

"The Archive of the Feet": Field Walking in Sports History

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SPORTS HERITAGE IS A GROWING CONCERN. Clubs and governing bodies are taking an increasing interest in presenting their past, often evidenced in corporate stadium tours from Manchester to Melbourne that include trophy cabinets and key sites where famous events took place. Halls of fame and sports museums present us with the artifacts of their past, otherwise ordinary objects like outfits and playing equipment that have become hallowed by association with the greats of their games, such as Lasse Virén's running shoes in Finland's Sports Museum. Local museums include sporting collections to help tell the story of their place, while national museums mount special exhibitions, such as the Victoria and Albert Museum's 2008 display on Olympic posters, to stress the social and cultural importance of sport. Central and local authorities throughout the world commemorate sportsmen and women in statues, street names, public buildings, postage stamps, and coins, from the Brian Clough Way between Nottingham and Derby to the Joe Louis statue in downtown Detroit, from Donald Bradman appearing on an Australian twenty-cent piece coin through to the Mary Peters Track in Belfast. Statutory bodies such as English Heritage are also taking an interest in sport, exploring ways in which sport's surviving material culture can be protected and presented, with a particular emphasis on community amenities for participation sports, such as bowling greens and swimming pools.¹

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The North American Society for Sport History

Underlying this disparate growth in sports heritage, which is informed by a sometimes uneasy mix of commercial, academic, and community agendas, is a basic assumption: that the places where sport happened in the past matter in the present. Sports geographer and historian John Bale linked this to the notion of "topophilia," where sports sites can "create fond memories, or provide a sense of place" for the people who play and/or spectate at them.² The emotions involved are deeply historical in an emotive rather than academic way, linked as they are to people's biographies and family histories, and to communities' sense of development and identity. Sports historians are recognizing these issues, and have, since Bale's groundbreaking *Landscapes of Modern Sport* of 1994, increasingly taken 'place' into account. This trend has also been influenced by the redevelopment of many sports grounds to make them fit for purpose for post-industrial consumers, both in the stadium and in the armchair, a trend typified by the demolition of many old football grounds in England in the wake of the 1989 Hillsborough disaster, and their rebuilding as modern amenities on post-industrial land.

This recent wave of stadium demolition and redevelopment has given rise to an important issue in sports history: what happens when old sporting sites are abandoned? How do redevelopments of old sites accommodate the memory of what happened there? Do traces of the sport usage remain evident long after the field and the stands have been reduced to archaeology and replaced by housing, shops, or offices? In many cases, some element of memorial culture has been built into the new layout. A few examples from Southampton, a port city on the south coast of England, illustrate this trend. At The Dell, the ground of Southampton FC from 1898 until its demolition in 2001 when the club moved to a new purpose built stadium, the layout of the new housing development follows the shape of the pitch and the stands, while all of the housing units have been named after Southampton players and managers, such as Matthew Le Tissier and Ted Bates. Quarter of a mile away in Northlands Road, the County Ground had been Hampshire County Cricket Club's main home since 1885. The club moved to an out-of-town site in 2001 and sold the ground for redevelopment, and the housing estate now built on the site includes a piece of sculpture that echoes a wicket, while Marshall Square commemorates a leading player. This trend is playing out in towns and cities across the country, seen most famously at Highbury, which Arsenal FC left in 2006: there one of the stands has been converted into luxury flats, while the site of the pitch has become a communal garden.

This commemoration can make it relatively easy for historians to get a sense of such sites' geography. However, many other sport sites have been lost without such traces: athletics grounds that lost their audiences; school playing fields that were sold for redevelopment; bear pits and cockpits that fell out of favor with the law. While some of these sites have left archaeological or built traces, many more have not, and the only clue to their exact whereabouts is on old maps or in pictures that we can gauge against extant features. It is this issue—how to get a feel for sport sites when the sport has gone—that concerns me here. Our starting point for such places will be documentary evidence. We must use historical maps to guide us to where sites were and how they inter-related with their environments, and we must use contemporary visual evidence—engravings, paintings, photographs, and film, whatever is available—to get a sense of dimensions, color, and appearance so that we can go beyond the single dimension that mapping offers. Oral history can also help for the recent past, giving us personal insights on how spaces were used, and what it

felt, sounded, and smelt like to be there. Similarly, contemporary press reports can give us a flavor of atmosphere and environment. Official reports on the organization and regulation of events may also be available. However, a key ingredient is missing from this mix of sources and methods: physical engagement with the site, what historian Simon Schama, citing one of his old teachers, called "the archive of the feet."³ What I aim to do here is to advocate an increased use of field walking as a method in sports history research and to model it with a case study of a field walk on an important site that left only minimal traces behind, the route of the 1908 Olympic Marathon, which I walked in the centenary year as part of my on-going research on the first London Olympics.

