

## PEOPLE

# An inspiration striding across generations

A new children's book tells the remarkable and largely unknown story of Eric Liddell's life as a missionary in China; author **Roy Peachey** explains his journey towards writing the book

**C**hariots of Fire introduced me to Eric Liddell, the proud Scot who was born in China, the sprinter who would not run on a Sunday, the rugby international turned Olympic gold medallist.

What moved me in the movie all those years ago still moves me today: Vangelis's stirring music; the human drama; Liddell's unaffected goodness. However, as time passed, the details of Liddell's remarkable life gradually faded from my memory, though the theme tune lingered for longer. I grew up, moved to another part of the country, and became a schoolteacher, leaving Liddell behind.

Or so I thought, but it has never been easy to out-run the flying Scotsman. Glancing back, I discovered that he was still there at my shoulder. My life had moved on but Eric Liddell could not be shaken off so easily.

We met again on the athletics track. Having skived games at school to avoid the misery of swimming lessons, I rediscovered my childhood love of sport in my twenties and threw myself into hockey, football, and cricket. Finding that I was pretty quick on my feet, I also joined the local athletics club.

Like Liddell, I became a sprinter. Like him, I loved running fast.

Unlike the great man, I never became any more than an average club runner.

Nonetheless, I began to appreciate Liddell's astounding success at the 1924 Olympics. Breaking the world record in the 400 metres when he had expected to run in the 100 metres was astounding. Clocking the speeds he achieved on cinder tracks without the aid of starting blocks or modern training methods was truly remarkable.

And then I discovered the rest of Liddell's story, the story that Chariots of Fire did not tell.

Returning to university as a mature student, I worked on an MA in Chinese Studies, a course that proved to be extremely fruitful. Browsing in the library when I was supposed to be writing an essay, I was taken aback to find a book about China and the First World War. Even though I had a history degree, I hadn't realised that China had been involved in the Great War. What I read became the basis of my novel, *Between Darkness and Light*.

I also read with growing amazement about Eric Liddell's life after the 1924 Olympics. As an Olympic gold medallist, he could have basked in his new-found fame and made a fortune, but instead he



*I am the arms that are pumping. The legs that are striding out. The breath that is pulsing. When I'm running I don't have a body*

returned to China. There he became a teacher in Tianjin before moving to war-torn Siaochang, where he lived a quietly heroic life.

There are many stories about his self-effacing actions during those years but the anecdote that perhaps best illustrates his character concerns a young Chinese artist who had been left for dead after occupying Japanese troops bungled an attempt to behead him.

Having rescued another wounded soldier, Eric was on his way back to Siaochang when he was alerted to the presence of the badly injured artist, so he saved him too, despite the obvious risk to his own life.

In the comparative safety of the mission hospital, the man revived and, as a token of gratitude, he gave Eric a picture of a peony which he had painted while recuperating. This painting reminded Eric, "that hands of friendship still stretch out across the oceans," as I put it in *The Race*, my first novel for children, "in that one simple picture Scotland and China are united".

Sitting in a university archive with the painting and Liddell's wafer-thin letters from China in my hands was a humbling experience. It felt as though we were shaking hands across the decades. I was inspired and just a little over-awed.

If he had been there, Eric would no doubt have put me at my ease because he never stood aloof from anyone, which is one reason why he adapted so well to life in a Japanese prisoner of war camp when war overtook the ex-pat community in the 1940s.

What struck me most forcibly about the many accounts of life in the prison camp was how much everyone admired Eric Liddell. No one had a bad word to say about him.

From a human point of view, he had lost everything. He had been separated from his beloved wife and

children. He was no longer free. His work was in ruins. Yet he did not give in to self-pity. He continued to live for others to an extraordinary degree.

In particular, he had a special heart for the children of the camp. For their sake, he organised sports fixtures and athletics competitions. For their sake, he even refereed a hockey match on the Sabbath.

Eric's finest hour came not in the Olympics in Paris in 1924 but in a prison camp in China in 1944, his ultimate sacrifice being witnessed not by adoring spectators but by a crowd of emaciated prisoners and curious camp guards.

As I read about his life in that university library, I realised that there was a remarkable and largely unknown story here that needed to be told, but it took a few years before the opening words of *The Race* hurdled into my mind.

I was out jogging with my eldest daughter, having given up competitive athletics a few years earlier, but as we ran together, I remembered the old days when running had been my release.

"When I'm running all my worries disappear and I concentrate on just two things: the race and myself. Not what I've done or what I'm going to do, what I think or even what I feel, but the real me that appears when I'm running. I am the arms that are pumping. The legs that are striding out. The breath that is pulsing. When



Main image: Hulton Archive/Getty Images

**Eric Liddell winning the 220 yards race at Stamford Bridge in 1923, main; the sprinter in 1924, above; winning the 440 yards race at Stamford Bridge in 1924, above right; Roy Peachey, left**



*The Race* by Roy Peachey is out now (Cranachan, £7.99)

## WELLBEING

## How to stay cool if you find it a struggle to run in the heat

When temperatures spike, it's important to be strategic with your summer workouts, says **Liz Connor**

**B**eautiful sunny days can seem a rare treat, so it's natural to want throw on your trainers and make the most of the weather with a lunchtime run in the park.

