhaps around 5 miles in all) – yet the course is recorded as being shorter than (2). Add in the fact that the distance is recorded in the programmes as being identical in length to stage 1, then it then seems likely that a typographical error was made and perpetuated in race programmes until 1930. The comparable times of stages 1 and 2 also bear this out.

25:20 W. Freeman (Birchfield H)..... 1925

24:41 N. Biddulph (Hallamshire H)..... 1926

24:25 B. Macdonald (Birchfield H)..... 1927

24:07 N. Biddulph (Hallamshire H)..... 1928

26:48 J. Harris..... 1926

26:32 F.L. Buckingham 1927

24:38 T.J. Flower..... 1929

(4) 1930-1935, 5 miles 176 yards. From Broomwood Rd., Clapham Common, straight on as in previous years to the last turning on the right, Nightingale Walk, turn right down Nightingale Lane to Wandsworth Common Station, left to St James' Rd., Trinity Rd., (crossing Balham High Rd.,) passing tube station on the right, Tooting Bec Rd., to Asylum Corner, Church Lane, Mitcham Rd., London Rd., Mitcham Fair Green and left to *News of the World Ground*, Mitcham.

Again, this route is as (3) except that the start has been shifted to a slightly earlier position, probably not more than a couple of hundred yards. This reinforces the theory that (3) was more like 5 miles

26:25	A. Bourton (Birchfield H)	1930
25:48	T.J. Holden (Tipton H).....	1932
27:47	T.J. Flower.....	1930
26:47	J.E. Flower	1932
26:34	J. Ginty	1935

Stage 3

(1) 1921, Croydon to Hooley.

(2) 1924, 5 miles 528 yards. To the Railway Bridge, Mitcham Common, passing Ravensbury Arms, Beddington, Windmill, Hilliers and Plough Lanes, and passing the Aerodrome to Purley Corner.

28:20	A.H. Nicholls (Surrey AC).....	1924
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(3) 1925-1926, 5 miles 352 yards. Over the Railway Bridge, Mitcham Common, passing Ravensbury Arms to the Four Crossroads, Beddington Lane, Windmill, Hilliers and Plough Lanes, and passing Croydon Aerodrome to Purley Fountain, Purley Corner.

28:02	A. Sidaway (Birchfield H).....	1925
27:16	E. Stone (Highgate H).....	1926
28:59	A.E. Smith	1926

(4) 1927, 5 miles 448 yards. Course as (3). Although not mentioned in the official programme, The Belgravian reports that the third stage was 96 yards longer than for the previous year and that the following stage was correspondingly shorter. It is quite possible that a late adaptation was made due to the ongoing work on the new arterial road.

28:33	A.C. Neal (Hallamshire H)	1927
29:35	A.E. Smith	1927

(5) 1928-1935, 5 miles 856 yards. Over Railway Bridge, Mitcham Common, passing Ravensbury Arms on right, straight road to the Arterial Road, Purley Way, turn right thence to Purley Corner, along Brighton main road to Purley Knoll, first turning on the right.

29:04	F. Light (Birchfield H).....	1928
28:59	F. Light (Birchfield H).....	1929
28:51	H. Doggott (Salford H).....	1932
28:33	F. Light (Birchfield H)	1933
30:08	A.E. Smith.....	1928
30:00	A. Allum	1932

Stage 4

(1) 1921. Hooley to Redhill.

(2) 1924, 5 miles 410 yards. Brighton Rd. to Feathers Hotel, Merstham.

31:59	L.M. Cummins (Surrey AC)	1924
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(3) 1925-1926, 5 miles 1,408 yards. Brighton Road, passing Smitham Railway Bridge, The Star Inn, Hooley, The Jolliffe Arms, Merstham, to The Feathers Hotel, Merstham.

Unknown fastest time..... 1925

31:07 ⁴ / ₅	T.F. Mountford (Herne Hill H)	1926
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31:33	J.G. Flatt	1926
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(4) 1927, 5 miles 1312 yards. Course as (3). Although not mentioned in the official programme, The Belgravian reports that stage four was 96 yards shorter than for the previous year and that the preceding stage was correspondingly longer. It is quite possible that a late adaptation was made due to the ongoing work on the new arterial road.