Field Walking as Historical Research

There are many advantages that we, as historians, can gain from increased field walking, not least the individual health benefits of getting out of the classroom, the archive, or the library and into the open air. Methodologically, the benefits that can accrue to our understanding can also be significant if we add visits to the sites to our visits to the archives. Being there gives us at the very least a sense of place, an appreciation—however much the landscapes and townscapes may have changed since the sport happened—of dimensions, of distances between things, of sightlines and vistas, of the topography and climate, and how all of these aspects of place may have influenced the playing and the watching of sport. Field walking can also help us to understand how old sporting sites have been treated in redevelopment. In some cases, road layouts remain relatively faithful to the sporting layout. Stanley Crescent in London's Notting Hill Gate still follows the curve of the race track that was closed in 1841, while in Tuscany, Lucca's market place is a perfect fit in the footprint of the Roman amphitheatre. This kind of adaptation of space takes us into sports historian Richard Holt's pursuit of continuity and change in sports history on the micro level. Using the Southampton examples again, we can trace some parts of the modern city's history through its abandonment of its nineteenth-century football and cricket grounds, a history that takes us into post-industrial demands for housing and the shift to a post-industrial economy and the lifestyles that go with it. In this way, the sports historian can link play to its shifting socio-economic contexts in a clear way, with the fate of sport sites serving as an index to historical change in communities. In short, being there can add both geographical detail and contextual awareness to our research into sport. Field walking, supported by library- and archive-based research, is beneficial to our work, as I aim to demonstrate through my Olympic exploration.

There is, of course, a risk that even with documentary back-up, field walking in sports history can become an overly antiquarian affair, or little more than a tourist exercise, a kind of guided tour with sport as a special subject. It is also too easy simply to record places, measure distances, and treat the whole exercise as just another piece of empirical fact-finding. This has its place, but if it is all that we do then it might stifle both the creative and the critical urges that are so important in the writing of interesting history. For this reason, we need to take intellectual guides with us as well as our maps and our walking boots: we need to develop theoretically-informed ways of walking and engaging with the old sporting landscape. We will often find nothing to mark sites of the historical sport, and we need ways of dealing with those absences just as we do for presences. Each of us has our inspiration in other fields of our research, our methodological gurus and guides

from whom we have learnt how to read documents, how to consider evidence, and what to do with it: and the same needs apply in field walking. My debts in developing the informed walk along the 1908 Marathon route are to a number of people working in disparate fields. Used critically, their insights can prove beneficial to all sports history field walking.

My first guide is the doyen of English local history, W.G. Hoskins. In *Local History in England*, first published in 1959 and revised in 1972, he urged local historians to get out into the field: "The great scientist Humboldt said that no chemist ought to be afraid to get his hands wet. For the same reasons, no historian—certainly no local historian—ought to be afraid to get his feet wet."⁴ Hoskins was a practical guide and was not explicitly theoretical: as is usual for those historians who do not draw attention to their theoretical perspectives, his work was characterized by an assumption of empiricism. What he wanted was for local historians—academic or popular, professional or amateur—to get things right, to build up the detail on what happened where, and how different phases of a community's history related to each other. Next to Hoskins I nominate Simon Schama, whose *Landscape and Memory* of 1995 did so much to get cultural and social historians thinking about places and the meanings we attach to them. He emphasized the relationships that exist in the places "where history and geography met," the political and cultural battles that go on over the preservation of some landscapes and the destruction of others, and the meanings that communities attach to their forests, rivers, and mountains.⁵ These insights can be an inspiration for anyone wanting to go beyond the obvious parts of a town's sportscape—its stadiums and swimming pools, for example—and into the ways those locations have taken on layers of meaning linked to class, community, and generational identity.

Hoskins and Schama did not say much about sport, apart from the latter's work on mountaineering, although their complementary blend of empirical and critical readings of places can teach sports historians a great deal. Next to them, I nominate John Bale, the sports geographer with historical sensibilities who has done more than anyone to get sports historians to think about the meanings that people attach to their sport sites and to take geography into account. *Landscapes of Modern Sport* provides us with a rich vocabulary that helps us to interpret sporting locations, from individual stadiums and club houses through to tracts of countryside devoted to hunting, skiing, cycling, or climbing. The key concept of topophilia—the love of place—which he applied to such locations complements the work of social and cultural historians interested in spectating habits and identity formation. Similarly, his use of topophilia's opposite, topophobia, to sports locations with which we feel uncomfortable, has helped us to understand hostile sport environments. Bale's application of the concept of placelessness to sport gives us a theoretical grasp on processes of globalization in sport, particularly the ways in which facilities such as Olympic running tracks have become standardized, regardless of geographical location.⁶

With Bale we must place Simon Inglis and English Heritage's *Played in Britain* project, which has done so much to get sporting heritage taken seriously. The books in this series have made a strong case for artifacts and buildings of sport to be recorded and, where possible, preserved in the same way that more traditional protected buildings, such as castles and stately homes have done.⁷ This is a heritage from below, which complements the museum and heritage establishment's growing interest in the objects and locations of everyday life, as witness such post-industrial initiatives as Beamish Mining Museum in

County Durham and the National Trust's acquisition of a group of working-class terraced houses in Birmingham. Through *Played in Britain*, English Heritage has put sports heritage on the radar of both sports history and the heritage lobby. These books provide excellent training manuals for anyone wanting to go field walking with their eyes open for sport's historical landscapes, such as street names, sport-related road layouts, and surviving sites. Their work also has a functional role in lobbying for protection and investment in sports heritage. It thus takes us into an applied argument on Schama's point about "what landscapes were worth preserving" and why.⁸

