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## This Flag Dips to No Earthly King ...

### The 1908 Olympic Opening Ceremony: Fresh Evidence

— Bob Wilcock —

Bill Mallon and Ian Buchanan have dealt authoritatively concerning the controversies relating to the flags at the Opening Ceremony, and the conflicting reports of flag-bearer identity, in their article in *JOH* Vol. 7, No. 3, September 1999 (reprinted in the 2009 XIII Olympic Congress Special Issue), and in their book *The 1908 Olympic Games, (Appendix II)*.

There were two occasions in the Opening ceremony when the flag should have been dipped: when the teams lined up on the field facing the Royal Box, and during the march-past, as the teams passed the Royal Box.

Mallon and Buchanan concluded that the “possibility exists, which ... would explain both aspects of the problem. Perhaps Rose failed to dip the flag during the march-past ... which was of little consequence to the British media, but

then he did dip it while in line with the other flag bearers”. They speculated that the issue may never be fully resolved, but evidence has at last emerged.

#### The Flags around the Stadium

Mallon and Buchanan record the US protest at the fact that ‘Old Glory’ was not flying amongst the flags around the stadium (nor was the Swedish flag) (pp. 314-5). These omissions were soon put right, and the British Olympic Association apologised. The reason for the omission, and the fact that flags of non-competing nations China and Japan were flying is that, under the agreement between the BOA and the organisers of the Franco-British Exhibition it was the responsibility of the organisers not only to



**Fig. 1:** The American athletes approaching the Royal Box, caps on heads (private collection).

build the stadium but also to furnish it'. Imre Kiralfi, a Hungarian showman, was the man in charge, and he and his committee quite simply provided flags without full knowledge of, nor consideration of the countries that were or were not competing. The American annoyance is understandable, and it turns out was to have an interesting consequence, but the issue did not make the minutes of the British Olympic Council who held daily meetings throughout the Games (although urgent issues were dealt with on the spot, without reference to the Council).

### The American flag bearer

Photographic evidence solved the question as to who was the American flag bearer, confirming it to be Ralph Rose (Fig. 1). The standard bearer in front of him was Johnny Garrells<sup>2</sup>. It may be added that *The Chicago Daily News* identifies the gentleman in top-hat and tailcoat behind Rose as "Matty" Halpin, the team manager.

### The Canadian Flag Bearer

Photographs have also come to light of the Canadian Olympic team in the march past (e.g. Fig. 2). These have enabled Robert K. Barney to identify the flag bearer as Ed Archibald of Toronto (who won a Bronze in the pole vault) and swimmer Robert Zimmerman as the standard bearer<sup>3</sup>. The photos also confirm that the team marched under the Canadian flag (c.f. speculation reported in Mallon & Buchanan, p. 36, note 18).

### The French Flag Bearer

The identity of the French flag-bearer has been reported as unknown to the French Olympic Committee (CNOSF). He cannot be identified from photographs of the parade

because his face is hidden by his arm holding the flag (Fig. 3), but he is named in the *Daily Mail* report of the Opening Ceremony as Émile Demangel, who went on to take the Silver Medal in the one-lap (660 yards) cycle race (Fig. 4). The standard-bearer is not identified, but is potentially recognisable from photographs<sup>4</sup>.

