

## When the Olympics Came To Walthamstow

In the summer of 1948 the Olympic games was held in London. At this time I was a 10 year old boy living in a prefab that was built on a WW2 bomb site in Islington. That long summer holiday period was particularly anxious time for me as I had just left my Junior school and was due to start my new secondary grammar school at the end of the holiday. As I was the only pupil from my school to gain admission to this school, this meant I wouldn't know anybody at my new school.



This was still at a time of 'austerity' Britain, when three years after the end of WWII, the rationing of most foodstuffs including clothes and petrol was still in force. (Although bread had been de-rationed earlier in the year) However, as a child born just before the outbreak of the war, I didn't know any different. On the plus side, these were the years of full employment.

I was very excited about the Olympics and tried to learn about what was happening. Fifty nine nations took part but the defeated powers of Germany and Japan were excluded. London saw the first Olympic photo finish, in the 100 metres, and the introduction of starting blocks for sprinters. These were the first Olympic Games since Berlin in 1936. The 1940 Games went to Tokyo, then Stockholm, but were cancelled - as were the 1944 games - due to World War Two

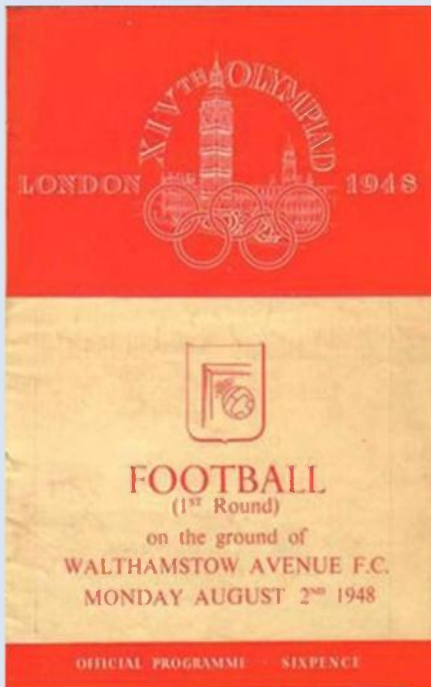
Like most people we didn't have a television and my knowledge of what was happening in the world came from newspapers (I did a morning paper round so I was able to read the newspapers) from the radio and from Pathe News when you went to the cinema.

I remember vividly Emil Zátopek, the fantastic Czechoslovakian runner. In the 10,000m final at the 1948 London Games, Zátopek lapped all but two runners and won by more than 300m. Three days later, he ran in the final of the 5,000m. Trailing by 50m at the start of the final lap, he closed the gap with a stunning sprint finish. But he had to settle for silver finishing just 1.5 metres behind the victor, Gaston Etienne Reiff of Belgium.

I also remember Fanny Blankers-Koen aka "the Flying Housewife". She was a a Dutch athlete and a 30-year-old mother of two children who won four gold medals at the 1948 Olympics. But what I didn't know about was the day that the Olympics came to Walthamstow.

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While the football at the 2012 London Olympics took place at first class stadiums all around the UK (including Scotland and Wales), at the 1948 London games, things were more local. All but two of the games took place in what would today be considered London.



On Monday August 2nd (the actual kick-off time may be lost in the mists of time (FIFA say 18:30 and Wikipedia says 12:00), Turkey took on China in a first round match at Walthamstow Avenue's Green Pond Road ground. Turkey won 4-0 with goals from Kılıç, Saygun) and Küçükandonyadis. The attendance of 21,708 was a record for the stadium.

What I find astounding is how many people came to watch the game. In 1948, unlike today, there weren't large numbers of Turkish or Chinese people in the UK. This suggests that the vast majority of people attending the match must have been local people. Because of petrol rationing there is unlikely to be very many coaches bringing people to the match (Although I suspect that both the Turkish and Chinese teams together with reserves and officials probably came on team coaches that were possibly London buses)

*Left :the programme cover for the match*



Although nearby Forest Road was well served by trams and buses, most of the spectators would have come to Hoe Street station (Now Walthamstow Central) and then walked to Green Pond Road. Some, from north and east London would have travelled on the Kentish Town to Barking line and come via Blackhorse Road station.

