

FROM THE SMOKE TO THE COAST

BY

BRIAN BOARDLEY

FOREWORD

At last after two years the chronicle about my own athletic career beginning from 1958, the founding of Lowestoft Athletic Club from its early days until the amalgamation in 1996, and Paul Evans rise to fame, is completed. It was a challenge when I was asked to take on the task but I feel it has been worthwhile. You must forgive any errors in the spelling or punctuation but I can assure you it will not spoil your enjoyment. I am most grateful to Bill Kingaby for his ten years of press cuttings, Gary High for sight of his scrapbook and Barbara High for her many committee and A.G.M minutes. Without them, the chronical would not have been possible. All I can add is read and enjoy a part of club history.

BRIAN BOARDLEY

' FROM THE SMOKE TO THE COAST
PART ONE

My first induction to athletics came completely out of the blue. It came about when I started work as a Estimating Clerk at Alexander Cowans, a paper merchant and stationery company based in Upper Thames Street in the heart of the City of London. I was 16 years old at the time, and it had never crossed my mind I may have had the potential to be a athlete. That was until one of my colleagues in the office came up to me a day or two after I had started, and said: "Have you ever thought of taking up running?"

My reply, after the initial shock, was: "You must be joking. I couldn't run to save myself!"

However, Norman did not give up, telling me I had the perfect build to be a *ATHLETE*. He was a member of Hern Hill Harriers, which I found out later to be one of the top clubs in London. Norman also ran Cowan's own running team competing in the London Business League and currently down to just five members, which gave him the opportunity to put more pressure on myself. I finally gave in and that was the beginning of what would turn out to be a long career in athletics.

Over the next few weeks I began my training under the watchful eye of Norman. I must admit he had been right all along. In that time I had taken to running like a duck to water and my confidence grew after each training session. Now the time had come for my first taste of competition. It took place at Chigwell, in Essex. A road relay over five legs, I was given the third leg, a distance of just over 3 miles. For my first race, although not a particularly fast one, losing only one position, I was heartily *CONGRATULATED* by my fellow team members.

The time had come for me to join a club. Under Norman's guidance I joined Deptford Park, a small dockland club. It turned out to be a good move. The Head Coach for middle-distance was Bernard Smith who was currently coaching the fastest miler in Britain by the name of Bill Giddings. Bernard agreed to take me on. He was a hard task master but all the hard work paid off. Within four months I had broken five minutes for the mile, returning a time of 4minutes 56.8seconds at the age of nineteen.

~~TO BE CONTINUED~~

PART TWO

My stay with Deptford Park was to last about two years. In that time, under the guidance of coach Bernard Smith, my times on the track had improved no end. But one training evening in 1961, Bernard broke the sad news he was leaving the country to take a job in India. After his departure things were not the same at Deptford. At work I told Norman my concern and he suggested I should move to another club. A few weeks earlier I had been approached by George Hemsworth, who was the secretary of Victoria Park Harriers, a east end of London club, about a possible move to them in the future. Remembering the conversation I got in touch with George and within a few weeks I left Deptford to join Victoria Park, a move I was never to regret. Victoria Park were at the time in the top twenty of British clubs in the country. It meant I had a high standard to live up to. Unlike Deptford, who had been a track and field club, 'Vicky Park', which it was widely known in athletic circles, were involved in all three disciplines, i.e., track and field, Cross-Country and road running. Over the coming weeks I trained six days a week, determined in my mind to build on my strength and speed to make a good impression on my new club. All my hard work paid off. In a short time with 'Vicky Park' my track performances were improving considerably and my road running too. It was then I HAD my first setback. Starting a mile race on the Tooting Bec track I was involved in a collision with a fellow athlete on a tight bend leaving me out for six weeks with a broken elbow.