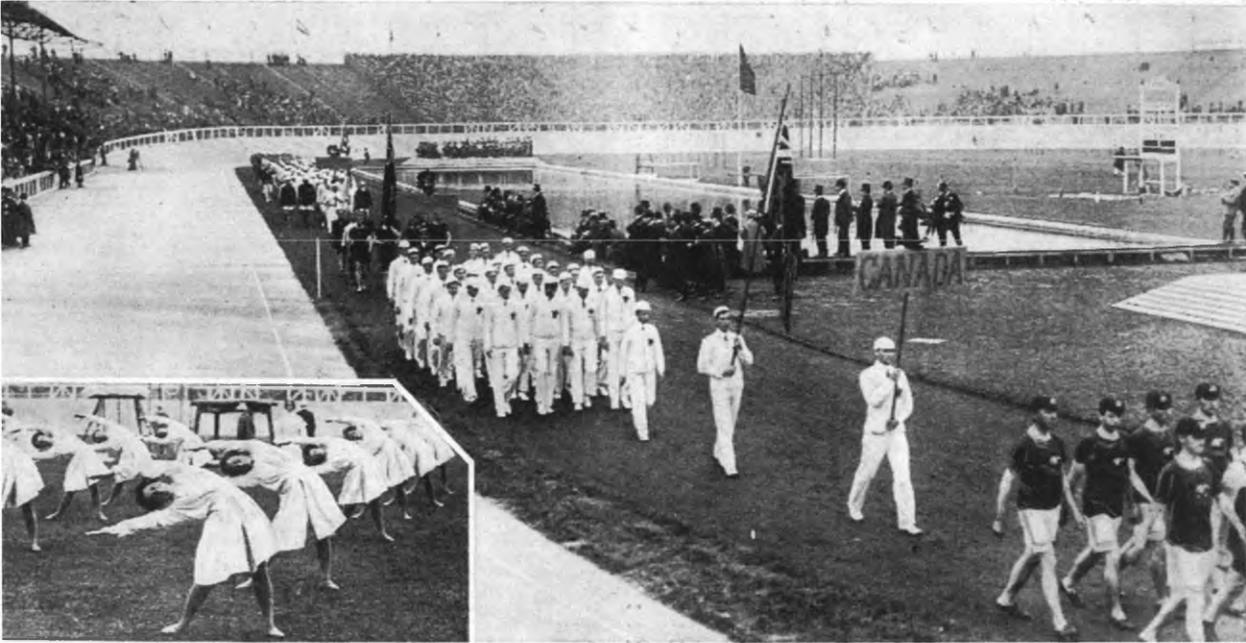
The flag-bearers for a number of other teams have also not been identified. To date no photographs have been found that might enable visual determination of the flag-bearer for these teams, although there is more than one photo showing that Finland did not have a flag, and did not even have a proper name-plate because they arrived only just before the ceremony started (Fig. 5).<sup>5</sup>

### The Build-up to the Opening Ceremony

The protocol for the Opening Ceremony was published well in advance. It was in all the major newspapers, and will certainly have been given to team managers. British Olympic Council minutes confirm the obvious, that there was regular communication with all the teams. The teams shared specific "assembly rooms" under the stadium, and press reports indicate that some at least undertook training in the stadium in the days leading up to the Games.

This included the US team. The majority arrived by USMB Philadelphia on 5 July, and initially stayed at London's St. Ermin's Hotel. They were reportedly unhappy with the arrangements made for them, and the crowded stadium for training, so James Sullivan moved most of the team to Brighton on England's south coast, about an hour by train from London.<sup>6</sup>

They stayed at the town's finest hotel, the Hotel Metropole, and trained at the Preston Park cricket ground about a mile from the hotel. It was there that the first Anglo-American "incident" took place. It was a good-humoured incident, and the Americans clearly thought



**Fig. 2:** The Canadian team (*Daily Graphic* photographs, private collection).

nothing of it, and indeed afterwards wrote saying how much they had enjoyed their stay in Brighton, and how good they had found the training facilities.

They arrived in Brighton on the Tuesday before the Games, and on the Friday afternoon when they turned up at Preston Park they found the cricket pitch firmly occupied by a local archery club who had a regular booking. It took the intervention of a local town councillor to resolve the situation, the archers occupying the western half of the ground, leaving the eastern half to the US athletes<sup>7</sup>.

The centre of a cricket pitch is sacrosanct, and strictly not to be walked upon except during a match. For this reason shot-putters and javelin throwers were denied the opportunity to train in Brighton, and in all some 20 US athletes stayed in London, one of them being Ralph Rose.