Field walking for historical research has, of course, a long-established template outside local history in the discipline of military history, and I would add the leading practitioner of the art of battlefield walking, Richard Holmes, to my list of guides. Holmes has combined detailed contextual narratives of battles with descriptions of "The Ground Today" in his *Army Battlefield Guide* of 1995 or "A View of the Field" in *War Walks* series.⁹ This approach provides us with examples of how to interpret historical sites when the landscapes themselves have changed since the events. Holmes is also excellent at noting and contextualizing memorial culture on the battlefield, another skill that we need in sports history. Such works offer us models in walking contemporary landscapes using historical maps as our guides, and in reading features—streets layouts on the lines of racecourses rather than slopes from which decisive attacks were launched, perhaps—to get a sense of what happened where. Sport may seem trivial next to this—for the bloodbath of Ypres we substitute people playing football; for the troops building up on Southampton Common on their way to Normandy in 1944, we substitute a horse racing crowd. But all sports history could suffer from this inferiority complex when placed next to military history, and it is no reason not to borrow its approaches.

My final guide, and probably the most unorthodox of them all, is Iain Sinclair, a London-based poet and author who explores the city with an eye on the overlaps between history, geography, and psychology, "half-noticing revisions in the fabric of things."¹⁰ This approach is particularly radical as it makes us look at the kind of landscapes and townscapes that more obvious tourist-based walking guides would ignore: indeed, he is dismissive of the "officially approved and brochured architecture" of tourist routes.¹¹ In *Orbital*, for example, he walked the perimeter of the M25, the motorway around the edge of London, something that motorists experience as "a three-hour fairground ride with dull views" and that was never intended as a pedestrian journey.¹² In the course of the walk, his observations on "the fabric of things" take in musings on Count Dracula, Gerard Winstanley, and S.F. Edge's 1907 twenty-four-hour drive at Brooklands. His *Lights Out for the Territory* of 1997 was based on a series of eccentric walks around London, ranging from a recovery of the esoteric lines on which Christopher Wren based his plans for the rebuilding of London to the route of East End gangster Ronnie Kray's funeral in 1995. More recently, Sinclair has turned his attention to Hackney in east London, a place that has never been on the tourist route but which is gaining attention as the site of the 2012 Olympic games.¹³ Indeed, the fact that Sinclair's criticism of the Olympic project earned him a ban from reading his work in local libraries is evidence of the critical nature of such explorations.¹⁴

Sinclair advocates walking in the tradition of the *flâneur*, the wanderer created by the nineteenth-century French poet Charles Baudelaire who walks around the city observing and collecting details, informed by a blend of local knowledge and an ironic detachment

from the everyday life of the city's inhabitants. Inspired both by Baudelaire and by Walter Benjamin's sprawling *Arcades Project* (1999),¹⁵ Sinclair advocates walking as the best way to explore and exploit the city: the changes, shifts, breaks in the cloud helmet, movement of light on water. Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode, tramping asphalted earth in alert reverie, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to reveal itself.¹⁶

This approach brings the field-walking sports historian towards a reflective mode, in which the researcher's autobiography clearly influences the choices s/he makes about where to "drift purposefully"; as Benjamin put it in his essay "The Return of the *Flâneur*" in 1929, "The account of a city given by a native will always have something in common with memoirs."¹⁷ For my journey along the marathon route, this aspect was particularly resonant, as I grew up in west London, not far from parts of the route, and I went to secondary school very close to the route's end at White City. Indeed, my regular school cross country run from the age of eleven to age eighteen was on Wormwood Scrubs, the open land that the 1908 runners crossed. Moreover, the emphasis placed in this kind of field walking on noticing random features, coincidences, and ironies also pushes the field walking historian towards a post-modern position. It is here that we can imagine Hoskins reaching in shock for the documentary comfort of the mummified chest. However, we can learn much from the informed wandering of this approach, particularly when we move away from seeing the *flâneur* as a specific Third Republic Parisian dandy, and seeing the role instead, with sociologist and philosopher Chris Jenks, as a metaphor for "a creative attitude of urban inquisition."¹⁸

This set of guides is deliberately eclectic and provocative. I chose them for the particular insights that their work can bring to the field-walking sports historian. There are some tensions and potential contradictions between them, and none of their approaches must be taken uncritically. Sinclair, for example, is always in search for a psychogeography of place which assumes spiritual energies in key places, an idea with which I am not wholly comfortable; while I could take the now traditional sports historian's soapbox stance and criticize Hoskins for not including sports sites in his local exploration, and for his unspoken assumption that sport is less important than religion, local government, and trade. Such caveats aside, these guides provide a range of challenging and informative insights on method and purpose, on what to look for and how to look at it for a critically informed approach to a lost sporting landscape.