However, once back in training I soon got back to my old form and finished the 1962 track season off on a high note. Following quite a satisfactory cross-country and road season of 1962/63 in April came the highlight of a busy winter, the London to Brighton road relay sponsored by the 'News of the World'. The race was open to the top twenty clubs in Great Britain and started on the stroke of 9a.m from Westminster Bridge and finishing on Brighton Pier. I was selected to run the stage to Gatwick Airport, a distance of just over 5 miles. 'Vicky Park' were to finish

in seventeenth place, which was rather disappointing having expected to finish around twelfth spot. By now I was in the top five of middle-long distance runners at 'Vicky Park' and the future was looking bright for me.

PART THREE

My own performances on the country and road over the winter of '63/64 had been most encouraging and I was now looking forward to the coming track season. Also 1964 would be the year of the ~~Rome~~^{Tokyo} Olympics, all eyes firmly fixed on how our athletes would fare on such a glittering occasion. My busy winter was also paying dividends, lowering my mile time by nine seconds and three miles by sixteen seconds. ‡ Was now challenging for the 'A' string place for both these distance, but I would have to wait until next year before I would achieve my dream.

Arriving for training one July evening, I noticed there were a large group of athletes, coaches and officials congregated in the middle of the track. Being curious, as you do, I hurried over to find out what was going on. I found to my surprise the cause of so much interest was centred on Ann Packer, who had recently returned from the ~~Rome~~^{TOKYO} Olympics, winning a gold medal in the 800metres and a silver in the 400metres, accompanied by Robbie Brightwell, her future husband, winner of a silver medal in Great Britain's 4x400 Mens relay team. Unknown to me Robbie had asked earlier if it was possible to put on a 800metres mens race. His request was readily accepted. It was now left to us 'Vicky Park' athletes to take up the challenge. To be honest I was not too keen on competing, but as one of the coaches remarked: "It will be good speed training for your future races", so taking his advice I joined Robbie and the four other 'Vicky Park' VOLUNTEERS on the starting line. From the gun it was a foregone conclusion Robbie would go straight to the front of the field leaving the rest of us in his wake. I was told afterwards he went through the bell in fifty -two seconds before finishing in a time of 1min-53seconds, obviously easing down on the final lap. As for my own efforts I came in a very heavy legged fifth sixteen seconds behind Robbie! By the close of the 1964 track season my times for the mile had come down to 4mins-37seconds and the three miles to a very satisfactory 15mins-12seconds. I now looked forward to the winter season to STRENGTHEN my aim to improve for the 1965 track season.

1965 could not have started better for me. My first race that year, a five mile road race around Victoria Park, I recorded my fastest time of 25-17 over the distance, finishing 11th out of over one hundred competitors. However, there was better to come. In March I was to run in the National Cross-Country held at Parliament Hill Fields over a distance of nine miles. It had been snowing the week before, so the course was already a sea of mud, not for the faint hearted I can tell you. The race itself was over three laps, so by the time I started the final lap conditions were pretty grim. To be honest before the race I was feeling a bit apprehensive whether the heavy going would suit me. As it turned out I need not have worried. After a reasonable start I found myself picking off runners at will, finishing in a very creditable 342nd position out of around two thousand others. Later I heard not only I had beaten ^{A TEN V} internationals on the day but also I was first man home for Victoria Park which meant I was club champion for 1965. Looking back I rated it my best cross-country performance of my career.

The 1965 track season began with a three mile track race at Southend where I finished in 4th position recording a personal best of 15mins.-05secs. Five weeks later I cracked the fifteen minute barrier with the time of 14mins-56.8 secs at a trophy meeting at Ilford. All my hard training over the winter was definitely paying off. In June of that year I was selected to run the mile in the Alec Myer Trophy held on my home track. In a quality field of milers I finished in third place, recording a personal best of 4mins-32secs, and a month later at Ladywell Park I broke nine minutes for 3000metres on a flooded cinder track recording 8mins. 55secs.

I was now established as the fastest middle-distance track athlete in the club from one mile up to 5000 metres, which was to last until 1967. The pressure was now on myself to perform well. I did find out a few years ago I still featured in the top ten of Victoria Park's (now known as Tower Hamlets) club records over 3000metres and 10,000 metres.