30:21	C.A. Frith (Hallamshire H)	1927
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32:33	W.A. Rice	1927
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(5) 1928-1935, 5 miles 1,232 yards. Brighton Road, passing Smitham Railway Bridge, The Star Inn, Hooley, The Jolliffe Arms, Merstham, to The Feathers Hotel, Merstham.

29:11	J.E. Webster (Birchfield H).....	1928
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29:04	H. Platt (Salford H)	1932
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31:29	W.S. Mitchell	1928
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31:02	A. Allum	1929
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30:26	A. Allum	1930
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29:42	A. Allum	1933
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(6) 1935, 5 miles 352 yards. Brighton Road, passing Smitham Railway Bridge, The Star Inn, Hooley, to Jolliffe Arms, Merstham.

Unknown fastest time..... 1935

28:52	J.E. Flower	1935
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Stage 5

(1) 1921. Redhill to Povey Cross, Horley.

(2) 1924, 6 miles 262 yards. Brighton Rd. to The Chequers Hotel, Horley.

33:20	F. Evans (Surrey AC).....	1924
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(3) 1925-1934, 6 miles 352 yards. Brighton Road, passing Redhill Post Office, Earlswood Common, Christ Church Salfords, to The Chequers Hotel, Horley.

31:50	Cpl. W.M. Cotterell (Surrey AC).....	1925
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31:02 ¹ / ₅	A.T. Muggridge (Brighton & Cty H)	1926
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31:00	B.C.V. Oddie (South London H).....	1928
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30:59	J.W. Beman (Birchfield H)	1929
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30:57	Cpl. J. Wilson (Aldershot Cmnd AC) ...	1931
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30:17	G.W. Bailey (Salford H)	1932
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39:33	G. Easton.....	1926
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35:04	J.G. Flatt	1927
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33:19	A. Robertshaw.....	1928
33:17	W.S. Mitchell.....	1929
32:02	S. Warboys	1930
31:58	A. Allum	1932
31:57	A.W. Penny	1934

(4) 1935, 6 miles 1,232 yards. Brighton Rd., passing The Feathers Hotel, Redhill Post Office, Earlswood Common to The Chequers Hotel, Horley.

Unknown fastest time..... 1935

35:05	C.T. Carter	1935
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Stage 6

(1) 1921. Povey Cross, Horley to Pease Pottage.

(2) 1924, 5 miles 282 yards. Brighton Rd. to The George Hotel, Crawley.

27:33	J.D. Sangster (Surrey AC)	1924
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(3) 1925-1935, 5 miles 176 yards. Brighton Road, passing Gatwick Cottages, Povey Cross, Tirnberham Bridge, The White Lion, Lowfield Heath, to The George Hotel, Crawley.

26:56	W.O. Williams (Birchfield H)	1926
26:24	F. Quinn (Birchfield H)	1928
30:56	M. Hasler	1926
29:44	W.G. Dodkin	1927
28:36	P.N. Khlopin	1928
28:08	W.A. Rice	1930
27:33	T.J. Flower	1931
27:23	H.J. Fletcher.....	1932

Stage 7

(1) 1921. Pease Pottage to Handcross Hill.

(2) 1924, 4 miles 665 yards. Brighton Rd. to The Red Lion Hotel, Hand Cross.

25:39	F. Hobbs (Cambridge H)	1924
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(3) 1925-1935, 4 miles 704 yards. Brighton Road, passing The Half Moon Inn, The Black Swan Inn, The Fountain Inn, Zion Church to The Red Lion Hotel, Handcross.

25:18	A.E. Elliott (Surrey AC)	1925
24:01	W. Monk (Birchfield H)	1926
23:18 ³ / ₅	J. Williams (Hallamshire H)	1927
23:15	E.B. Fowle (South London H)	1932
25:59	W.L. Bayliss	1926
25:48	F.L. Buckingham	1928
25:43	H.E. Footer.....	1931
24:29	E.A. Duffett	1932
24:24	S.T. Ring	1935

Stage 8

(1) 1921. Handcross Hill to Albourne

(2) 1924-1935, described as 6 miles 222 yards in 1924, and then for following years 6 miles 218 yards, but it is the same course. Brighton Road, passing Stapleford Crossroads, The Queen's Head, Bolney, to The Castle Hotel, Hickstead.