The 1908 London Olympic Marathon

Over the past few years, I have been researching various aspects of the U.K.'s Olympic history and heritage, and I found myself increasingly drawn to the 1908 Olympic Marathon as part of the story. The race itself, staged on July 24, 1908, has been narrated well in numerous accounts of various genres, ranging from popular history to statistical analyses.¹⁹ It has a unique place in Olympic history for two reasons. First, the distance used for the 1908 route from Windsor Castle to the Great Stadium at Shepherd's Bush—26 miles, 385 yards—subsequently became the standard marathon distance. Second, the race itself has become famous through the story of Dorando Pietri, the Italian runner who entered the stadium first but then collapsed on the track and had to be helped up by race officials and assisted across the line. His heroic victory was short-lived, as the U.S.'s officials rightly

complained about the physical assistance that Pietri had received. John Hayes of the U.S., second over the line on the day, was given the race. The British enthusiasm for the underdog, exacerbated here by the fact that it was the unpopular Americans who they perceived to have stolen the plucky Italian's laurels, made Pietri a hero, and he has gone down in some accounts as the moral victor. Pietri's story has been embellished over the years, with one account claiming that he "lay in a semi-coma desperately close to death for the two days following his collapse," despite the newspaper evidence from 1908 that showed he returned to the stadium the day after his race and collected his consolation trophy—without anyone helping him up the steps—from Queen Alexandra.²⁰ Other aspects of the race, such as the mysterious under-performance of Canada's Tom Longboat and the dreadful showing of the British team, are also well told in the historiography.

Two features of the race struck me as unexplored. The first was the planning of the route. We need to know how this route, which caused the heartbreak and heroism of the day and then became enshrined in the logistics of modern athletics through its distance, was devised, something I explored in a recent article.²¹ While researching this in the archives of the Amateur Athletics Association (AAA) at the University of Birmingham, the Polytechnic Harriers at the University of Westminster, and local newspaper collections from Slough to Shepherd's Bush, I found myself increasingly drawn to recovering the route, to transposing it onto a modern map, and to walking it. I felt that this would give me a perspective on the event that nothing else could match. The fact that the route was ephemeral, and that unlike many other sporting sites it had generated no buildings or special territorial layout, added to the appeal: here was something that was central to modern Olympic history (and, through its distance, to modern sport as a whole), but that was likely to be invisible on the ground where it happened.

I also saw the route as an opportunity to reflect on the key idea in sports historiography that sport sheds light on other aspects of society. We are used to thinking about sport contextually, and how to make links between what people did in and around sport and their wider attitudes, mores, and economic realities: from how they treated their bodies to how they treated animals, and from what they did with their disposable income to what they did with their free time. Sport here is often presented as a window on to wider society, or a prism through which we can see a period. The marathon route struck me as a way of taking this basic idea of contextualizing sport and using it as a framing device for wider trends but making it physical by seeing what the route could tell us about the human geography of Edwardian London. Moreover, I have always been inspired by Richard Holt's idea of looking for both continuity and change in sports history: "to understand how far things did *not* change is just as important as understanding the extent to which they did."²² Taking this idea, I saw the marathon route as a chance to see continuity and change not so much in sport but in the human geography over the course of a century. In this sense, we can see the 1908 Marathon route as the site of a key event in modern sports history, and use it, with all its sporting resonance but none of sport's built remains, to find out more about English history. Rather than a frame, a window, or a prism, I planned to walk the country roads, the dual carriageways, the suburban streets, and the shopping centers of where the 1908 Marathon happened in order to find a route through history.

With this plan, walking was my only option. Running it was—unfortunately—not realistic for me in 2008, but I can make a virtue of necessity by noting that a *flâneur* would

never be so undignified as to don trainers and shorts: besides, note taking, photography, and "half-noticing revisions in the fabric of things"²³ are impossible to do while running. Driving was simply out of the question, both on practical grounds—many parts of the route are impassable by car—and on the grounds of the spirit of the thing: if I was to gain any kind of insight and empathy with the men who started the race, and to get any sense of distances, sightlines, ascents, and descents, then it had to be on foot.

As I have shown elsewhere, the British Olympic Committee (BOC) devolved the planning of the athletics events for 1908 to the AAA, which in turn devolved the marathon to the Polytechnic Harriers, the athletics club of London's Regent Street Polytechnic.²⁴ The main organizer was the club's Jack Andrew, who saw the marathon as a way of "stimulating interest in long distance running."²⁵ The International Olympic Committee (IOC) required only that the route be approximately forty kilometers. Andrew and his colleagues designed a route away from central London so as to avoid congestion, and one that would take in some historical sites, including Windsor Castle and two of England's leading private schools, Eton and Harrow. The route went from Windsor Castle to the west of London to the stadium at Shepherd's Bush in an arc, running north-east as far as Pinner then south-east to the end. The final distance, once the starting point had been settled on the lawn of Windsor Castle and the finish line placed in front of the stadium's royal box, was 26 miles and 385 yards.²⁶