The track season now over, it was back to the road and cross-country. My first cross-country race of the season was held

at Enfield over five miles in the Chingford League, finishing fourteenth in a time of 29-10. At the end of 1965, looking back, my improvement had been beyond my wildest dreams. What would 1966 bring? Would it be better than last year?

As it was about to turn out, I could have not got off to a better start, when in January I ran in a 6½ miles cross-country at Oxted, in Surrey, over a heavy, muddy course coming in 6th place out of a field of about one hundred. Later that month running in the North of the Thames cross-country championship I was to finish 55th out of just over two hundred, coming home first for my club.

I was now looking forward to February and competing in the Southern Counties cross-country championships at Parliament Hill Fields, the same course being used as the previous years National. The conditions this time less severe, no snow but still heavy and sticky in places caused by the winter rains enough to test anyones fitness. On a cold, damp Saturday afternoon a field of about six hundred runners set off to tackle nine miles of arduous terrain. Parliament Hill Fields had long had the reputation of being one of the hardest cross-country courses in the country due to its many hills and inclines, which I understand still stands to this day. My own aim had been to finish in the top two hundred and fifty. You can imagine my delight when I finished and found I had exceeded all my expectations coming 196th in a time of 55mins-18 secs.

The 1966 track season arrived and in late April I ran my first six miles race on cinder in the Southern championships against such notable internationals as Martin Hyman and Bruce Tulloh, Bruce renowned for running in bare feet, and many other high profile athletes. As I expected both Martin and Bruce were to lap me but I was more than happy when I heard I had achieved a time of 32mins-00secs, about nearly a minute faster than I had expected and a respectable 16th position out of twenty-six good class competitors. The experience I had gained was to put me in good stead for the future.

As well as track competition there were many road relays Victoria Park took part in. One such relay at Southend I ran the second leg over 4½ miles in a time of 22mins-25secs bringing the club home in third place. Two weeks later at Walthamstow I ran the third leg over a 2½ mile course held around a industrial estate. It was a good day for Victoria

Park the club eventually winning the relay from the host club, Walthamstow.

1966 had certainly been the pinnacle of my athletic career, a year I shall always remember having the added privilege to witness England's footballers win the World Cup at the old Wembley Stadium.

The start of the winter season began with a Chingford League road race at Wadham Lodge in early October. Finishing in 16th place, I also maintained my record of being first runner home for the club. My good form was to continue up to the beginning of 1967, but things were to change that year which would lose my 'top dog' status.

PART FOUR

The winter of 1966/67 I concentrated on preparing for the following track season using cross-country and road races as well as long runs and speed work to gain my fitness. Here is an example from my training diary of a typical weeks work out.

SUNDAY: 4x880 yards Average speed 2mins.25secs. 5minute rest.

MONDAY: 6 miles steady run on road 38-39 minutes.

TUESDAY: 4 miles fast run on grass 23-24 minutes.

WEDNESDAY: 5 miles steady run on road 31-32 minutes.

THURSDAY: 5 miles farklet on grass.

FRIDAY: Rest

SATURDAY: Competition

In the early part of 1967 two new members were to join Victoria Park. One was Mike Quanne, a twenty-year-old, and a young boy of sixteen by the name of George Kicks. From the start both were to show great potential as middle-distance athletes. I realized my days could be numbered as far as being 'top dog'.

The thought of competition did not bother me at all. I was pleased for the club, and it would strengthen the middle-distance section no end. By the end of the cross-country-season Mike was already showing he would be someone to reckon with in the coming track season. As for George, he was making his name as a Youth. I did overhear his coach remarking: "This boy is going places".