There were two rehearsals for the Opening Ceremony, the first being at 11:30 on the Saturday prior to the Ceremony on the Monday. This rehearsal was shortly before the start of an athletics event organised by the Polytechnic Harriers. No American took part in that event, although Harry Porter gave a high-jump demonstration. If members of the US team were not watching the potential competition it would be surprising, and being London based, Ralph Rose must surely have been at the rehearsal.

The ceremony included two salutes. The first was during the parade of athletes lined up in teams on the field. Immediately after the King had declared the Games open, the National Anthem was played "all flags being lowered to the salute". A photograph in the *London Daily News* of 13 July shows "the Athletes of all Nations rehearsing the Royal Salute". The photograph on a scratched micro-film is too poor to reproduce. It shows good-sized teams. The Swedish team is in the foreground. Their flag is clearly lowered, others are at various heights, all a bit of a shambles as first rehearsals can be. The US team is too



**Top: Fig. 3:** The French standard-bearer (private collection). **Bottom: Fig. 4:** Émile Demangel, the French Flag-bearer (private collection).



**Fig. 5:** The advancing teams and flag-bearers, Ralph Rose in black (arrowed). Note the Finnish team at the right without flag and proper name-board (*The Sphere*, July 18, 1908, p. 52).

far down the field to be identified, but there is no doubt that they (and Rose) knew what to do. The question is of course, when it came to it, did Rose do it?

### Russia, Switzerland and Turkey

Mallon and Buchanan draw attention to differing newspaper reports, and further researches show that extreme caution must be exercised – mistakes abound in virtually every report seen. *The Times* for example incorrectly identifies the team to the right of Sweden when they lined up on the field as Switzerland instead of Finland: there was just one competitor from Switzerland and he did not take part in the parade.

There is a curious second entry in *The Times* report. After parading on the field, the athletes marched round the track and past the Royal Box, where they were to salute again. *The Times* report lists the teams in order by their flags, but between Norway and Sweden came “the white, blue and red [flag] of Russia”, and after Sweden “the red Turkish flag with its crescent”. With such detail it reads authoritatively, but it appears the journalist was copying from a crib sheet, since neither flag was present: Russia had just one athlete, Georg Lind, who ran in the marathon. Turkey may have indicated an intention to compete, and the Official Report lists a “Mr. Moullos” as a competitor for the gymnastic heptathlon, but that report does not show him as having competed in any of the seven disciplines, and all the indications are that he did not compete. *The Times* does not mention a flag for Switzerland, but the report does go on to mention that the Finns arrived just in time to participate, although not in time to procure a proper entablature and flag.

### The Parade of the Athletes

Photographic evidence has come to light that enables the question as to whether the American flag was lowered on the first occasion, during the parade.

That said, it is not totally straightforward. The Official

Report gives the order of the teams in the march-past, but not the parade, most newspaper reports are vague, and even the more detailed descriptions turn out to have errors. *The Morning Post* refers to 21 nations rather than 18, and includes “Switzerland in green”, Italy between Denmark and France, and “gallant Greece in the centre”. *The Illustrated London News* similarly misplaces Italy. The description in *The Times* turns out to be the most accurate, except that they include Switzerland instead of Finland.

The athletes were marshalled under the stand opposite the Royal Box into two columns, one led by the US team, and the other by the British team. The US-led column entered the arena by the left-hand entrance facing the Royal Box, the UK-led column by the right-hand entrance, the two columns marched to the ends of the track, then turned to meet each other in the centre of the field. The result was that the teams were lined up in the following order:

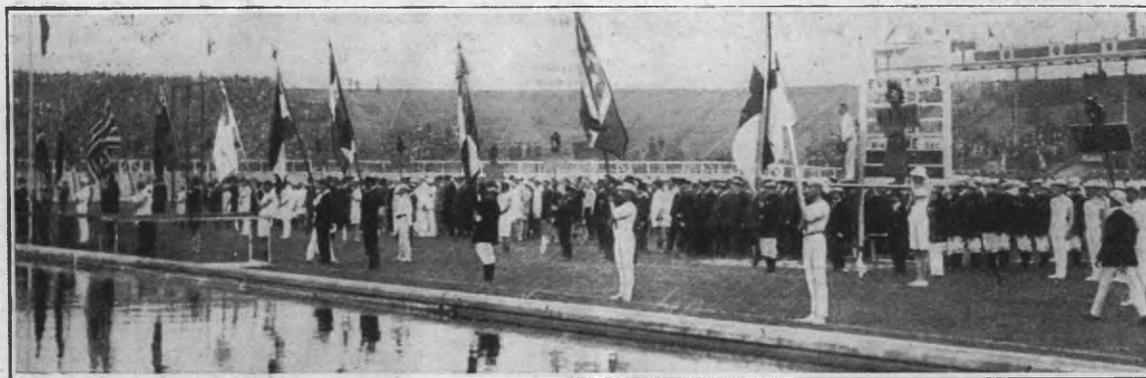
Austria, Belgium, Bohemia, Denmark, France, Germany, Australasia, CANADA, USA, UK, South Africa, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Sweden and Finland.<sup>8</sup>

This order is confirmed by careful study of some half-a-dozen photos showing the parade from different angles. This is not as straightforward as it might seem, but the important thing to note is that the US team, and flag, are in the centre, flanked by Canada and the UK.

This is borne out in a photograph published in *The Sphere* on 18 July 1908 (*Fig. 5*), which names the United States team, and in which the Stars and Stripes (or ‘Stars and Bars’ as it was sometimes referred to in the British press in 1908) is clearly visible. This photo also confirms that Italy were to the right of Great Britain as we look at them, and it was Finland, not Switzerland after Sweden.

One word of caution: at first glance it appears that the person holding the US flag is in white, but closer inspection shows that the dark-suited Ralph Rose is holding the flagpole close to his chest.

## A TRIBUTE FROM THE ATHLETIC WORLD TO THE KING AND QUEEN.



THE FLAGS OF ALL NATIONS COMPETING IN THE OLYMPIC GAMES GROUPED OPPOSITE THE ROYAL BOX AFTER THE GRAND PARADE. ("Daily Graphic" Photograph.)

**Fig. 6:** Ralph Rose holding the US flag (*The Daily Graphic*, July 14, 1908, p. 9, private collection).

There is a similar problem with the photograph from *The Daily Graphic* of 14 July (Fig. 6), but enlargement shows that the British flag curls into the American flag (Fig. 6A). The British flag-holder is in white, and Ralph Rose is standing immediately beneath the flags.

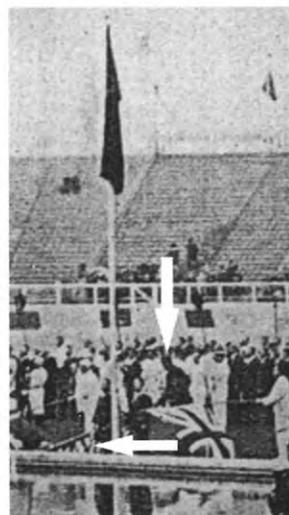
Three photographs have been found showing the flags dipped. The first, from the American magazine, *The World Today*, September 1908, is tantalising in that it only shows the Swedish and Danish flags clearly (Fig. 7). However the caption says "Dipping the colors" and there would surely have been reference to the American flag in the report accompanying the photo had it not been dipped, but there is not.

The second photograph, from the British magazine *The World* of 15 July 1908, (Fig. 8) finally resolves the issue, showing conclusively that not only was the American flag dipped along with the others, it is in fact nearly touching the ground! The Union Jack is clearly visible, as is the Canadian flag. Between them, arrowed (Fig. 8A), lies the Stars and Stripes largely hidden by the surround of the swimming tank. Ralph Rose, also arrowed, is bending over as he holds the flag-pole.