Mapping the route onto today's roads sets a minor challenge. The official report from 1908 provided a prose description that is easy enough to follow in general terms, and its list of mile markers gave some firm evidence.²⁷ However, it did not include a map, and the description itself is often inconsistent in detail. It lacked any absolute direction instructions—a few subjective lefts and rights, but no compass points. It jumped from specific distances—"Road towards London for 925 yards"—to single clause large chunks, such as "follow the tram lines until the Jubilee Clock Tower at Harlesden," a distance of about three miles.²⁸ Marathon historians David Martin and Roger Gynn claim that the official description provides "an almost incomprehensible combination of streets and local buildings."²⁹ The task of mapping, however, is simplified when we use the report in conjunction with the route map that was published in *The Times* on July 24, 1908, the day before the race, which included all the mile markers, and with the *Illustrated London News* version of July 18, 1908, which added pictures of the views at some of the mile markers.³⁰

However, despite these helpful documents, there are still a few tricky transcriptions to make, based on road layout changes and pedestrianized areas in the centers of some towns (notably Uxbridge and Harrow), and by the loss of some of the buildings and other landmarks named in the report—the stadium itself, the tram lines from Wembley to Harlesden, Pinner Gas Works—and the renaming of railways and stations, like Ruislip and Ickenham Station, now called West Ruislip. The loss of the Stadium itself was, of course, not a challenge for me, as I had passed it every day for seven years on my way to school, but for anyone new to the area there are few clues to its location. However, some careful comparative map work between a modern A-Z of Greater London and late Victorian maps, some thorough frame-by-frame work on Google Maps with the 1908 official report in front of me, and some research on railways and tram route history provided me with what I think is an accurate plan. It coincides with Martin and Gynn's route for the most part, but I disagree with their reading of the last stages. They have the route going across Wormwood

Scrubs and onto Scrubs Lane, which then becomes Wood Lane, and then into the Stadium.³¹ This takes them away from the report's account of "the footpath between the Prison and Hammersmith Infirmary into Ducane Road."³² The report was published after the event, and the Ducane Road version is backed up by contemporary news reports, by police records of how the course was marshaled and controlled, and by a photograph of Pietri turning left out of Artillery Lane into Ducane Road, the prison walls clearly behind him.³³

Taken together, these primary sources allowed me to reconstruct the route in the spirit of Hoskins' approaches to local history: maps, newspapers, official documents, government records, photographs—here was corroboration. Walking the route over two days, with an overnight stop at roughly halfway in Ruislip to take off time pressure, allowed me to engage with the route physically. It would be disingenuous to claim that I achieved any kind of deep empathy with the runners. Short of running it rather than walking it, wearing 1908 standard clothes and shoes, and fuelled by 1908-style sports nutrition that was heavy on red meat and low on carbohydrates, any real empathy would be impossible. However, my field walk did give me a hint of what it must have felt like. The ascents have not changed significantly over the century, particularly the gentle but long climb at Stonebridge Park, near the 23-mile mark, up Hillside towards Craven Park. There were very few shaded areas in 1908 on what was "a close, warm, and muggy . . . summer afternoon, when the sun was deceptively strong and there was very little air," and there are precious few now, with only the woods to the north of Slough offering any real shade.³⁴ As we shall see, much of the architecture is unchanged, allowing me to have a sense of the runners' views, and the key site of Wormwood Scrubs, the open grassland that the runners hit under a mile from the stadium, remains open, and it is still easy to sense the change in running surface that the runners would have experienced as they went from the road to the grass. Many of the pubs that offered the runners refreshments, as listed in the Official Report, are still in place, allowing me to get a sense of distances between drinks, and I made sure I took on water at each of these places in tribute to the runners. My desire for empathy did not extend to me using the beef-based Oxo refreshment packs that the runners were supplied with at some of these stops or the 'stimulants available in case of collapse.'³⁵ However, real empathy apart, being there added a dimension to my research that would have been impossible to gain from any other sources. The photographs and the Pathé film of the race gave me a visual sense of the event: walking it gave me a physical sense, however far removed from what the runners must have felt, that the archives can never replicate.³⁶ Like Richard Holmes at Hastings, Waterloo, or the Somme, the walk gave me perspectives, sightlines, and the physical sensations of tiredness and hunger that are not a regular part of the historical research process.

However, as well as getting a sense of the physical feeling of the race, I was also in search of what the route could tell me about Edwardian London and how it has fared over the intervening century. This was my Sinclair approach, choosing a route for an internal or design significance—like his search for scenes in P.D. James novels or his giant V-sign route through east London—that then becomes a sampling device. In my case, the marathon route, with its original emphasis on staying away from central London and its planned inclusion of some spectacular historic sites—Windsor, Eton, Harrow—along with plenty of ordinary suburbs and market towns—Slough, Uxbridge, Harlesden—gave me twenty-

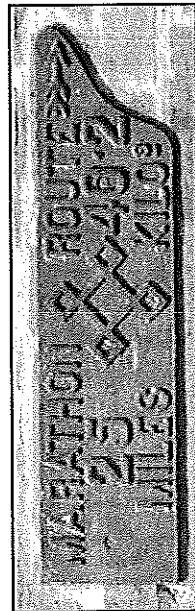
six miles of history. Through this, I could look for Hol's continuities and changes in the townscape and landscape, Inglis' and Wood's commemoration and heritage, Bale's sense of a sport site that has taken on resonances over time, while also keeping my faux *flâneur* eye out for coincidences and ironies.

