

The 1908 Olympic Games in Brent.

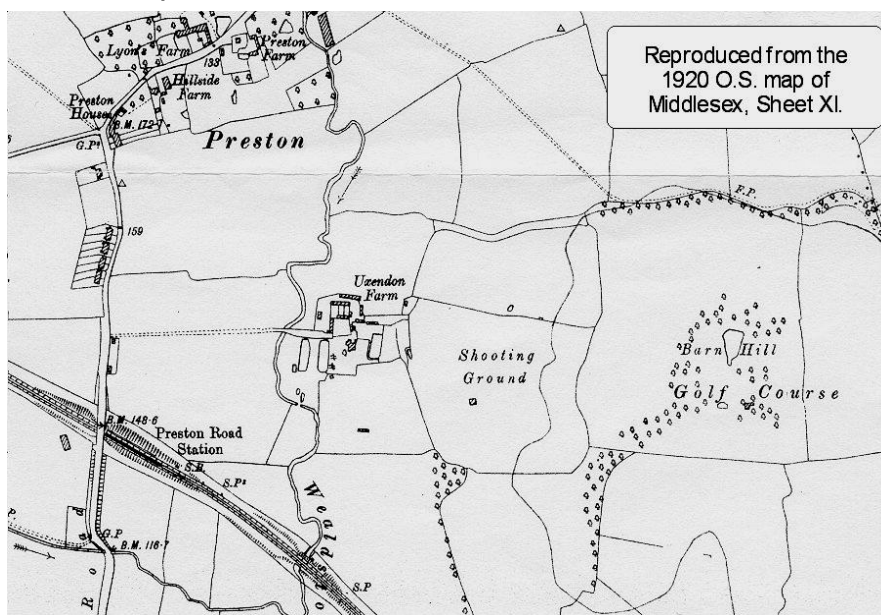
The fourth modern Olympic Games of 1908 were originally awarded to Rome, but London agreed to stage them when Italy had to meet heavy rebuilding costs after a devastating eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 1906. The London Games were the largest yet, with just over two thousand competitors (including 37 women) from twenty-two nations taking part in 109 events. The main venue was the new White City Stadium at Shepherd's Bush, but two events took place, partly or wholly, in what is now the London Borough of Brent.

Clay Pigeon Shooting:

Although the rifle and pistol shooting events were at Bisley, where Oscar Swahn of Sweden became the oldest ever first time Olympic gold medal winner at the age of 60, the shotgun events were held at Uxendon Farm, near Wembley. Because road access was difficult, the Metropolitan Railway was persuaded to open Preston Road Halt for the convenience of competitors and spectators. If passengers wanted the train to stop at this new station, they had to ask the driver beforehand, or put out their hand as the train approached if they were waiting on the wooden platform.

Map showing the Preston and Uxendon area as it was at the time of the 1908 Olympic Games – mainly countryside, with a hamlet of three farms and a tearoom at Preston Hill.

[Source: Brent Archives – Maps collection.]



Unlike the Paris Olympics of 1900, where the shotgun events included live pigeon shooting (the only time in Olympic history when creatures have been deliberately killed), the 1908 competitions used clay saucers as targets. Sixty-one men representing eight countries took part in the "clay bird shooting", held from 8th to 11th July.