It is intriguing to imagine that some of the inhabitants of the newly built next Priory Court estate that overlooked the ground would have watched the game from their balconies

*Left: The kick off – picture from Google images*

## 1948 – A United Kingdom Timeline

- **Monarch** – George VI
- **Prime Minister** – Clement Attlee (Labour)

### Events

- 1 January – British Railways created when the government nationalised the railway industry.
- 4 January – Burma gained its independence from the United Kingdom.

- 12 January – The London Co-operative Society opened Britain's first supermarket, in Manor Park, London. In the same month, Marks & Spencer introduced self-service in the food department of their Wood Green store.<sup>1</sup>
- 17 January – The all-time highest attendance for an English Football League game when 83,260 people watched Manchester United draw with Arsenal in a match played at Maine Road.
- 30 January–8 February – Great Britain and Northern Ireland competed at the Winter Olympics in St. Moritz, Switzerland, and won 2 bronze medals.
- 4 February – Ceylon (later renamed Sri Lanka) became independent within the British Commonwealth. George VI became King of Ceylon.
- Early March - The Trades Union Congress and Government agreed a formal policy of voluntary wage restraint. The "New Look" in women's fashion became available in British stores.
- 17 March – Britain signed the Treaty of Brussels with Belgium, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.
- 1 April – The Fire Services in Great Britain was returned from the National Fire Service to the control of local authorities (under terms of Fire Services Act 1947).
- 15 April – Rowntree's introduced Polo mint sweets.
- 30 April – The Land Rover is unveiled at the Amsterdam Motor Show.
- 24 April – Manchester United defeated Blackpool 4–2 in the FA Cup final at Wembley Stadium to claim their first major trophy for 37 years.
- 13 May – National Assistance Act superseded the old Poor Law system.
- 14 May – The murder of June Anne Devaney, a three-year-old girl in Blackburn led to the fingerprinting of more than 40,000 men in the city in an attempt to find the murderer.
- 14–15 May – At midnight, the British Mandate of Palestine was officially terminated as the state of Israel came into being.
- June – Professor Lillian Penson became the first woman elected to serve as Vice-Chancellor of a British university (London).<sup>5</sup>
- 5–13 June  
• The first Aldeburgh Festival.
- 21 June - Manchester Small-Scale Experimental Machine, the world's first stored-program computer, ran its first program.
- 22 June -The ship *Empire Windrush* arrived in Britain with 500 Jamaican immigrants.
- An Order in Council removed the title of Emperor of India from the Royal Style and Titles in recognition of the independence of India in 1947.
- 1 July -
- The Town and Country Planning Act 1947 and the Town and Planning (Scotland) Act 1947 came into effect as the foundation of modern town and country planning in the United Kingdom, requiring planning permission for land development and establishing the system of Listed buildings.
- The National Museum of Wales opened the Welsh Folk Museum at St Fagans to the public, the first open-air museum in the UK
- 5 July -
- The National Health Service began functioning, giving the right to universal healthcare, free at point of use.
- Changes to the National Insurance social insurance scheme came into effect.
- The Children Act 1948 came into effect, transferring responsibility for child welfare from Poor Law Guardians, Approved schools and voluntary organisations to new local authority Children's Departments with professional Children's Officers.
- 15 July – First London chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous established.
- 25 July – The end of Post-War bread rationing.

- 29 July–14 August – Olympic Games was held in London. Great Britain and Northern Ireland won 3 gold, 14 silver and 6 bronze medals at the event, which was televised by the BBC.
- 29 July – The Stoke Mandeville Games were held for the first time. These were the predecessor of the Paralympic Games.

## Post Script

In 1948 the British Prime Minister was Clement Attlee. In 1950, West Walthamstow MP – Valentine McEntee (Labour) resigned his seat in order that that Clement Attlee could stand for the seat. Val McEntee was rewarded with a Baronetcy and Prime Minister Clem Attlee became the MP for West Walthamstow.

**Bill Bayliss**  
**July 2013**

Some sources

*Wikipedia* for the timeline information

<http://walthamstowavenue.wordpress.com/category/olympic-games/>

<http://www.friendsreunited.co.uk/soccer-summer-olympic-games-1948-china-v-turkey-london-walthamstow/Memory/6c821d16-a83e-4cf3-a518-a0cf00d16af1> for the kick off image

<http://walthamstowavenue.wordpress.com/2010/03/25/the-day-the-olympics-came-to-walthamstow/> A history of Walthamstow Avenue (1900-1988)

<http://history1900s.about.com/od/fadsfashion/a/olympics1948.htm>