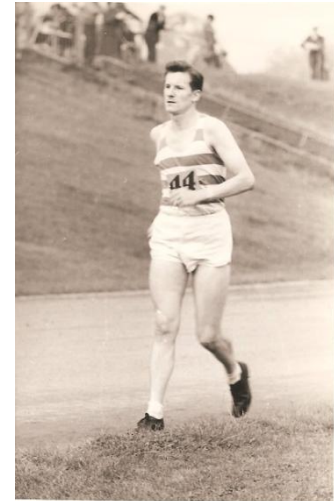


Jack Thomas C606

Bristol R.W.C. 'Bristol 100' 1977 (100 miles): 21.57.19

Club: Bristol R.W.C



During the 1940s and 1950s Wales, alone in Great Britain, included Race Walking in its Championships. This meant that Welsh Secondary Schools took the event seriously.

I first tried it when I was in the VI Form at St. Julians High School in Newport in 1952. I won the One Mile Walk in the school sports. This put me in the school team for the Monmouthshire Secondary Schools Championships. I won that as well and went on to represent Monmouthshire in the Welsh Schools Championships. There, inexperienced, out of my class, I was disqualified, but I now had a taste for walking and decided to stick with it.

I joined my local club, Newport Harriers, an excellent and, by far, the best walking club in Wales. I was only interested in short-distance events, but we had two Centurions, J.B.F. Morgan C197 and T.H. Thomas C239.

When I joined Woodford green A.C. in 1958 I still raced only the shorter races but, with Tom Richardson C100 and Hewie Neilson C145, I became more interested in longer races. I assisted in some way or other at the Chigwell 100s in the 1960s and I decided that I would be a Centurion- but not yet.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s I decided it was time to try, but a series of Achilles tendon injuries stopped me. When we moved back to Wales in 1975 I joined Bristol Race Walking Club, which was led by the excellent Charles Shelley C356. Charles, with the club, promoted the Bristol 100s. I still wanted to be a Centurion and a locally organised race made a strong appeal to me. I had seen walkers arriving at Chigwell and the Brighton & Back absolutely exhausted in their efforts to get to the race for a 6 O'clock Friday start. A race from my own club only 20 miles from home and on a course I knew from club races seemed a very good idea. One problem was that I had never raced further than 20 miles, so I obviously needed serious miles in my legs.

I worked out several training courses from home and built the mileage systematically, included various feeding and set out with my dog. By the time of the 1977 Bristol 100 I had the fittest dog in Wales. He was a superb companion for me – and he loved the training.

My tactics for the race were simple. I would start at 5 miles per hour and hold it for as long as possible. At 62 miles I was 10 seconds down on my schedule and, at that point, I really believed I could do it. My wife Barbara, was my attendant, and she kept me going with encouragement and feeding.

From 62 miles I had 4 laps left – the Bristol course had a 9½ mile lap. I was now slowing. At 90½ miles I went through in 19 hours 30 minutes. I had one lap left, 9½ miles and 4½ hours to do it on. I needed 2½ hours. With just a couple of miles left I was caught by J.G. Peddie C605 and he got me going again. As we walked under the M4 for the last time and headed up the long hill to the finish, somebody called out that if we got a move on we would beat 22 hours. That did it. Tiredness vanished as we aimed to beat a time barrier. We both did. Peddie did 21.56.47 and I did 21.57.19.

I felt terrific and triumphant. I had done it! I had used a mixture of 'Vaseline' and 'Boots Foot Comfort' on my feet and it worked like a charm. My wife, who had been in and out of the car, trotting along with refreshment and support, had several nasty blood blisters.

Becoming a Centurion has meant a great deal to me. It is an honour to belong to this marvellous body and meet, on close terms, the fine people who are members, to belong to a club whose membership is decided by achievement, not by the paying of a subscription. It is not easy to join, but it is not meant to be.

I became a Grade 1 Judge in 1991, at the same time as my friend Eric Horwill C 390. I judged a couple of Battersea Park 100s. In those days one judges for the whole 24 hours.

In 2000 I put down to judge at the Captain Barclay Millennium Challenge at Newmarket. Peter Marlow was Chief Judge, but he realised that he was double-booked, as he was also down to judge the AAA Championships on the same day. He asked me to be Chief Judge at the 100, I was delighted to accept. There then seemed to be an assumption that I would carry on, and I did. The next 100 was the Hedgethorpe 100 at Colchester.

I was uneasy about judging for 24 hours. Concentration could not be maintained and so I introduced a rota system, with two teams of judges operating four hours on duty and four hours off. I have been Chief Judge at all the 100s since 2000 apart from the Manx 100s. I have loved it, loved the companionship of walkers and officials, contributing to these wonderful events.

J.F. Thomas