Using the route as a way to find out about continuity and change in London's history involves working between historical mapping and the race's primary sources and walking with eyes open to architectural changes, vanished sites, renamed places, and rerouted roads. The major changes to the route are, obviously, those based around suburban growth and road building.³⁷ The route now traverses two motorways, going under the M4 between Eton and Slough and over the M25 just west of Uxbridge. In addition, it crosses two major dual carriageways: the North Circular Road east of Wembley, and the Westway at White City in the last quarter mile. This final stretch has also been sliced by the extension of the London Underground's Central Line. These changes push the modern pedestrian on to bridges and into subways in places that the 1908 runners would have simply gone straight across. Town centre redevelopments have not corrupted the route too badly: the line of the 1908 route has been lost for short distances in central Uxbridge and central Harrow, but Slough, Ruislip, Pinner, Wembley, and Harlesden are all on the same basic layout. The route was chosen in part to avoid disruption to traffic and trade, but the apparently unstoppable dependency of urban and suburban dwellers on private car ownership has impacted on the original marathon course. Suburban expansion has also greatly changed the route's appearance. In 1908, Wembley Park represented the basic edge of London as far as the route was concerned. The growth of Metroland in the 1920s and 1930s has changed all this, and the route is now essentially suburban from Uxbridge onwards. Housing, civic buildings, and shops along this stretch remain solidly inter-war, with the bard of Metroland, John Betjeman, commemorated in a road name in Harrow. There are also many inter-war and post-war sport and leisure sites dotted along the route, including Wembley Stadium (originally opened in 1923, demolished in 2000, with a new stadium opened in 2007), Uxbridge Lido (opened in 1935, and currently awaiting redevelopment), a modern golf range at Harrow, an artificial ski slope at Uxbridge, and, renamed for a local Olympian athlete, Linford Christie Stadium on Wormwood Scrubs. Some of the landmarks named in the route, such as the Pinner Gasworks, have gone, evidence of a shift in the area's industrial profile. It is also, obviously, a far more multicultural landscape than it could have been in 1908, as evident most obviously in Indian and Chinese food shops, and in a diverse range of places of worship, including synagogues, Sikh temples, mosques and Islamic study centers, evangelical Christian churches with predominantly Anglo-Caribbean congregations, and Roman Catholic churches in Irish communities.

However, we can also see some clear continuities throughout the route, aspects of the human geography that would have been recognizable in 1908. The three big establishments that appealed to Andrew's sense of history in designing the route—Windsor Castle, Eton, and Harrow—remain, with the playing fields of the schools very prominent. Wormwood Scrubs Prison remains resolutely Victorian at the end of the route. The railways used as landmarks in the route may have changed their initials, but all of them are still there, as is the Jubilee Clock Tower, erected for Queen Victoria's golden jubilee in 1887 and still a landmark in central Harlesden. Many of the pubs and hotels that were used by the runners

as refreshment stops have left a trace. Some have been rebuilt, and most have been renamed, but the footprints of the originals remain: The Crooked Biller at Iver Heath, The George in Ruislip, The Poplars also in Ruislip (now an old people's home) and others are still there as places of rest and refreshment. Overall, then, the route offers us a microcosm of Edwardian London and its survival and adaptation over a century.

As well as using the route to tell a story about London's expansion, we can also use it to look for evidence of the race, both in contemporary artifacts and archaeology and in subsequent commemoration. This is the approach informed by Inglis' work on sports heritage. The marathon needed no specific build, but the stadium played an important role in the race's drama, as it was here that Pietri famously turned the wrong way on the track and then collapsed a number of times before being helped over the line. The stadium, the world's first purpose-built Olympic facility, was originally meant to stand for a year as part of the Franco-British Exhibition. It survived instead until 1985, quickly taking on the name of White City Stadium after the bright plaster of the temporary exhibition buildings. White City served for many of those years as the center for amateur athletics: the AAA's championships were held there until 1971 when the new stadium at Crystal Palace superseded it. The stadium also hosted the athletics events of the 1934 Empire Games, as well as greyhound racing, speedway, rock concerts, and football. It was demolished in 1985 when the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) bought the land, and its site is now home to the BBC's Media Village. The stadium's archaeology has been destroyed, and there are no built remains. However, there is some commemoration of the site's Olympic history in the shape of a memorial plaque on the BBC's building, and the legend, "THIS IS THE SITE OF THE FINISHING LINE OF WHITE CITY STADIUM WHICH HOSTED THE 1908 OLYMPICS," on the pavement of the site's course. A more specific marathon commemoration is at the edge of the site, where one of the roads is named Dorando Close in honor of the Italian hero. It is perhaps typical of the ongoing British belief in Pietri's apparent moral victory rather than Hayes's actual victory that it is the Italian who is commemorated, not the American. Here we have a clear statement by the BBC and the local authority, the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, that the extraordinary things that happened in this rather ordinary London suburb are worthy of public commemoration. As well as these modern commemorations, one artifact from the day of the race has survived, an iron mile marker at Barnespool Bridge in Eton. It has been moved higher up the wall than its original position as a defense against vandalism and trophy hunters. It points the way north, telling the runners—or the modern walker—that there are still twenty-five miles to go, and is embellished with the Polytechnic's badge, not an Olympic symbol, and so serves as a reminder of the relative informality of the pre-branded Olympics.



