# From the Sheffield Star…

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FEATURES

The Star OPINION

## Councils will need to change

We should be under no illusions, we are in for a few more years of belt-tightening austerity that is going to hit all of us in differing ways.

First the good news: the freeze on fuel duty is just the sane measures and soyone engaged in the business of transport needs. Infrastructure spending will create jobs and we will see a return to the school building programme that came to a grinding halt after the last General Election. And those on lower incomes will see some relief with a rise in the income tax threshold.

Now for the bad news; three more years of spending cuts will mean councils and police will have to make even greater savings for longer.

How much more can they take? Some will say that if Sheffield Council can save £9.5m from changes in its children's services, as reported yesterday, without affecting services, then they just need to look a bit harder.

But council leader Julie Dore is predicting the "end of the council as we know it".

Of course party politics will be playing a big role in her rhetoric, but we have to be concerned about just how our councils are going to continue to deliver services that we pay for.

They will have to fundamentally change their approach to how they work for us and we will have to change our expectations. We have started to do so, evidenced by our reluctant acceptance of the highly bin collections.

But this will just be the start.

The challenge for the councils will be to convince the public that structural changes to the way they deliver our services will still protect the most in need and not materially affect our daily lives.

## What caused this terrible tragedy?

NO words can console the parents of Emma Lidbey, the four-year-old girl who died after the car she was in was hit by a train on a level crossing.

Mark and Zoe Lilley must be heartbroken. No parent expects or wants to ask live their child and we can only offer them our deepest condolences.

They must be left to grieve in private as they try to come to terms with their terrible loss. But the couple will want to know how this tragedy happened.

We hope the police and the Rail Accident Investigation Branch can provide an answer as they investigate the cause of this incident.

Both bodies can be trusted to do a thorough and complete job, which we hope will prevent a repeat incident.

But for now, all our thoughts are with the family in what must be their darkest hour.

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## Looking back at Sheffield's king of the walking men



SMITH OF The Star

HE WAS the sporting superstar of his age.

Known throughout the world, feted on both sides of the Atlantic, records set by Sheffield's George Littlewood in the 1880s still stand today.

Littlewood the 'Sheffield Flyer' was a prodigious athlete born the son of a steelworks manager.

Training on a diet of chicken, calves foot jelly, oysters and beer he would run from Sheffield to Doncaster and back for exercise before breakfast – picking up newspapers from his mother's house before going to work.

He once chased a horse called Charlie from Sheffield to Doncaster and lost by threequarters of a mile – though Charlie was pulling a cart.

A good all-rounder, he also entered a lion's cage in a Wombwell menagerie for a bet in 1886.

Not that he was short of cash. At the height of the pedestrianism craze just before Littlewood hit his peak, an American athlete called Charlie Rowell won $10,000 in two races in Madison Square Garden, New York in 1879.

Though some of the fanaticism for six-day endurance races – and the prize money – had died down by the time Littlewood was on top they still attracted up to 170,000 fans and massive amounts of gambling.

One story – though uncorroborated by Littlewood's biographer and author of King Of The Peds Paul Marshall his great-great nephew – has it that Littlewood, during a race in New York, stopped to bathe his blisters in a bath of alcohol when a gambler, irate at George's winning the race rather than the man he had backed, tossed a match in the bath and badly burned Littlewood's leg.

The story goes that George defied the agony of his burns and carried on to win the race.

Tough of the track indeed.

Littlewood was also a bit of trouble and couldn't find any evidence of this story," said Paul, of Elsecar, Barnsley.

"But that is the kind of thing that' went on. Gambling was huge among the pedestrianism races and fans flocked to see them. Competitors used to get nobbled by people in the crowd who would push, trip and throw pepper in the athletes' faces.

"The races all took place indoors. Sheffield's Drill Hall used to hold them. Some were bigger than others but the competitors ran and walked on 'up sticks' and tanbark' tracks which were specially rolled to produce a flat surface. Some were eight laps to the mile, Sheffield's was 13.

"Many of the races would start on a monday just after midnight – they wouldn't run on the Sabbath – and finish just before midnight on the following Saturday.