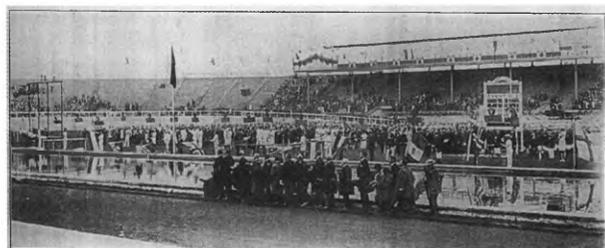
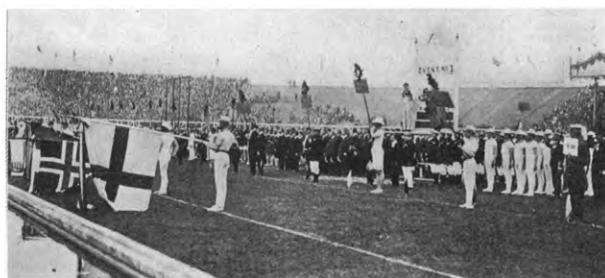
This photograph illustrates why it has taken so long to find the answer to the problem: the proof that the flag was lowered comes from the fact that it is not visible in the photograph. There is another photograph of the flags lowered in *The Daily Telegraph* of 14 July 1908 that many researchers will have seen but not appreciated, for exactly the same reason, the Stars and Stripes are not visible.<sup>9</sup>

### The March Past

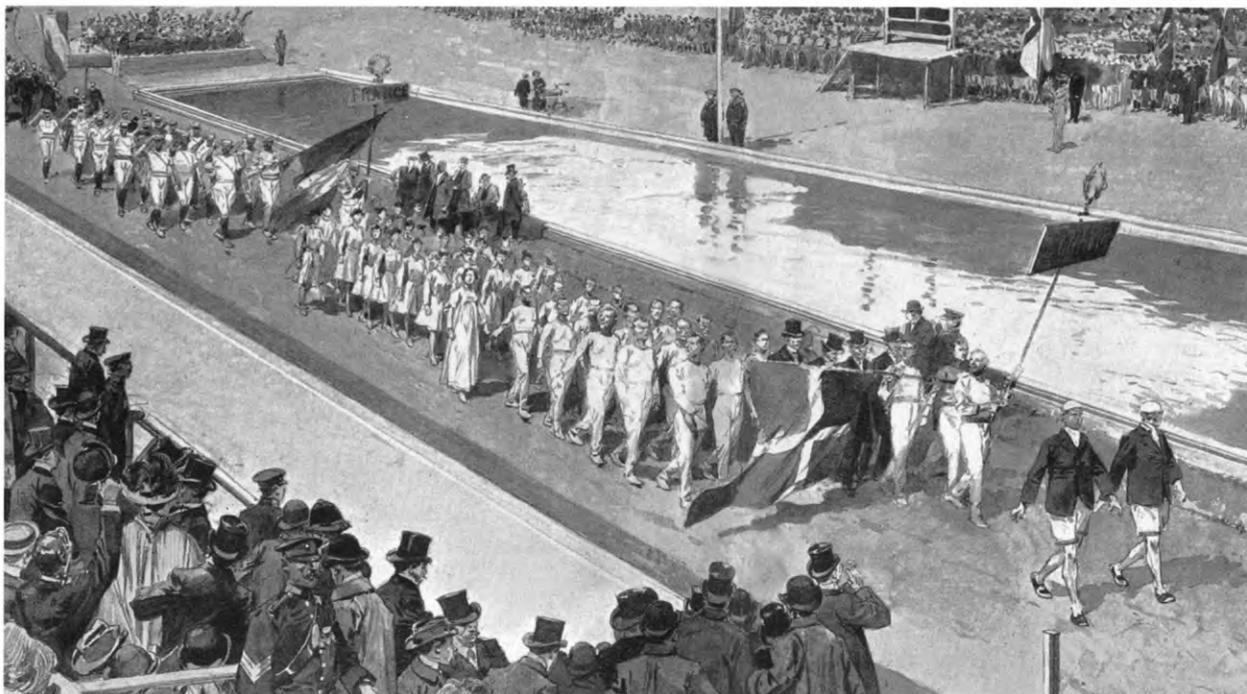
The published protocol included the following "Each column on passing the Royal Party will salute, afterwards marching right round the track and make its exit."<sup>10</sup> The protocol does not state what form the salute should take, and in particular does not state that the flag should be lowered. However in its report on 13 July under the heading "What will be done" *The Sporting Life* states "As each company arrives opposite the Royal Box the military



**Left: Fig. 6A:** Ralph Rose holding the US flag (*The Daily Graphic*, July 14, 1908, p. 9, private collection). **Right: Fig. 8A:** The US flag dipped, Ralph Rose bending forward (*The World*, July 15, 1908).