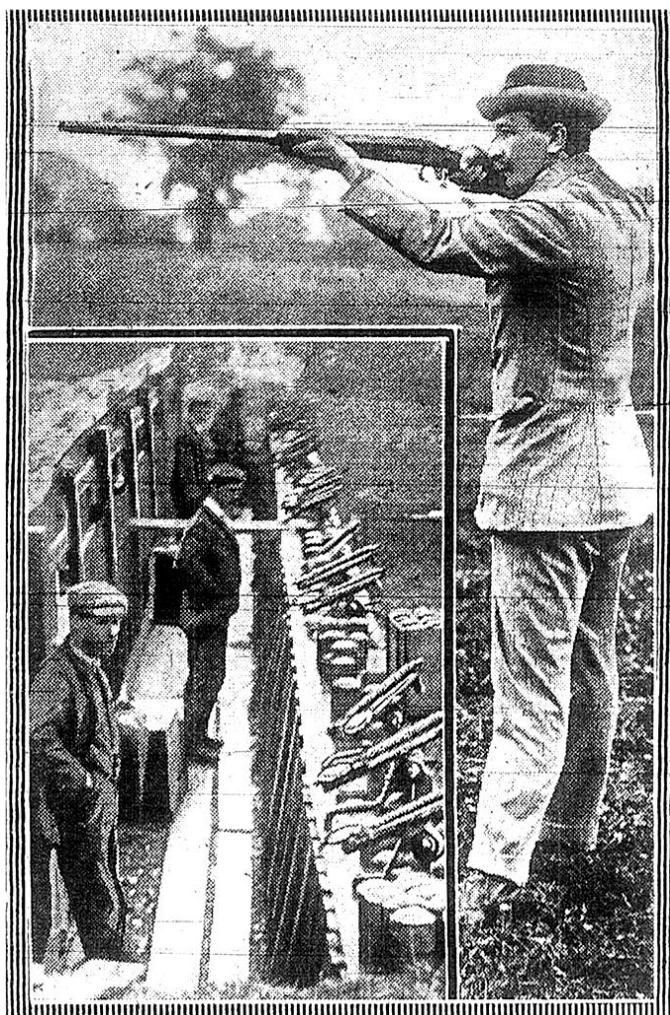
The outcome of event was concisely given in "The Times" newspaper of Monday 13 July 1908, which contained the following report:-

'CLAY BIRD SHOOTING

The clay bird shooting competitions in connection with the Olympic games were concluded, at Uxendon, on Saturday. In the first stage each competitor shot at 30 birds in two rounds of 15 birds each. The second stage consisted of 20 birds per man, fired at down the line, while in the third stage each competitor shot at 20 birds in two rounds of ten birds each, followed by 10 birds per man at unknown traps and angles.

The gold medal in the individual competition was won by a Canadian, Mr W.H. Ewing, with a total score of 72, another Canadian, Mr G. Beattie, winning the silver medal with a score of 60, whilst Mr A. Maunder, British Isles, won the bronze medal after a tie with Mr A. Metaxas, Greece.

First place and gold medals in the inter-team competition went to Mr F.W. Moore's British Isles team with a score of 407, Canada winning the silver medals with a score of 405, and Mr G.W. Whitaker's British Isles team the bronze with 372. The Dutch team was knocked out on Friday.'



A picture from "The Daily Mirror" of 9 July 1908, showing one of the British competitors at Uxendon and '*... the traps from which the "birds" are released*'.

[Source: British Library Newspapers, Colindale.]

The 1908 Olympics were the last where competitors entered the Games as individuals, rather than as selected members of a national team. This was why Britain was able to win two medals in the team competition. The teams were described as from the British Isles because they included members from Ireland, who the organisers would not allow to compete under their own flag.

A photograph of the clay bird shooting competition at Uxendon, from the "Evening Standard" Sports Supplement of 11 July 1908.

[Source: British Library Newspapers, Colindale.]

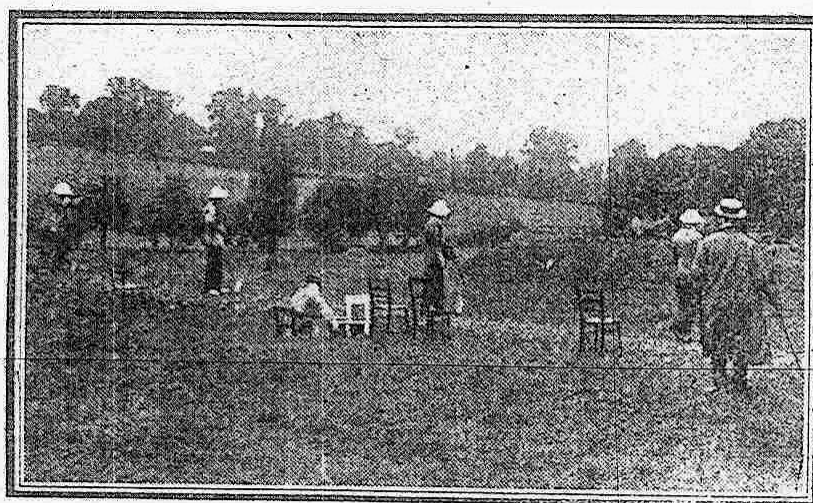


Photo 12]

OLYMPIC GAMES.

