

AUSTRALIAN CENTURION FOUNDERS : BRIAN PARKINSON



Brian Kent Parkinson was born in 1931, the grandson of Basil Parkinson.

Born in Lancaster, England, Basil Parkinson was a prominent runner with the Cheshire Tally-Ho Club before his arrival in Melbourne at the age of 21. In 1890 he founded the Melbourne Harriers, the colony's oldest club, where he had much success as a miler, hurdler, steeplechaser, and cross-country runner. He was instrumental in drafting the rules for a proposed Victorian Amateur Athletics Association. When the V.A.A.A. was formed at the Port Phillip Club Hotel in Flinders St., Melbourne, on 8th October 1891, he was elected as Honorary Secretary, and is considered the father of athletics in Victoria.

‘Parky’, as he became known, was a man of vision and enlightened values, a man who argued over a hundred years ago against the class based definitions of amateurism that existed in older countries. He was recognised as a member of the Sports Australia Hall of Fame¹. I remember Brian relating how Parky was most proud of the fact that, in his hayday, he could beat anyone running backwards.

It almost goes without saying that Brian was brought up in an athletics oriented family.

The athletics connections widened even further when Brian married Marion Redman, the daughter of former English walker Fred Redman². Fred, a former World Junior Record Holder for the 10 mile distance, had migrated to Australia in 1961.

Brian duly joined Marion in the ranks of the walking fraternity and started to compete with the Victorian Amateur Walkers’ Club (VAWC) who were based at Albert Park in Melbourne.

When Len Mathews³ contacted fellow walkers Fred Redman and Tom Daintry⁴ with a view to forming an Australian chapter of the Centurions, Fred immediately drew his son-in-law into the working group. Brian had the business knowledge necessary to draw up a constitution and formally setup the new organisation and it was he who did most of this necessary ground work.

With the Centurions set up, Brian then stepped back and allowed the first Centurions to take control of their new organisation.

1 See <http://www.sahof.org.au/hall-of-fame/member-profile/?memberID=308&memberType=general>

2 See <http://centurions.org.au/centprofiles/founder%20fred%20redman.pdf>

3 See <http://centurions.org.au/centprofiles/founder%20len%20mathews.pdf>

4 See <http://centurions.org.au/centprofiles/founder%20tom%20daintry.pdf>

He was now an able sporting administrator and ran the 'Little Walkers' races each Saturday at Albert Park. In this capacity, he was responsible for introducing many future Victorian racewalk champions to our sport.

Brian's sporting administration career was cut short when he was posted to Papua New Guinea in the mid-seventies by Shell, for whom he worked. He spent over 10 years based in Port Moresby, until retiring in the late 1980's. His career at Shell had spanned nearly 40 years. Thoughts of retirement were forestalled when he was called back into the Shell world to return to PNG and take up his accounting portfolio again after a short break.

He finally returned to Melbourne in the mid 1990's and promptly returned to study. This eventually evolved into a variety of teaching roles, in which he continued long after the normal retirement age of 65.

Brian was also involved deeply in the Freemasons, and was a proud member of that organisation for over 60 years.

Into his mid eighties, Brian lived in the Melbourne suburb of Bentleigh and kept a fatherly eye on the doings of the Centurions.

In recent years, his health had deteriorated, with a variety of issues, and it was a number of years since he had been able to attend any of our centurion functions. Eventually time caught up with him and he died on 20th June 2018, aged 87.

With Brian's passing, the last of our Australian Centurion founders has departed. He now joins fellow founders Len Mathews (1983), Fred Redman (1986) and Tom Daintry (2002) in our honour role.

The Centurions and the Victorian Race Walking Club each remember Brian for his many contributions to their clubs.

Tim Erickson
1 August 2019