

Charlie Rowell — aka the ‘Cambridge Wonder’ (1852-1909)

... Was from Chesterton, near Cambridge, England, and who between the years of 1872 and 1885, during his career as a professional pedestrian, broke many world records.

It was Edward Payson Weston who hired Rowell to act as a pacemaker in his attempt to walk 275 miles in 75 consecutive hours at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, London, in February, 1876. Rowell’s career up to that point, and how he fared in the race, is described in detail on page 86 and 87 of *King of the Peds.*

Now established as an up-and-coming figure in the sport, his connections raised him in class, and in October/November of 1878, entered him in the 142-hour, six days go-as-you-please “**Long Distance Championship of England**” contest, again at the “Aggie”.

Rowell’s performance in that one is covered in **Chapter 11** at the end of which there is a nice illustration of him in scenes at the end of the race on page 158.

Our next snippet about Rowell is when he accompanies Weston at the beginning of the “*Wily Wobbler’s*” 2,000 mile walk around the shires of England in 1,000 hours in 1879 (page 178). Indeed Weston later turns up in Cambridge (page 188 and 189) on his way to the finishing post in London.

Chapter 15 then deals with Rowell’s journey to New York and his successful attempt to take the international version of the Astley Belt back to England in March of 1879. Check out how much he earned for doing so (today’s equivalent - just over \$1,000,000)! This chapter has some illustrations of him on page 192, 195, 196, 206, 210, 214, 217 and 219.

Sadly, and due to a poorly foot, Rowell was unable to defend his title and the belt headed back to the United States courtesy of Weston who annihilated the opposition in June of the same year. (Charlie appears on a poster advertising the match on page 238). However, Rowell retook the title of “Champion of the World” at Madison



Square Gardens in September earning for himself a huge amount of money. The story of the race can be read about in **Chapter 20**, and like his previous race in America, it makes fascinating reading! Another illustration of him can be found on page 266.

Page 371 enlightens the reader that not only was Rowell an athlete, but he attended to other pedestrians in races too!

Chapter 27 (“**The Master v The Apprentices**”) deals with a further defence of his title which took place in London and if you look on page 386, there is the most amazing drawing of Charlie in action.

A “**Four-Cornered Event**” during which Rowell (illustration on page 412) takes on the American, Jimmy Albert is described in **Chapter 30**, and this is followed by the last defence of his title against Weston in **Chapter 32** (two photos on page 437) after which, he gets to keep the belt.

Chapter 35 then deals with another big match in New York in February/March 1882 during which the ‘*Cambridge Wonder*’ creates much anxiety for his army of fans and backers (illustration on page 447). Look out for him breaking some interesting records in this one by the way!

Rowell is at the top of the bill again for his next contest, again in the “Big Apple” in September of 1882; the story of that one being told in **Chapter 39**.

His last race in the USA was again at Madison Square Garden in April/May of 1884. It was in this race that can be read about in **Chapter 45** that Rowell became only the third man to break the 600-mile barrier in six days! That was quite an achievement for the most one of the most amazing athletes the world has ever seen!

Chapter 47 then describes Charlie’s participation in the 5th “**Astley Challenge Belt**” race which was a prize for winning the 12-hours a day, 72 hours per week version of the Long Distance Astley Belt. This took place at the Westminster Aquarium, London in November of 1884.

Rowell’s last competitive race was the “**International Pedestrian Tournament**” held at the same venue in May of 1885. It was here, and against all the odds, that he delivered a truly spectacular performance to break yet another world record which still stands today. The story of that achievement can be found in **Chapter 49**.

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