**Top: Fig. 7:** Original caption "Dipping the colors on the opening day in front of the royal box" (*The World Today*, September 1908). **Bottom: Fig. 8:** The US flag dipped, Ralph Rose bending forward. Original caption "The opening of the Olympiad" (*The World*, July 15, 1908).



salute will be given *and the colours lowered.*" Other newspapers do not add this detail, and this perhaps helps to explain both why different teams saluted differently, and why King, organisers and public were indifferent as to whether the flags were lowered as part of the salute.

Mallon and Buchanan quote various newspaper reports from both sides of the Atlantic which suggest that *all* teams lowered their flags in salute, but none of them are categorical, and *The Sporting Life*, in a quotation not used by Mallon and Buchanan says "Several of the nations dipped their flag as they arrived opposite the Royal party, while others contented themselves with a military salute." Mallon and Buchanan conclude that Rose probably did not in fact lower the U.S. flag, and *The Sporting Life* quote raises the possibility that he was not alone.

There are a good number of photographs showing teams marching around the track, but like those of the American and Canadian teams illustrated earlier (Figs. 1 & 2) they do not show the teams at the moment of passing the Royal Box. The best image is an artist's impression, published as a supplement to *The Graphic* on 18 July 1908 (Fig. 9). That is instructive in that it shows the Danish flag lowered sideways, but the French flag lowered forwards. It may be artistic licence, to show the Danish flag more clearly, but it again supports the view that there was no prescribed way to make the salute.<sup>11</sup>

It is also informative to consider reports that specifically refer to the American team. *The Morning Post* reported that "the United States ... were in everyday dress, and as they passed the Royal box they held their caps to their chests." *The Daily Telegraph* referred to the American team as "wearing ordinary dress, and carrying their cloth caps across their breasts" but went on to say that all teams "passed the Royal Box at attention, with eyes right and colours lowered ..." and that the British team "added to all these courtesies the military salute."

Since this article was first prepared, a photograph has

come into the author's possession that finally resolves the question. The photograph at the start of the article shows the US team wearing their caps as they approached the King's Box. The present photograph (Fig. 10) shows the American team passing the Royal Box, caps to their chest, and Ralph Rose holding the flag up high!