For the early part of the '67 track season I did not come up against Mike in competition. He was mainly selected for the 880 yards or mile events. It did not take him long to be near breaking two minutes for the shorter distance and under four thirty for the mile, surpassing anything I had achieved. In the meantime I was sticking to the longer distances and having some pleasing results. One race at Ilford that summer will always stay in my memory. We were in the grip of a heatwave, the temperature a hot 97degrees. Twenty-two athletes lined up at the start, but only seven to actually complete twelve laps of hell. How I managed to be one of the seven, I still wonder to this day. A.A.A's rules at the time forbid any form of refreshment during the race. However, it turned out to be a good day for me finishing in second place, although registering a time of 15mins-41secs, over forty-five seconds outside my best.

Towards the end of the track season Victoria Park held their

club championships. Mike Quanne, not surprisingly, won both the 880 yards and mile, but to everyone's surprise he was to take the three miles title too, completing a unique treble.

The first winter fixture of the season saw Victoria Park competing in the Blackheath road relay. Running against some very good teams from the south I recorded a time of 15mins-31secs for the three mile course, the team finishing tenth out of about thirty teams.

By now Mike Quanne was established as our top distance runner. It was a great weight off my shoulders, I don't mind telling you!

1968 was to start badly for me. Early in the year I caught a virus that would keep me out of training and racing to well in to February.

At the same Mike Quanne had for some unknown reason disappeared from the scene. It was sometime later we heard Mike had got the wrong side of the law and would be serving a two-year sentence at Her Majesty's pleasure. Unfortunately for the club his crime made the headlines in the 'Hackney Gazette', which I can tell you did not go down too well with our chairman. So this meant I was now back in the 'hot seat' once more.

My first competition after returning was a GRUELLING nine miles in the Southern Area cross-country championships held at Parliament Hill Fields. Considering my lack of training, I was pleased to finish 223rd out of a field of over five hundred. It certainly did the trick as far as my next race was concerned, the club's ten mile road championships, which I was favourite to win. I did not disappoint, winning in a time of 53mins.15secs., nearly two minutes ahead of my nearest rival. In late March the first of three road relays took place. The Watford relay was run over a rather flat, fast three mile course consisting of five runners to a team. I

was given the third leg making up three places, and recording a time of 14mins.40secs, but unfortunately we were just outside the medal positions in fourth place. The next two relays held at Chingford and Hornsey respectively WERE A disappointment, the club being nowhere near the first three TEAMS.

Another track season dawned with the first meeting at Reading. I was selected for the two miles finishing seventh in a strong field of twenty-two in a time of 10mins.07secs. In the June of '68 Victoria Park took a team of athletes to Swansea for a long week-end, which included a match against the local club. We were 'billeted' in houses of Swansea A.C members. I do remember

the particular house I stayed at had two large glass cabinets in the front room containing numerous Welsh international rugby caps dating back over 100 years. The meeting took place on the Sunday on a dusty cinder track. Running over two miles once more, I finished fourth in 10mins.05secs behind three top Welsh athletes. On the Sunday evening the Swansea club put on a great spread for us, to be followed by the **SOUND** of their male voice choir to conclude a enjoyable week-end.

In the 60's tracks were still in the process of being converted from yards to metric, so it meant you would either be running a 1500metres at one meeting, and a mile at another. They do say variety is the spice of life!

It was then in July I was to hear news that would change my life for the future. My Father, who had had health problems for the last few years, was offered early retirement from his employer. After discussing it with my Mother and myself, we both agreed it would be a too good an offer to turn down. Of course it would mean vacating the flat we had lived in the last twenty two years, as it was owned by my Father's employer. The date of his retirement was set for the end of December. I must admit I had mixed emotions about what was happening. Especially when my parents dropped the 'bombshell' they had decided to move to Lowestoft, both their place of birth. It left me to choose if I stayed in London and found a flat to live, or begin a new life in Lowestoft. After some serious **THOUGHT** I decided for the latter. It was then purely by chance my mother's brother, who was living in Lowestoft, happened to stumble across a house for sale in St Peter's Street, and being a builder by trade, gave it the 'once over'. His findings were: 'It's a bargain. Just a few things need bringing up to date. You would be fools not to take it'. So on January 7th, 1969, we took up residence in our terraced house, which would be our home for years to come.

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