

Dick Ripley : The AAA's "Forgotten Chariot"



Richard N Ripley (Dick) ran in the 1924 Olympic Games, along with Abrahams & Liddell. He was not mentioned in the film Chariots of Fire but was a very great athlete in his own right. From 1924 to 1926 Dick represented the AAA in all the representative matches, being the only runner to have done so, and he never failed to count for his team.

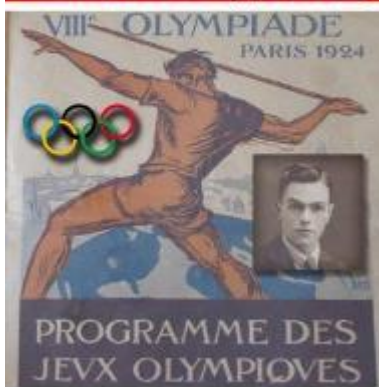
Dick was the Northumberland and Durham Champion at 440 yards for six consecutive years, an achievement that has never been beaten. In

addition Dick used his birth in North Ormesby to enable him to qualify for the Yorkshire title and he became the Yorkshire 440 yards Champion for at least one year.

The fact that Dick was selected for the Olympic team in 1924 was undoubtedly an outstanding achievement. In those days athletes were usually wealthy or connected to a University. Dick was just a normal working lad from the North East. He ran in the 4 x 400m relay team and obtained a Bronze medal. He found this a disappointment because the team that ran that day was not the one originally selected and the correct team should have taken Gold.



The original team included Eric Liddell. Liddell had strong religious beliefs and would not



by Jennie Shurmer

run on Sunday. Although the film Chariots of Fire, made it clear that Liddell changed his distance from 100m to 400m because the heats for the 100m individual race were to take place on Sunday, it did not mention that Liddell pulled out of the relay as well. The final of the relay also fell on Sunday.

Two weeks later, the British Team, but this time including Liddell, beat the USA Olympic Gold winners in the Empire Games at Stamford Bridge. This photo shows that team, left to right Eric Liddell, E Toms, G Butler and Dick Ripley.

Following the Olympics, Dick beat the French Olympic 400m runners, Teneveaux and Galtier, in an Amateur Athletic Association match against France. The following year he again won the same race with the fastest time in Europe. In 1925 he was English 440 yards champion and was the fastest English 400m/440yards runner. Altogether he achieved 17 individual titles and won 44 first prizes in open competition.

Despite all the titles Dick held, he always counted one of his greatest honours as being part of the Guard of honour to His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales, during his official tour of Paris, during the 1924 Olympics in Paris. Dick is on the left of the Prince in this picture.

Dick's career did end with a degree of tragedy when he tore a ligament not long before the 1928 Olympics. He used to say that after that he had a lot of luck, the trouble was it was all

bad! His first wife died of cancer, leaving him to bring up three small children alone. His eldest son was murdered in Australia, whilst serving in the Merchant Navy. His second wife was involved in a bad accident and left for dead at the side of the road. She eventually recovered but was never quite the same and his youngest daughter (me) got measles at a very early age, leaving her with a chest problems. Despite all this Dick was not a bitter or miserable man. He had a fantastic outlook on life and, although he never had much money he lived life to the full. He died at the age of 95, on 14th July 1996.

Dick's dedication to athletics was unprecedented and his achievements, even by today's standards were outstanding. If you would like to read more about this incredible athlete, I have written a historical novel, based very closely on Dick's life. The book is called The Forgotten Chariot (ISBN 978-0-9558593-6-6) price £7.99. The publisher is Cormorant Publishing Hartlepool Tel: 01429 865066 or e-mail www.riddlewrites.co.uk. Anyone living in the Hartlepool area can purchase the novel from W H Smiths, Middleton Grange Shopping Centre or Pocket Papers, The Marina. Otherwise the book can be ordered directly from me, Jennie Shurmer, Tel: 01429 291039 or Mobile 07895177863.