

**Henley-in-Arden walking contest poster, 21st July 1904**

**CR3547A/179**

The Document of the Month for April takes on a sporting theme and showcases a poster advertising a walking contest in Henley-in-Arden in July 1904. The poster comes from the collection CR3547, the personal and business papers of the Hemming family of Henley-In-Arden, which includes printed works such as posters, pamphlets and programmes for community events that took place in the town up until 1999. The poster on display highlights the popularity of competitive walking that took place during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

# HENLEY-IN-ARDEN WALKING CONTEST

THURSDAY, JULY 21, 1904,

Starting from the Mile-stone, Henley side of the "Bird-in-hand," to the  
"Dun Cow," and finish at the Market Place (about 12 miles).

ABOUT

£5

PRIZES.

START AT FOUR O'CLOCK.

**ENTRANCE 6d. Four Prizes.**

Open to a radius of Three Miles. Handicap by time.

*For further particulars apply to W. SHAKESPEARE, Junr., Hon. Sec.,  
on or before Wednesday, July 20th.*

S. SMITH, PRINTER & STATIONER 102, HIGH STREET (Opposite Church), HENLEY-IN-ARDEN.

Henley-in-Arden walking contest poster, Warwickshire County Record Office,  
CR3547A/179

The poster is A3 in size and is printed on thick, white paper with bold, green text in multiple fonts. It is shown to be printed locally by an 'S. Smith, Printer and Stationer' who was based at 102 High Street in Henley-in-Arden<sup>1</sup>. The poster would have been displayed in various positions across the town to encourage participation in the walking contest, specifically those living within a three-mile radius.

Advertising the contest, the poster states the time and date as four o'clock in the afternoon on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July and provides the route which participants would need to follow. It gives the starting point as the Milestone, situated at 185 High Street in the town, to the Bird in Hand public house on the Birmingham Road, then to the Dun Cow public house in Pathlow and finishing back at Henley-in-Arden marketplace, making a total distance of around twelve miles<sup>2</sup>. Participants were required to pay an entrance fee of 6d, or around £1.96 in today's money<sup>3</sup>.

Using the details provided on the contest poster, we can refer to local newspaper reports to find out what happened at the event itself. The Stratford-upon-Avon Herald, reporting on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> July 1904, gives the names of those officiating at the event, including race starter Mr Thomas King, judges Mr Reading and Mrs Stokes, handicappers Messrs A. Stokes, C.J Hughes and R. Herring and Honorary Secretary and Treasurer W. Shakespeare Jnr<sup>4</sup>.

The newspaper reports that the afternoon of the 21<sup>st</sup> of July was 'very warm'<sup>5</sup> which may have put some people off participating, as only thirteen of the sixteen entrants 'put in an appearance'<sup>6</sup>. The Leamington Spa Courier, also reporting on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1904, tells us that of those that took part, nine participants completed the full twelve miles and 1<sup>st</sup> prize of £2 5s (£176.78<sup>7</sup>) was awarded to a T Westbury, who completed the contest in 2 hours 9 mins and 55 seconds<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Henley-in-Arden walking contest poster, Warwickshire County Record Office, CR3547A/179

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Converted using The National Archives Currency Converter, [Currency converter: 1270–2017 \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](https://currencyconverter.nationalarchives.gov.uk/) (accessed 06/03/24)

<sup>4</sup> 'Walking Contest' *Stratford Upon Avon Herald*, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1904, found via the British Newspaper Archive:

<https://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0004779/19040729/021/0003?browse=False>

<sup>5</sup> 'Walking Contest' *Stratford Upon Avon Herald*, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1904, found via the British Newspaper Archive:

<https://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0004779/19040729/021/0003?browse=False>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Converted using The National Archives Currency Converter, [Currency converter: 1270–2017 \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](https://currencyconverter.nationalarchives.gov.uk/) (accessed 06/03/24)

<sup>8</sup> 'Walking Contest' *Leamington Spa Courier*, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1904, found via the British Newspaper Archive: [Henley-In-Arden. | Leamington Spa Courier | Friday 29 July 1904 | British Newspaper Archive](https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0004779/19040729/021/0003?browse=False)

Both local newspaper articles highlight the popularity of the event, with ‘crowds of people assembled’<sup>9</sup> at the finish line in the marketplace, who provided an ‘animated appearance’ and ‘loudly applauded’<sup>10</sup> the finishers. Community spirit is particularly emphasised when the oldest competitor, a Joseph Stanley aged 65 years old, finished in a respectable 2 hours and 34 minutes and the many impressed spectators decided to pull together and collected 11s 6d (£45.18<sup>11</sup>) to present to him<sup>12</sup>.

### **Pedestrianism**

The poster on display allows us a glimpse, at a local community level, of a wider phenomenon taking place in across the world during this time. Pedestrianism, or competitive walking, became a popular spectator sport during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is believed to have originated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century where noblemen placed bets on how far and how fast their footmen could walk alongside their carriages. This wagering turned into a spectacle sport during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with participants walking large distances over many days inside packed indoor arenas and wagers being placed on which participant would drop out first<sup>13</sup>.

Competitive race walking would later be recognised as a professional sport as basic rules were established, making it more formalised<sup>14</sup>. It was first featured in the 1904 Olympics as part of an all-rounder event (similar to what we now recognise as a Decathlon) before becoming a separate event at the 1908 Olympic Games, where it has continued to feature at each Olympic Games since.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Walking Contest’ *Stratford Upon Avon Herald*, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1904, found via the British Newspaper Archive:

<https://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0004779/19040729/021/0003?browse=False>

<sup>11</sup> Converted using The National Archives Currency Converter, [Currency converter: 1270–2017 \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](https://currency-converter.nationalarchives.gov.uk/) (accessed 06/03/24)

<sup>12</sup> ‘Walking Contest’ *Leamington Spa Courier*, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1904, found via the British Newspaper Archive: [Henley-In-Arden. | Leamington Spa Courier | Friday 29 July 1904 | British Newspaper Archive](#)

<sup>13</sup> ‘Race walking: Origin, rules and Olympic history’ found via Olympics.com

<https://olympics.com/en/news/all-you-need-to-know-about-race-walking> (accessed 06/03/24)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.