

THE HISTORY OF THE "IRON GAME"

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THOMAS INCH WINS THE FIRST BRITAIN'S STRONGEST MAN TITLE

HISTORY makes present circumstances understandable. Indeed, very often present day affairs could not be evaluated except by association with the past.

Thus a title often referred to in pre-war days, viz.: "Britain's Strongest Man" became associated in the minds of the then generation of lifters with the name of, possibly, the greatest of British Amateur Champions, Ronald WALKER, who was the undisputed Hvy-Wt. British Amateur Champion from 1931 to 1936. During that period, whilst still an amateur, he won the title of "Britain's Strongest Man" in a championship held under the auspices of the "British Amateur Weight-Lifters' Association." This title he held without challenge until the very day of his most unfortunate and regrettable death in 1948.

Yet the title had a history and the two title holders concerned with the making of that history are alive to-day in the persons of Thomas Inch, age 66, and Edward Aston, age 65—both fit, well and unusually strong for men of their age.

The title was first brought into official prominence by the action of *Health and Strength* in 1910 when they offered a money prize of £50 to the winner of an open championship for that specific title.

The motive actuating *H. & S.* at that time was a genuine desire to clarify an obscure situation, and to enable the "World of Weights" to learn the worth of the man destined for that superlative award. Thus once again was the official organ to place its resources behind efforts to put weight-lifting on a businesslike footing, instead of permitting some lifters to do anything but lift heavy weights.

The offer of £50 made by the proprietors of *H. & S.* aroused great interest. So much so that donors from all over the country sent in contributions towards the purchase of a Gold Cup for presentation to the winner. Included among these donors were Arthur Saxon, £3; Kurt and Hermann Saxon, £1 each, and Mr. A. Dennison Light, £10, etc.

THE CONTEST IS DESCRIBED BY W. J. LOWRY

It was soon discovered that there were really several strong men in the field—some without real competitive experience but, in all cases, they were strong.

Weekly features in the magazine appeared giving history and exploits of all those who intimated their intention of competing against Thomas Inch, hitherto regarded as the actual Champion by most of the enthusiasts of those days. These accounts aroused interest as seldom had it been so stimulated before, and the day of the contest was indeed an eventful one.

Absence of Edward Aston

Aston was not one of the competitors for this title on that particular occasion although history has yet to record that he was ultimately to annex that title. On this occasion, however, he had too much to engage his attention in the match against Max Sick, the Bavarian, whose actual competitive weight-lifting ability was still a matter for conjecture.

Thus Aston forfeited an opportunity to secure at least runner's up prize in order to win a far greater honour—World's Middleweight Professional Champion.

The contestants ultimately to appear on the date of the championship were: Fred Hall, of Poplar; Wilfred Harwood, of Haworth, Yorkshire; Teviotdale, of Scotland (the birthplace of many strong men); Jas Evans, of Macclesfield; Cressey, of Holbeck, Yorkshire; and, of course, Thomas Inch, of Scarborough, Yorkshire.

It is interesting at this juncture to note how often Yorkshire figures in important weight-lifting championships. It is not entirely coincidental that the three title holders in history were born in Yorkshire—Inch, Aston and Walker.

Difficulty was experienced at first in securing a referee acceptable to all concerned. The choice, at last, fell upon our old friend Tom Pevier, ex-British Hvy-Wt. Amateur Champion—and, at that point in history, still the undefeated Hvy-Wt. Amateur Champion!

In this connection it is instructive to note that that special sanction was sought and obtained from the Amateur Gymnastic Association for Pevier so to act. Thus was created the official precedent for amateur referees to adjudicate upon professional performances which led to the adjudication by me on professional records by Edward Aston, Thomas Inch, Herman Goerner, etc., during the years between the two wars.

The venue selected was the historic one of The German Gymnasium, Pancras Road, London, N., and the date was Saturday, the 11th June, 1910.

The lifts laid down to decide the Championship were: One Hand Clean, Two Hands Clean and Jerk with Barbell, One Hand Snatch and the One Hand Anyhow—lifts that differed slightly from the old amateur set but which, nevertheless, were fairly representative.

The contest was arranged to take place in two sessions—one in the afternoon, and the other in the evening. Lots were drawn to decide the order of appearance: thus, Messrs. Jas. Evans, Fred Hall and Wilfred Harwood were drawn to lift during the afternoon, whilst Teviotdale, Inch and Cressey were selected to lift in the evening.

Unfortunately (or fortunately) for Hall, he could not secure permission from his employers to compete in the afternoon session, and, therefore, despite the rule which could have disqualified him, he was sportingly allowed to lift in the evening.

Many distinguished spectators made their appearance with the inevitable introductions on the fateful day. Professor Szalay; Mr. Ferdinand Gruhn, who had trained Georges Hackenschmidt for his contest against the Terrible Turk, Madralli; Mr. Eugene Corrie, celebrated National Sporting Club Boxing Referee, Mr. Edward Aston—to mention but a few.

And, at 2.30 p.m., the now well-known M.C., Major Best, opened the proceedings in his usual inimitable manner.

Wilfred Harwood easily defeated his solitary afternoon rival—Jas. Evans. Harwood, then famous as a vegetarian strong man, lifted with grace and ease, and lifted creditably. After all, 201 lbs. One-Hand is good in any style, and a "Clean" lift with that poundage is still very good even in these days of Olympic heights.

The evening show, of course, was the real attraction, and it found Inch looking his best and fittest. He had reduced body-weight a good deal but his fit and strong weight of 13 st. 2 lbs. at the end of the contest obviously gave proof to the belief long held that he could never again compete as a middleweight.

Inch, despite the care of his training and the precision with which he tackled each and every poundage, had failures, and was disqualified once by Pevier. Despite these, he lifted well, scientifically and calculatingly—obviously the master of all present.

Fred Hall, of Poplar, was indeed the "dark horse" of the championship and his form, considering all things, was really a surprise to all including, I venture to assert, to Inch himself. Experts present considered that he devoted too much time to elaborate massage and feeding during the two hours spent by him on the lifting platform, with results that minimised his total but did not make any difference to his position of runner-up.

Teviotdale insisted on "swinging" rather than "snatching" and also concentrated too long prior to making his onslaughts on the weights. Incidentally, this, apparently, is no longer considered a fault but is practised by many of the World's best.

Inch, subsequent to the contest, suggested that a time limit should be fixed on all attempts. An idea which, I believe, could be adopted with advantage even thirty-nine years after his brain wave.

Note.—Weights were weighed to the nearest ounce in professional championships; hence the odd fractions of eighths of pounds.

RESULTS OF THE FIRST OFFICIAL BRITAIN'S STRONGEST MAN CHAMPIONSHIP HELD AT THE GERMAN GYMNASIUM, PANCRAS ROAD, LONDON, N.1 ON SATURDAY, the 11th June, 1910—two sessions; afternoon and evening.

Name of Competitor and District	Two Hands				Total
	One Hand Clean	Clean & Jerk w B.	One Hand Snatch	One Hand Anyhow	
1. Thomas Inch, Fulham, London	213½	250½	132	230½	826½
2. Fred Hall, Poplar, London	210½	252½	136	182½	780½
3. Wilfred Harwood, Haworth, Yorkshire	201½	231½	139½	206½	779½
4. Teviotdale, Scotland	175½	231½	139½	193	739½
5. Jas. Evans, Macclesfield, Cheshire	133½	220½	115½	129½	599½
6. Thomas Cressey, Holbeck, Yorks.	Nil	226	132½	Nil	358½