31:17	J.E. Wilson (Surrey AC)	1924
31:08	C.T. Clibbon (Surrey AC)	1926
30:45	H. Bowler (Hallamshire H).....	1927
30:22	W.O. Williams (Birchfield H)	1928
30:13	W.E. Eaton (Salford H)	1932
29:57	V. Harman (Slough AC)	1934
33:15	A.D. Pyer	1926
31:47	W.G. Webb	1928
31:39	A.W. Penny	1930
31:25	A.W. Penny	1932
31:10	A.E. Taylor	1935

Stage 9

(1) 1921. Albourne to Pycombe.

(2) 1924-1935, described as 5 miles 495 yards in 1924, and then for following years 5 miles 486 yards, but it is the same course. Brighton Road, passing Church, Sayers Common, The Duke of York Inn, The King's Head, Albourne Green, Dale Hill, Dale Cottage, to the Post Office, Pyecombe.

Note: This stage is incorrectly listed as 6 miles 218 yards in the 1925 programme – a typographical error repeating the distance of stage 8 (2).

30:14	J. Shaddock (Surrey AC)	1924
28:32	W.T. Marsh (South London H)	1925
28:16	C. Fisher (Hallamshire H).....	1928
28:03	L.H. Weatherill (South London H).....	1930
27:33	T.B. Campbell (Salford H)	1932
28:58	H.E. Footer	1926
28:42	H.E. Footer.....	1930
27:55	H.E. Footer	1932
27:37	H.E. Footer	1933

Stage 10

(1) 1921. Pycombe to Brighton Aquarium.

(2) 1924, 6 miles 804 yards. The Post Office, Pyecombe to the Aquarium, Brighton.

32:07 ¹ / ₅	C.T. Clibbon (Surrey AC)	1924
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(3) 1925-1928, 6 miles 904 yards. Brighton Road, passing The Plough Inn, Pyecombe, The Black Lion, Patcham, the Post Office, Preston, Preston Park, Railway Arch, to the Aquarium, Brighton.

For 1929-1935 The Plough Inn is passed via the new main road at Patcham and the finish is referred to as the Lamp (Winning Post) opposite Palace Pier, Brighton. The distance remains the same at 6 miles 904 yards and the course is regarded as the same.

32:02 ¹ / ₅	A.H. Rodway (Birchfield H).....	1925
31:57 ³ / ₅	E. Harper (Hallamshire H).....	1926
31:28	E. Harper (Hallamshire H).....	1927
31:13	A.T. Muggridge (Polytechnic H).....	1928
34:56	H.E. Footer	1927
33:27	E.A. Duffett.....	1928
32:48	W.G. Webb	1932

Clubs with most top ten team placings 1924-1931

1=	Surrey AC.....	8
	South London H	8
3=	Highgate H	7
	Birchfield H	7
5=	Hallamshire H.....	6
	Herne Hill H	6
7=	Cambridge H	4
	Tipton H	4
	Woodford Green AC	4
	Polytechnic H	4
11=	Essex Beagles	3
	Hampstead H	3
	Aldershot Command AC	3
	Belgrave H	3
15=	Royal Corps of Signals	2
	Slough AC	2
	Brighton & County H	2
18=	Achilles Club.....	1
	Irish Fusiliers	1
	Queens Park H	1
	Wycombe Phoenix H	1

Teams ranked on top 10 positions 1924-1931
(scoring 10, 9, 8, etc.)

1	Birchfield H	68
2	Surrey AC	57
3	South London H	56
4	Hallamshire H	51
5	Highgate H	38
6	Herne Hill H	29
7	Cambridge H	19
8=	Belgrave H	17
	Tipton H	17
10	Royal Corps of Signals	15
11	Woodford Green AC	14
12	Aldershot Command AC	13
13	Polytechnic H	12
14	Hampstead H	10
15	Brighton & County H	7
16=	Essex Beagles	5
	Slough AC	5
18	Queens Park H	3
19	Achilles Club	2
20=	Irish Fusiliers	1
	Wycombe Phoenix H	1

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