"They were a huge money-maker. In 1888 George won $1,500 in New York and also had a substantial bet on himself that would have made him around $18,000.

Those were vast sums in 1888 who might have earned around £2 a week as a skilled mah in a steelworks at home in Sheffield at that time.

Three were vast sums in 1888 who might have earned around £2 a week as a skilled man in a steelworks at home in Sheffield at that time.

AGRICULTURAL HALL ISLINGTON. MONDAY SEPT 6th TILL SATURDAY SEPT 11th SIX DAYS RACE 11 A.M. TO 11 P.M. EACH DAY. CHAMPIONSHIP OF THE WORLD.

SEP. 6th 7th 8th 9th 10th 11th

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ADMISSION FULL MILITARY BAND. ONE SHILLING. THE SPORTING LIFE APPOINTS JUDGES

**No stroll:** A poster promoting a six-day endurance race, above; George Littlewood, far right, and his grave below right

# Walking into history

### Littlewood the Lionheart

**1858** Born Rawmarsh, Rotherham.
**1861** Littlewood family moved to Attercliffe.
**1879** Came fourth in his first 72-hour, 'go-as-you-please' event and won £4.
**1882** Won his first race and set new 12-hours-per-day, 72-hour world record of 274 miles on a 38-lap-to-the-mile track in a circular rink. Won £30, first prize plus £10 for beating the record.
**1885** Won Sir John Astley Champion Gold Medal and £60, included £10 for beating world record of 405 miles.
**1887** Philadelphia, USA. Annihilated opposition in Championship of the World Sweepstakes.
**1888** Went to New York to compete in his last two races at Madison Square Garden. Broke 600-mile barrier despite running on a raw bone in his foot.
**1888** Beat world record of 621¼ miles, held by American Jimmy Albert. His world record of 565 miles wasn't beaten for 36 years.
**1890** Retired and took the Royal Head pub in Attercliffe.
**1912** Died of consumption (TB).

"Littlewood the Lionheart" took on all-comers on both sides of the Atlantic in gruelling 'Go-As-You-Please' races where contestants ran or walked as far as they could in six days, often getting by on as little as two hours sleep every 24 hours," added Paul aged 53.

"In his later days George had the King's head pub in Attercliffe and although he had to work very hard for his money he became a very wealthy man. In 1882 he set the record in head and toe racing at 530 miles in six days and six nights. That record still stands.

"In December 1888 he beat American Jimmy Albert's world record of 621¼ miles for go-as-you please. His world record of 623¾ miles wasn't beaten for 36 years until 1984, when the Greek ultra-marathon man Yiannis Kouros covered 635 miles 1,023 yards at Ruskill's Island, New York."

Although those records are unlikely to be challenged again, as six-day endurance races are not in great demand these days, it is believed by physiologists that Littlewood and his contemporaries were working at the outer limits of human endurance.

George Littlewood died 100 years ago this week on December 6, 1912, aged 53, and possibly the greatest ultra long distance foot racing athlete who ever lived.

Around 2,000 Sheffield ers attended his funeral at Darnall cemetery where his headstone can still be seen.

FEATURES

**Archive interview**

GEORGE Littlewood was greeted by thousands of fans when he returned to Sheffield after winning the Fox Diamond Belt at Madison Square Garden in 1888.

Among them was a local reporter, probably from the Sheffield Evening Telegraph. The interview on Littlewood's triumph, which took place at The Red Lion in Shalesmoor, was recorded thus:

■ **Reporter:** [so you hold the lead of record of the first day?

**Littlewood:** No, I was about 17 miles behind.

■ **Reporter:** How was that?

**Littlewood:** Half about 4 o'clock on Monday, I drank a bottle of beer which had gone slightly sour and this disagreed with my stomach and the consequence was that I was obliged to take a rest.

■ **Reporter:** What means did you employ to bring about your recovery?

**Littlewood:** None in particular. After I had a rest, I set to work again, and had no more beer for a time, and my stomach recovered its natural tone, and I became alright.

■ **Reporter:** Had you a hard task to beat Hertz?