Photo 12 Sports Agency.

Clay bird shooting at Uxendon Shooting School Club. The Canadian team.

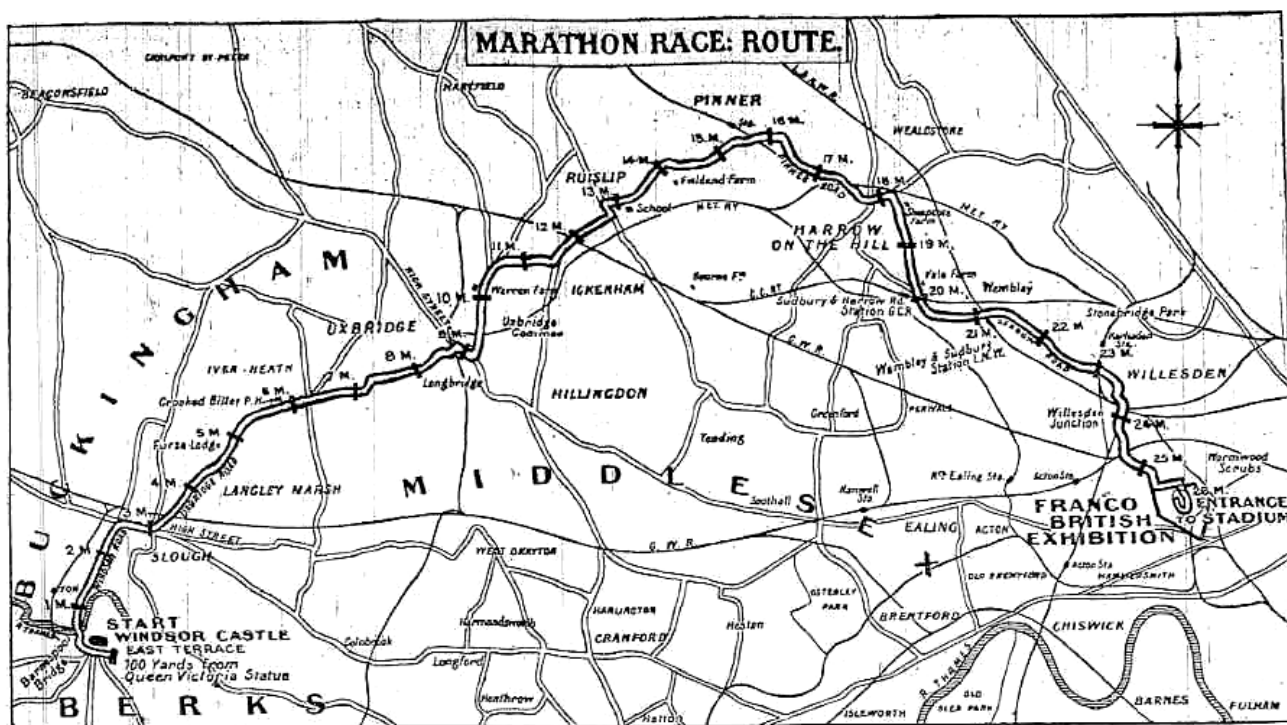
The week after this Olympic event, the Uxendon Shooting Club hosted the national Clay Pigeon Association's championship, while the main athletic events of the 1908 Olympic Games began at the White City Stadium.

The Marathon:

There was no fixed length for the "marathon" long distance running event. The 1896 Athens race, and those at the second and third Games, were all about 40 kilometres, but the Olympic Committee suggested 42 kilometres for London. The British organisers ignored the metric distance, and measured a course of exactly 26 miles back from the Stadium entrance to a starting line at Windsor Castle, five miles of which passed through the Urban Districts of Wembley and Willesden.

The first twenty miles of the route had '*... no very striking features*', according to a description in "The Times" on the day of the race, but this changed at Sudbury:

'... it is here, five miles from home, where the tramlines begin, that the runners will meet with the severest test of their endurance. Because of their inelasticity, wood blocks are particularly trying to the feet, and the glitter on the polished surface of the road, if the sun happens to be shining, will be apt to make a man who has travelled over 20 miles at top speed turn more than a little dizzy.... The hills, though none of them are really severe, are steeper and longer than anywhere else on the course, and the 22nd, 23rd and 24th miles are by far the most punishing part of the race. After that, when the Jubilee Clock Tower, just short of Willesden Junction, has been passed, the road drops once more, and the final run in across Wormwood-scrubs and down a lane at the back of the Stadium is easier going.'