A distance and direction marker from 1908 survives. COURTESY OF [HTTP://LONDON.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://london.blogspot.com).

As a sport site that inspires topophilia or topophobia in line with Bale's writings, the route now has very little going for it. It still attracts its devotees who run the route, despite the underpasses and bridges that break up the flow and play havoc with tired runners' calves. For example, athletics historian and journalist John Bryant ran it on the centenary, July 24, 2008, for example, dressed as Pietri. However, outside these specialist circles, there is nothing there beyond the commemorative markers named above to inspire enthusiasm in the way that other historic and traditional sites, such as Lord's or Cooperstown, can. The suburban streets of Wembley, Uxbridge, Ruislip, and Harlesden are too anonymous and too removed from the events to have much resonance, and the demolition of the stadium ensures that there is no real focus for anyone wanting to love the place. Indeed, the route itself as a competitive course quickly declined, forming as it did only a part of the Polytechnic marathon that was instituted in 1909. The 1948 London Olympic games, based at the Empire Stadium in Wembley, eschewed the 1908 route, despite the older course passing within half a mile of the Stadium to the south.³⁸ Instead, the planners for 1948 sent their marathon north from the stadium on a loop through Stanmore and Boreham Wood. Similarly, when Christopher Brasher and John Disley established the London Marathon in 1981, which has gone on to become one of the world's leading city races, the 1908 route was simply not an option. Following the New York City model, the London Marathon was designed to go through the heart of the city, to pass by key sites such as Greenwich, Tower Bridge and the Tower of London, St Paul's Cathedral, Buckingham Palace, and Westminster—the very city centre that 1908's planners wished to avoid.³⁹ Unsurprisingly, the 2012 Olympic Marathon will be based on this central route, with its glamorous tourist potential, ensuring that the Windsor Castle to White City route sinks further into the history books: neither topophilia nor topophobia, but simple indifference.

Finally, what did I notice with my *flâneur* gaze? What historical coincidences and ironies struck me as I walked, knowing myself to be on a mission that made me different from anyone else on those pavements? A series of snapshots comes to mind: walking past the playing fields of Eton College on a sports history project and remembering the Duke of Wellington's alleged remark about the Battle of Waterloo being won there; the splendor of the new Wembley Stadium, its embarrassing imperial past erased, with its arch that can be seen for miles, and this largely forgotten route passing in its shadow; spray can graffiti on the road sign for Dorando Close, a vandal's ignorance threatening to obliterate one of the few commemorative markers; the boundary marker stone on the wall of Hammersmith Hospital, set in place on July 27, 1908, just three days after the race, evidence of the growth of the fabric of these suburbs in the same week as the marathon; the single runner I saw along the entire route; the virtual absence of pedestrians of any kind in large swathes of car-dominated suburban streets near Uxbridge; a 1980s pub in Ickenham now branded as Champions sports bar; the stadium near the finish named after Linford Christie, a local hero and Olympic gold medalist subsequently tarnished by drug allegations and banned for life from having anything to do with the Olympic games; walking along Artillery Lane, between the prison and the hospital, and flashing back to all the times I ran along there in the 1970s as a schoolboy; and the arrival of Westfield shopping center at Shepherd's Bush, the construction of which led to the demolition of the last surviving buildings of the 1908 Anglo-French Exhibition. There remains the scope to write up the run in the style of

Benjamin's *Arades* or one of Sinclair's London walks, combining historical documents with contemporary observations, graffiti, and found objects: for now, this approach has helped me to remark on what may otherwise be unremarkable, and to make links between past and present that spring from autobiography, emotion, and subconscious associations.

Conclusion

I hope to have made a case for field walking as a research method for sports historians, and to have demonstrated, through the case study of the 1908 Olympic marathon route, how such activities can be critically engaged with rather than simply experienced in an antiquarian manner. Such visits can give perspectives one may not otherwise achieve, both physically through being there and mentally through understanding the place and the sport in a way that archives alone cannot give. The minor inconveniences, particularly those thrown at the researcher by the weather, are worth the effort. Historians with mobility impairment may find some sites inaccessible, which strengthens the case for more of this type of research to be done and made widely available through virtual tours, for example, or through illustrated websites. For Olympic historians in particular, this kind of approach can have a democratizing effect, as it can restore Olympic history to the suburbs in which it happened, and put those ordinary places—in this case, Slough, Harlesden, and the rest—back into the story.

As well as being a boon for researchers, field walking can be a valuable teaching tool. It is clichéd to say that visiting a site can bring the past to life, but from my use of this approach with undergraduates it is clear that many students have gained greater insights into the historical development of sport in urban communities by visiting some lost stadium sites than they ever would have done through using only documents. Being there has given them physical insights and emotional ones: I have seen students fighting the lump in the throat as we walk through the gateway to a housing estate that they suddenly recognize as an old football ground. I have had mature students spontaneously produce valuable oral testimony for their younger colleagues when we have visited the site of a lido that is now a car park, as they tell the others about the social and community nature of lido swimming. In turn, there are obvious community benefits from this kind of approach, as it can help to get sport sites more recognized on town trails and in local exhibitions. This may, of course, lead to the kind of "officially approved and brochure architecture" that Sinclair warned against,⁴⁰ but that may be a price worth paying if it helps sports heritage to be taken more seriously.