**Littlewood:** No, I was going so strong and well that I thought I was no use distressing myself. In fact, I considered the race was mine, and that I could easily pass Hertz whenever I liked.

■ **Reporter:** You were then confident of victory?

**Littlewood:** Rather. Why on Saturday morning I ran 23 miles without having a break and never felt as though I had been running. I don't know how far I should have ran without stopping had not Billy O'Brien come to me and asked me to step and not to beat the record too much.

■ **Reporter:** How far do you think you would have travelled?

**Littlewood:** I feel confident I could have covered 650 miles had it been necessary. Why, I never ran a yard from 11 o'clock on Saturday forenoon until 8 o'clock in the evening, and during that time I was off the track for two hours.

■ **Reporter:** When did you pass Albert's record of 621 miles?

**Littlewood:** At ten minutes to eight on Saturday night, and at 8.10 I had covered 622 miles. After that I only covered 1,320 yards, so you see I had plenty of time to beat the record still further if I wanted to.





# Nancy Fielder

Gets ready for Christmas

## Santa gets all the Christmas credit

"IT'S only 19 days until Christmas," my six-year-old pipes up as I tuck him up for the night.

Sleep?

Chance would be a fine thing.

There's shopping to do, cards to write, decorations to hang and festive cheer to be shared.

Not to mention the ever increasing to-do list, growing pile of washing, dinners to cook and chauffeuring to be done.

I haven't the heart to tell him 'Santa' hasn't yet managed to start the present shopping this year.

This is pretty typical of the lag red fella if you ask me.

He always makes sure everything is just perfect when the Kids wake up on Christmas morning but it is the mums who take all the strain in the run up.

In fact there is a definite theme when it comes to gender roles over the festive season.

A bit like the three wise men who eventually turned up with gold, frankincense and myrrh.

> "Mary would have been much better off with three women visitors"

Mary would have been much better off with three women visitors who would have no doubt made sure they had reliable directions, arrived on time, helped look after the baby, produced some decent meals to keep her going and given a useful gift like a pram.

And let's not get started on the shepherd and his gift of a sheep.

We all know who would have ended up cleaning up after that.

Don't get me wrong – Christmas is my favourite time of the year and I love every part of it.

It is just there are so many parts of it and they should all have been organised already.

I take great cheer from the many mums who stand at the school gate wishing there wasn't so much to sort in less than three weeks.

I smile sweetly while gritting my teeth and listening to the ones who already have everything wrapped and labelled.

They are definitely in a minority although next are more organised than me.

I would love to blame the balance of work, three kids, my course and life but surely I could have managed to buy at least a couple of presents before December 18?

Ok, I am exaggerating slightly as I booked all presents to arrive before Christmas.

I also went to September.

The aim was to save money by avoiding carnage.

I'd missed the deadline for menwell but had my fingers crossed they would get there before December 20.

done.

Four days later my sister called to say the parcels had arrived.

Was she sure? At the other side of the world?

I've known letters take longer to get from Hoyle to Hillsborough than that.

Perhaps it was this annoperfectly early arrival which lulled me into a false sense of security.



**Busy times:** Getting ready for Christmas

I had a big, proud fist against an important part of my list and that has been enough to keep me going for months.

So here we are, December 6 and not a single other present purchased.

My two eldest children seem to have Christmas lists that grow longer the later I leave the shopping.