Map of the Marathon Route, from "The Times" of 25 July 1908.

[Source: British Library Newspapers, Colindale.]

The 1908 Olympics were the last where competitors entered the Games as individuals, rather than as selected members of a national team. Because of this, the fifty-six runners from sixteen nations who lined up for the race on 24th July included twelve each from Great Britain & Ireland, Canada and the USA, as well as single entrants from Belgium, Bohemia, Finland, Hungary and Russia. In the previous few days there had been profiles of some of the top runners in the newspapers, including two of the "favourites" from the British

Empire, Charles Hefferon of South Africa and the native American Indian, Tom Longboat, from Canada.

At 2.33pm on a hot afternoon Mary, Princess of Wales, started the race. Three British athletes went off at a fast pace, the leader covering the first two miles in just over ten minutes. He had dropped out before Uxbridge, and the other two had faded before the race reached Pinner. The whole of the course was lined with spectators, as ticket prices for the Stadium were too high for ordinary people, but the crowds were thickest after the long, dusty road from Harrow passed Vale Farm. As "The Times" said next day:

'... over all the last part of the course, when one got on to tram-lines and between rows of houses, the spectators were packed as tightly as possible, and then only leaving a part of the road open, but enough to ensure no discomfort to the competitors.'

At Sudbury Hefferon had a four minute lead, but the crowds through Wembley and Stonebridge Park watched a fascinating race, as Pietro Dorando of Italy ran hard to close the gap, with three Americans not far behind him. By Harlesden, the leader's margin was down to two minutes, but soon afterwards Hefferon developed stomach cramps and slowed to a walk (he told a reporter later *'... I accepted a draught of champagne. It was a great mistake.'*). Dorando passed him with just a mile to go.



This photograph of Pietro Dorando, passing the Jubilee Clock during the marathon race, was one of several taken by a firm of photographers in Harlesden High Street, and turned into picture postcards. They sold 4,000 cards during the next week, some of which have survived.

[Source: Brent Archives –Image and Photograph online collection, No.1034.]

Dorando reached the Stadium so exhausted that it seemed unlikely he would complete the final 385 yards round the track to the finish in front of the Royal Box. He collapsed five times, the last time just 10 yards short of the tape. As the second runner, John Hayes of the USA, entered the Stadium, an official helped Dorando to his feet and guided him to the

line, in a time of 2hrs 54mins 46secs. When Hayes finished half a minute later, Dorando was being carried away on a stretcher. Hefferon finally struggled home almost another minute behind, and also had to be stretchered off.

A special "night extra" edition of the "Evening Standard" was published on 24th July, giving the story of the race under the headline:

MARATHON RACE ITALY WINS AFTER A GREAT STRUGGLE DRAMATIC SCENES

but the final paragraph of the report began '*The Americans have lodged a protest against the winner...*' The result was inevitable, and Dorando was disqualified for receiving assistance, with first place in the marathon being awarded to Hayes.



The front page of "The Daily Mirror" on 25 July 1908.

[Source: British Library Newspapers, Colindale.]

"The Daily Mirror" report on 25th July noted that:

'The Queen was present in the royal box, and though much distressed by the exhaustion of many of the runners, exhibited the keenest interest in the result of the historic race.'

That interest was made clear in the Stadium less than 24 hours after the marathon, during the prize giving on the final afternoon of the London Olympics. As well as presenting the winner's medal and trophy to Hayes, Queen Alexandra made a personal gift of a gold cup to Dorando. There had been no time to engrave it, but a card attached to the cup read:

"FOR PIETRO DORANDO
In Remembrance of the Marathon Race
from Windsor to the Stadium
FROM QUEEN ALEXANDRA."



A photograph of Dorando receiving his gold cup from Queen Alexandra, from "The Daily Mirror" of 27 July 1908.

[Source: British Library Newspapers, Colindale.]

The story of this epic race made newspaper headlines around the world, and raised the profile of both the Olympic Games and the marathon. When a fixed length for the race was set in the 1920's, it was no surprise that the distance chosen was 26miles 385yards.

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