But running in the heat can be a lot more tricky than you think, and if you're not careful, you can easily max out too early and finish your first kilometre wanting to lie down in a hot, sweaty, exhausted mess.

Yep, summer training isn't easy – but you don't have to give up on your outdoor runs just because of the sunshine. It's a case of being prepared, sensible and adapting as necessary. We asked some experts for their advice on safely managing the heat with summer running...

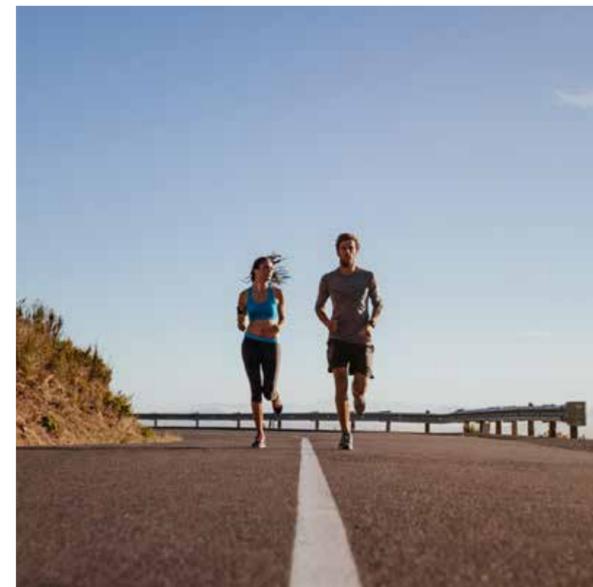
### Why is running in heat so hard?

"Running in the heat causes a rapid increase in your core body temperature, which the body counteracts by redirecting the blood from our muscles to the skin to support the cooling process," says NURVV Sport Scientist, Anna Kosciuk (nurvv.com).

Because of this, less blood is available to transport oxygen to the working muscles, and when your skin's receiving the blood flow that would normally go to muscles, Kosciuk says keeping pace becomes way more difficult: "The lack of oxygen quickly induces premature fatigue and results in a decline in muscle function, which can affect overall performance."

In this way, running in the heat is quite similar to altitude training. That overheated, heavy feeling is never pleasant, and dehydration can also play a role in its intensity. When you haven't drunk enough fluids, your body sweats less to stop you losing fluid more rapidly than you are replacing it, which means you have a harder time controlling your body temperature.

**How should you adapt your running technique in the summer?** Time it right. Even on baking days, it's significantly cooler around sunrise and sunset during summer months.



Be prepared for summer running, above; Salomon Advance Skin 5, inset

"A simple tip is to run in the morning or late afternoon, to avoid the hottest part of the day," says Randall Cooper, sports physiotherapist and CEO of Premax (premax.co.uk). Getting your run done first thing in the morning also leaves lunchtime free to focus on some all important recovery, like stretching and myofascial release.

Cooper advises running a course that is mainly in the shade (woodland paths are good for this) and slowing your pace to adjust to the heat and humidity. It's an obvious point, but the hottest day of the year is no time to aim for a PB. "When you're sweating more, you lose valuable fluids and electrolytes, which compromises the efficiency of the cooling process of the body," says Kosciuk.

Wearing a hydration vest, like the Salomon Advance Skin 5 (currently £89.90 down from £110, wiggle.com) allows you to sip on a 1.5-litre bladder of water as you go, so you don't have to wait until the finish line to properly rehydrate.

When it comes to summer running, Cooper says "light, technical fabrics that wick sweat and allow the skin to breathe" are best.

Microfiber polyesters and cotton blends with mesh areas and vents will help to keep you cool, and a hat and UV sunglasses are essential for

keeping your face and eyes protected from the rays. Wearing a broad spectrum of SPF50 on hot days is a no-brainer for runners too.

Shoe choice is equally important. "Get your trainers fitted to the shape of your feet and the function of your foot and lower leg," stresses Kosciuk. "There's no better way to avoid injuries than to ensure appropriate support and structure around your feet."

Have extra water on hand, some small wet towels to place on the back of your neck or wrists, and know where you can get out of the heat and the sun into a cooler environment, says Cooper. Replenishing the body with cold fluids is also a vital part of your post-run recovery.

### A final word...

Despite the disadvantages of summer running, learning to adapt to the challenge of hot weather can actually make you a more efficient runner. That said, it can also be dangerous to run outside in the heat as it increases your risk of heat stroke and other potentially serious heat-related illnesses.

Cooper says adapting to running in the heat should be done incrementally. "Not everyone responds to training in the heat in the same manner, so it definitely needs to be approached with caution," he advises.