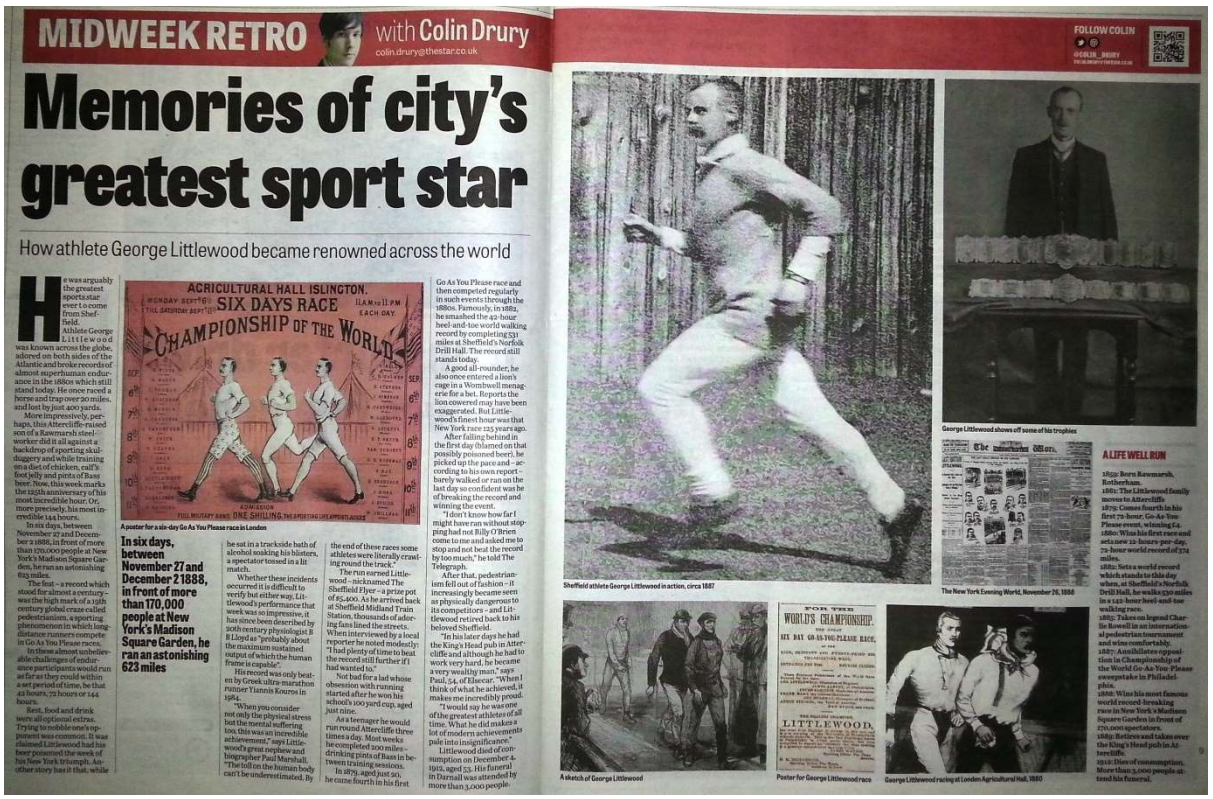
Fortunately my third is the young 'n know anything about Christmas – although the fact he turns one in 11 days time is adding to the chaos.

That'll be more things on the shopping list then.

To-and-fro crowds it will have to be either Ipswich or Meadowhall or sharp elbows during the Parquito lunchtime hustle.

After all Santa never chops points no matter how tired, stressed and overworked.

And as for 19 sleeps … well if the baby manages just a couple of extra-long nights out of the two, Dr Seuss might find himself in our house after all.



MIDWEEK RETRO with Colin Drury
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# Memories of city's greatest sport star

## How athlete George Littlewood became renowned across the world

He was arguably the greatest sports star ever to come from Sheffield.

Athlete George Littlewood was known across the globe, adored on both sides of the Atlantic and broke record of almost superhuman endurance in the 1880s which still stand today. He once raced a horse and trap over 20 miles, and lost by just 400 yards.

More impressively, perhaps, this Attercliffe-raised son of a Rawmarsh steelworker did it all against a backdrop of sporting skulduggery and while training on a diet of chicken, calf's foot jelly and pints of Bass beer. Now, this week marks the 125th anniversary of his most incredible hour. Or, more precisely, his most incredible 144 hours.

In six days, between November 27 and December 2 1888, in front of more than 170,000 people at New York's Madison Square Garden, he ran an astonishing 623 miles.

The feat – a record which stood for almost a century – was the high mark of a 19th century global craze called pedestrianism, a sporting phenomenon in which long-distance runners competed in Go As You Please races.

In these almost unbelievable challenges of endurance participants would run as far as they could within a set period of time, be that 42 hours, 72 hours or 144 hours.

