

John Edwin Fowler-Dixon, Centurion No 1, 1850 - 1943

When the Centurion "Brotherhood" was formed in 1911, John Edwin Fowler-Dixon was invited to become Centurion number 1 in recognition of his walk of 100 miles in 20.36.08 at Lillie Bridge, London in 1877.

The Pedestrians

Although in the C18th and C19th, there had been many celebrated "Pedestrians." Men such as John Foster-Powell, Captain Robert Barclay, George Wilson, and Edward Payson-Weston, and a number of women also, achieved notable feats of endurance. Various venues were used for their performances, including Newmarket Heath, the roads to Cambridge and York, and public halls like the Royal Agricultural Hall, Islington. However, these Pedestrians usually performed for wagers and prizes, and they were certainly not amateurs. A form of jog-trotting was considered permissible, even in walking races – something which would not pass the scrutiny of modern-day judges.

The first amateur performance

On August 21st/22nd 1877, J E Fowler-Dixon qualified as Centurion No 1 in a 100 miles track race at Lillie Bridge, London, clocking 20 hours 36 minutes and 8 seconds and setting an amateur walking record for this distance.

This was the first known amateur performance in which a distance of 100 miles or more was walked within 24 hours. No further amateur performance of 100 miles is recorded for over 20 years, until Surrey Walking Club's London to Brighton and back 104 miles walk in 1902. By 1911, several further walking races had been held in which men had achieved the 100 miles distance. In 1907, the record time for 100 miles had been improved, by T E Hammond of Blackheath Harriers, to 18h 13m 37s, and in 1909, a distance of 120 miles 1240 yards in 24h had been walked by E F Broad of Surrey Walking Club.

1911 - The Centurions

Several athletes who had achieved the coveted 100 miles distance met and took soundings about the idea of forming a society. On 11 May 1911, at a meeting at the Ship and Turtle, Leadenhall Street, London, the society of Centurions was inaugurated and held its first meeting. John Edwin Fowler-Dixon, having the longest-standing [34 years] qualifying performance, was invited to become Centurion No. 1 and was elected President for life. The inaugural meeting was attended by 13 Centurions. A total of 48 men had, by that date, qualified to become Centurions and each was awarded his unique Centurion number for life [in order of qualifying], as Centurions still are today.

As the minutes of the first meeting state, the necessary qualification for mem-

bership "shall be that the proposed member is an amateur and has walked 100 miles or more within 24 hours."

John Edwin Fowler-Dixon

"JEF-D" was a versatile and successful athlete, a prominent sports official and administrator, as well as a notable sports journalist and author. A world record-holding athlete, a founder and life Vice-President of the England Amateur Athletics Association, an official at four Olympic Games, JEF-D died at the age of 93 and is buried in the famous Highgate Cemetery in North London.

In 1877, in addition to setting the 100 miles walking record in his Centurion qualifying performance, JEF-D set a fifty miles amateur walking record of 8 hours 54 minutes and 40 seconds.

Also a talented middle-distance and long-distance runner, JEF-D achieved the record for the forty miles run in 4 hours 46 minutes and 54 seconds at Birmingham at the end of December 1884, and this record still stood in 1950. In 1885 he set the amateur record for fifty miles running at 6 hours 18 minutes and 26 seconds, beating his own record in the previous year by 2 minutes and 21 seconds.

He assisted in the formation of the England Amateur Athletic Association in Oxford in 1880, and was a Life Vice-President. An internationally-ranked athletics official, he became one of the British judges at the Olympics, serving as a judge at four Olympic Games, those held in Athens in 1906, Stockholm in 1912, Antwerp in 1920 and Paris in 1924.

A member of the London Athletics Club [in whose colours he had accomplished his Centurion performance in 1877,] JEF-D became President of the London Athletic Club in 1912. He was also Vice-President of the West London Lacrosse Club and a member of other athletic organisations.

A successful sports journalist and author, JEF-D wrote "Athletes and the War" as well as verses, short stories and articles on amateur sports and pastimes. A good golfer, he was a leading member of the Press Golfing Society. He was a close friend of Sir Emsley Carr, a Fleet Street Editor (News of the World) whose name lives on via the annual "Emsley Carr Mile" event.

When The Centurions formed in 1911, John Edwin Fowler-Dixon became their President and held Office until his death in October 1943 aged 93. Each year, one walker in the 100 miles Centurion qualifying event receives the "The Fowler-Dixon Style Trophy".

JE Dixon's father, a vicar, died at 93 years of age, and his mother at the age of 95. JE Dixon married Rachel Sarah Elizabeth Fowler, daughter of William Fowler,

of Braybrooke, Northants, and Regents Park, London in September 1874, and added Fowler part to his name.

JE F-D lived in Highgate at 5 Hillway. He is buried with his wife and children in London's famous Highgate cemetery. His obituary was published in the newspapers on 10 October 1943.

The following is an extract from Highgate Cemetery's records.

SPORTING PERSONALITIES AT HIGHGATE CEMETERY

<http://www.highgate-cemetery.org/index.php/sporting-interments>

JOHN EDWIN FOWLER-DIXON CENTURION No 1 & HIGHGATE CEMETERY

FOWLER-DIXON John Edwin (1850-1943). This Highgate resident's interest in athletics began as a journalist and founder of the Athletic News Agency. He achieved the record for the forty miles run in 4 hours 46 minutes and 54 seconds at Birmingham at the end of December 1884 and this record still stood in 1950. In 1885 he did hold the record for fifty miles amateur running at 6 hours 18 minutes and 26 seconds beating his own record in the previous year by 2 minutes and 21 seconds. He was not only a runner for he had the fifty miles amateur walking record of 8 hours 54 minutes and 40 seconds in 1877 and the 100 miles amateur walking record in the same year. With these achievements it is perhaps not surprising that he became President of the London Athletic Club in 1912 and he was also Vice-President of the West London Lacrosse Club and a member of other athletic institutions. He was Life Vice-President of the Amateur Athletic Association and assisted in its formation at Oxford in 1880. There was also an international aspect to his achievements when he became one of the British judges at the Olympian Games in Athens in 1906, Stockholm in 1912, Antwerp in 1920 and Paris four years after that. His journalistic interests produced *Athletes and the War* as well as verses, short stories and articles on amateur sports and pastimes.

Four Centurions visit the grave of John Edwin Fowler-Dixon in Highgate cemetery in February 2013



A poignant occasion - Ann Sayer, Sandra Brown, Sue Clements and Bill Sutherland.

The memorial reads: John Edwin Fowler-Dixon, Author and Athlete. A founder of the Amateur Athletic Association.