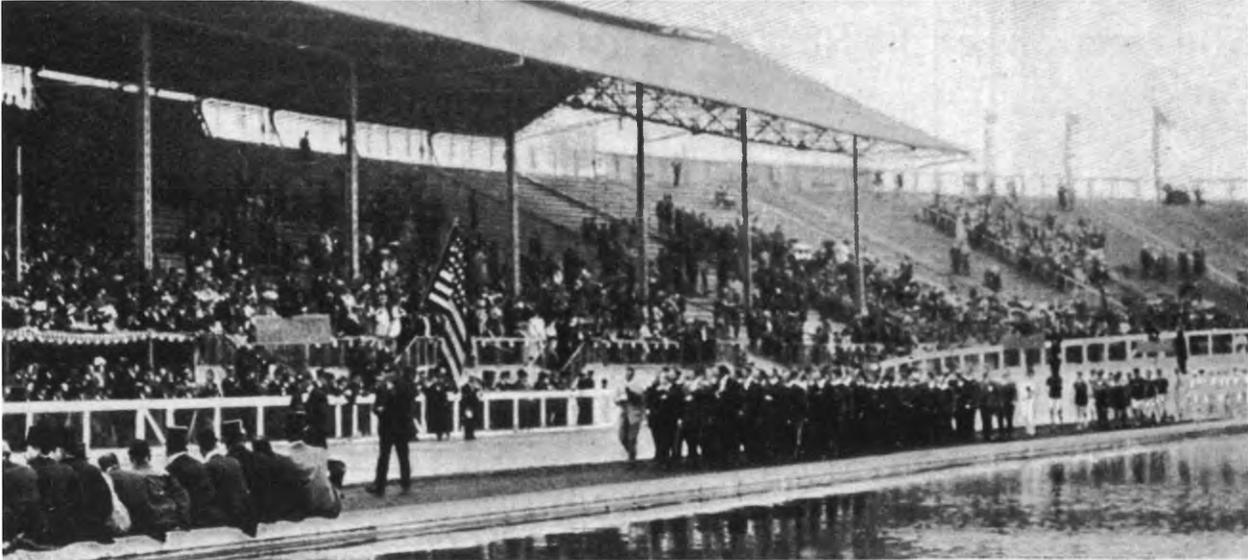
The final question is whether Ralph Rose simply forgot to lower the flag, or whether his action was deliberate. Press reports vary, but *The World* of New York states in its report on the Opening Ceremony published on 14 July, the day after the opening: "[An] incident noticed was the action of Ralph Rose, the giant shot putter of America, when he refused to lower his American flag when passing the royal box. Rose's team-mates approved his action when they discovered that the management of the Stadium had neglected to display an American flag in the Stadium, both America and Sweden being slighted in this respect."

## Conclusion

The photographic evidence proves Mallon and Buchanan's speculation to have been absolutely correct: Rose definitely did lower the flag during the parade, and equally definitely did not during the march-past. This latter attracted notice in the American press at the time, but not in the British press, which was generally enthusiastic about the Americans, did refer to their removing their caps in salute, and only commented adversely on the fact that they wore "everyday dress". The rest, as they say, is history. ■

## Notes and References

- 1 Minutes of the British Olympic Association, 20 December 1906
- 2 Rose won shot put Gold, Garrells silver in the 110 metres hurdles and bronze in the shot put; he also competed in the discus (free-style and classical)



**Left: Fig. 9:** The advancing teams and flag-bearers, Ralph Rose in black (arrowed). Note the Finnish team at the right without flag and proper name-board (*The Graphic*, July 18, 1908, copyright Rebecca Jenkins). **Right: Fig. 10:** The American team at the moment of salute – the team members have their hats to their chests, but Ralph Rose keeps the flag held high (private collection).

- 3 *Olimpika Volume XV111, 2009* published by the International Centre for Olympic Studies at the University of Western Ontario, Canada.
- 4 The author would welcome suggestions as to the identity of the standard-bearer, to [marathon@societyofolympiccollectors.org](mailto:marathon@societyofolympiccollectors.org)
- 5 *Sphere*, 18 July 1908; another view is reproduced on a postcard. See Mallon & Buchanan, p. 37 note 16
- 6 *World* 8 July 1908, and *New York Evening Post* 7 July 1908, cited by Rebecca Jenkins in *The First London Olympics 1908*, Piatkus Books 2008
- 7 *Brighton Argus*, 11 July 1908
- 8 They marched past in a different order: all the European nations in alphabetical order, except that Finland was after Sweden, then the USA leading the English-speaking nations, with the British team bringing up the rear.
- 9 The *Daily Telegraph* is widely available on microfilm, but the key photograph does not reproduce at all well. The only known paper copy is held by the British Library, but their newspaper collection is in the process of being moved, and the relevant copy is likely to be inaccessible until at least 2012.
- 10 *The Official Report*, p. 48.
- 11 Cropped from an image supplied by Rebecca Jenkins. As well as the different styles of dipping the flag it can be seen that the French have their arms raised to the forehead in salute.

#### Note from the Secretary-General:

Members who have a change of address, telephone – and/or fax-numbers, or e-mail address, should always inform the Secretary-General.

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