¹Played in Britain, <<http://www.playedinbritain.co.uk/index.php>> [1 October 2009].

²John Bale, *Landscapes of Modern Sport* (Leicester, U.K.: Leicester University Press, 1994), 121.

³Simon Schama, *Landscapes and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 24.

⁴W.G. Hoskins, *Local History in England*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 1984), 3.

⁵Schama, *Landscapes and Memory*, 139.

⁶Bale, *Landscapes* idem, *Running Cultures: Racing in Time and Space* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁷Simon Inglis, *Engineering Archie: Archibald Leitch—Football Ground Architect* (London: English Heritage, 2005); idem, *Played in Manchester: The Architectural Heritage of a City at Play* (London: English Heritage, 2004); Ian Gordon and Simon Inglis, *Great Lengths: The Historic Indoor Swimming Pools of*

Britain (London: English Heritage, 2009); Janet Smith, *Liquid Assets: The Lidos and Open Air Swimming Pools of Britain* (London: English Heritage, 2005); Ray Physick, *Played in Liverpool: Charting the Heritage of a City at Play* (London: English Heritage, 2007); Steve Beauchampé and Simon Inglis, *Played in Birmingham: Charting the Heritage of a City at Play* (London: English Heritage, 2006).

⁸Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 139.

⁹Richard Holmes, *Army Battlefield Guide: Belgium and Northern France* (London: HMSO, 1995); idem, *The Complete War Walks from Hastings to Normandy* (London: Ebury, 2003).

¹⁰Iain Sinclair, *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire: A Confidential Report* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2009), 7.

¹¹Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory* (London: Penguin, 1997), 121.

¹²Iain Sinclair, *London Orbital: A Walk around the M25* (London: Penguin, 2003), 328.

¹³Sinclair, *Hackney*.

¹⁴Rachel Cooke, "Iain Sinclair," *The Observer* (London), 8 February 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/feb/08/ian-sinclair-interview> [1 October 2009].

¹⁵Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999).

¹⁶Sinclair, *Lights Out*, 4.

¹⁷Walter Benjamin, "The Return of the Flâneur," in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2: 1927-1934 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), 262.

¹⁸Chris Jenks, "Watching your Step: The History and Practice of the Flâneur," in Chris Jenks, ed., *Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 156.

¹⁹David Martin and Roger Gynn, *The Olympic Marathon: The History and Drama of Sport's Most Challenging Event* (Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 2000), 63-80; John Bryant, *The Marathon Makers* (London: John Blake, 2008); Rebecca Jenkins, *The First London Olympics 1908* (London: Piatkus, 2008), 188-261; Bob Wilcock, *The 1908 Olympic Games, the Great Stadium and the Marathon: A Pictorial Record* (Brenwood, U.K.: The Society of Olympic Collectors, 2008); Bill Mallon and Ian Buchanan, *The 1908 Olympic Games: Results for All Competitors in All Events, with Commentary* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2000), 63-67.

²⁰Tim Noakes, *Lore of Running*, 4th ed. (Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 1986), 231.

²¹Martin Polley, "From Windsor Castle to White City: The 1908 Olympic Marathon Route," *The London Journal* 34 (2009): 163-178.

²²Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3, emphasis in original.

²³Sinclair, *Hackney*, 7.

²⁴Polley, "From Windsor Castle."

²⁵Polytechnic Harriers Marathon Trial Race, 25 April 1908, official program, p. 8, copy, PHA 5/2, file 1, University of Westminster Archives, London.

²⁶Polley, "From Windsor Castle."

²⁷Theodore Cook, ed., *The Fourth Olympiad: Being the Official Report of the Olympic Games of 1908 Celebrated in London Under the Patronage of His Most Gracious King Edward VII and by the Sanction of the International Olympic Committee* (London: British Olympic Association, 1908), 69.

²⁸Cook, *Fourth Olympiad*, 73-74.

²⁹Martin and Gynn, *Olympic Marathon*, 70.

³⁰"The Olympic Games," *The Times* (London), 24 July 1908, p. 9; *Illustrated London News*, 18 July 1908, 90-91.

³¹Martin and Gynn, *Olympic Marathon*, 69.

³²Cook, *Fourth Olympiad*, 74.

³³The National Archives of the U.K.: MEPO 2/1156; Centenary of Dorando Pietri's Feat in London 1908, <http://www.dorandopietri.it/galleria_en.asp> [1 October 2009].

³⁴Cook, *Fourth Olympiad*, 75.

³⁵Ibid., 71.

³⁶For a sample of newsreel film of the race, see <http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=52311> [1 October 2009].

³⁷For an overview of London's twentieth-century history, see Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (London: Viking, 2001).

³⁸Martin and Gynn, *Olympic Marathon*, 186.

³⁹John Bryant, *The London Marathon*, 2nd ed. (London: Arrow, 2006).

⁴⁰Sinclair, *Lights Out*, 121