Rest, food and drink were all optional extras. Trying to nobble one's opponent was common. It was claimed Littlewood had his beer poisoned the week of his New York triumph. Another story has it that, while he sat in a trackside bath of alcohol soaking his blisters, a spectator tossed in a lit match.

Whether these incidents occurred it is difficult to verify but either way, Littlewood's performance that week was so impressive, it has since been described by 20th century physiologist R Lloyd as "probably about the maximum sustained output of which the human frame is capable".

His record was only beaten by Greek ultra-marathon runner Yiannis Kouros in 1984.

"When you consider not only the physical stress but the mental suffering too, this was an incredible achievement," says Littlewood's great nephew and biographer Paul Marshall. "The toll on the human body can't be underestimated. By the end of these races some athletes were literally crawling round the track."

The run earned Littlewood – nicknamed The Sheffield Flyer – a prize pot of $5,400. As he arrived back at Sheffield Midland Train Station, thousands of adoring fans lined the streets. When interviewed by a local reporter he noted modestly: "I had plenty of time to beat the record still further if I had wanted to."

Not bad for a lad whose obsession with running started after he won his school's 100 yard cup, aged just nine.

As a teenager he would run round Attercliffe three times a day. Most weeks he completed 200 miles – drinking pints of Bass in between training sessions.

In 1879, aged just 21, he came fourth in his first Go As You Please race and then competed regularly in such events through the 1880s. Famously, in 1882, he smashed the 42-hour heel-and-toe world walking record by completing 531 miles at Sheffield's Norfolk Drill Hall. The record still stands today.

A good all-rounder, he also once entered a lion's cage in a Wombwell menagerie for a bet. Reports the lion cowered may have been exaggerated. But Littlewood's fastest hour was that New York race 125 years ago.

After falling behind in the first day (blamed on that possibly poisoned beer), he picked up the pace and – according to his own report – barely walked or ran on the last day so confident was he of breaking the record and winning the event.

"I don't know how far I might have ran without stopping but not Billy O'Brien come to me and asked me to stop and not beat the record by too much," he told The Telegraph.

After that, pedestrianism fell out of fashion – it increasingly became seen as physically dangerous to its competitors – and Littlewood retired back to his beloved Sheffield.

"In his later days he had the King's Head pub in Attercliffe and although he had to work very hard, he became a very wealthy man," says Paul, 54, of Elsecar. "When I think of what he achieved, it makes me incredibly proud.

"I would say he was one of the greatest athletes of all time. What he did makes a lot of modern achievements pale into insignificance."

Littlewood died of consumption on December 6, 1912, aged 53. His funeral in Darnall was attended by more than 3,000 people.




A poster for a six-day Go As You Please race in London

**In six days, between November 27 and December 2 1888, in front of more than 170,000 people at New York's Madison Square Garden, he ran an astonishing 623 miles**



Sheffield athlete George Littlewood in action, circa 1887



George Littlewood shows off some of his trophies



The New York Evening World, November 26, 1888



A sketch of George Littlewood




Poster for George Littlewood race



George Littlewood racing at London Agricultural Hall, 1880

### A LIFE WELL RUN

**1858:** Born Rawmarsh, Rotherham.
**1861:** The Littlewood family moves to Attercliffe
**1879:** Comes fourth in his first 72-hour, Go-As-You-Please event, winning £4.
**1880:** Wins his first race and sets new 12-hours-per-day, 72-hour world record of 274 miles.
**1882:** Sets a world record which stands to this day when, at Sheffield's Norfolk Drill Hall, he walks 530 miles in a 132-hour heel-and-toe walking race.
**1885:** Takes on legend Charlie Rowell in an international pedestrian tournament and wins comfortably.
**1887:** Annihilates opposition in Championship of the World Go-As-You-Please sweepstake in Philadelphia.
**1888:** Wins his most famous world record breaking race in New York's Madison Square Garden in front of 170,000 spectators.
**1889:** Retires and takes over the King's Head pub in Attercliffe.
**1912:** Dies of consumption. More than 3,000 people attend his funeral.

**And this article was dated 27-11-2013…**