

**WRESTLIANA, OR, THE HISTORY
OF THE CUMBERLAND &
WESTMORELAND WRESTLING
SOCIETY IN LONDON: SINCE THE
YEAR 1824**

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Wrestliana, Or, The History of the Cumberland & Westmoreland Wrestling Society in London:
Since the Year 1824 by Walter Armstrong

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WALTER ARMSTRONG

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WRESTLIANA;

OR, THE

History of the Cumberland & Westmoreland

WRESTLING SOCIETY

IN LONDON

SINCE THE YEAR 1824.

BY

WALTER ARMSTRONG, HON. SEC.

Then at lowpin' he'll gang a fall yard owre them aw,
And at rustlin', whilk o' them dare try him a faw.

BONNET ANDERSON.

Now, clear the ring! for hard to fang
The manly wrestlers take their stand.

SIR WALLACE SCOTT.

LONDON:

SIMPSON, MARSHALL, & CO., STATIONERS' HALL COURT.

1870.

550.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS volume contains a full account of all the transactions of the Cumberland and Westmoreland Wrestling Society in London since 1824, the annual gatherings at the Agricultural Hall and elsewhere, with remarks on most of the celebrated wrestlers who have figured therein; together with detailed lists of the winners, first, second, and third, up to the present time; the contributions to the charitable institutions of the two counties; and amounts given in prizes during the last ten years; the whole forming a complete history of the Cumberland and Westmoreland wrestling in the metropolis.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE Cumberland and Westmoreland Wrestling Society was the first, and, till a recent period, the only one existing in the metropolis that had for its object the practice and annual celebration of athletic sports; and though in the present day the importance of athletic exercises in the promotion of health, and the due development of the physical powers, is becoming more acknowledged and appreciated, as shown in the establishment of Gymnasiums and Athletic Societies, both in London and elsewhere; yet, the above, as far as London itself is concerned, stands alone, both in point of influence, and the pre-eminent skill and science displayed in the performance of the particular exercises practised by its members.

The origin of this Society, and the exact date of its establishment is somewhat uncertain; the best living authorities, however—very old members—agree that it has existed more than a century, the earliest mention of its annual gatherings being, that the

natives of Cumberland and Westmoreland were in the habit of meeting on Kennington Common on Good Friday to celebrate their favourite sports of wrestling and leaping. The prizes competed for in these days were insignificant in value, and few in number, a belt being awarded to the champion of the wrestling arena, to which all weights were admitted, and a pair of buckskin gloves to the best leaper, in imitation of the prizes at that time given for competition in many parts of Cumberland and Westmoreland.

The local affections and kindly feelings towards each other, so strongly characteristic of the natives of these counties, not only kept alive their ardour, but lent increased attraction to their meetings, drawing together a large number of old friends, many of them old playmates and school-fellows, who, since leaving their northern homes, and being occupied in various pursuits in different parts of London, seldom met, except on such occasions, and at no time to enjoy themselves so much.

As years flew by, and its numbers increased, the Society gradually became more organized; better, and a greater number, of prizes were given for competition, till, in the year 1824, we find the first record of a code of rules, and a regular staff of officers appointed to carry out the sports and conduct the business of the Society. Gradually, although at first,

confined to wrestling—irrespective of weights—and leaping, the competition has been extended, and prizes given for other sports, such as pole jumping, hurdle racing, etc. Competitors have also, under certain restrictions, and by permission of the Committee, been allowed to come from the north to contend for certain classes of prizes, though debarred from others reserved for the London residents only.

Since the commencement the annual meetings have been held in various places:—viz., Kennington Common, Chelsea, St. John's Wood, Chalk Farm, Highbury Barn, Copenhagen House, Hornsey Wood House, Hackney Wick, and for the last six years at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, a place admirably adapted for so large an assemblage. In consequence of the unparalleled success which has attended the meetings held at the last-named place, the Society is now in a flourishing condition. Having passed through all the dangers which more than once imperilled its very existence, its now firm basis may be said to rest in a measure on the valued permission of Sir Richard Mayne for the wrestling to take place on Good Friday. After a full explanation was given of the nature and objects of the Society—combining charity with manly exercise—the worthy Chief Commissioner never hesitated a moment to sanction the meeting on the day named above, and at the same time gave instructions that as many men as

might be required for the purpose of keeping order would be placed at the service of the Society.

In the year 1845, at the suggestion of Mr. Margetson, the old practice of collecting the funds in subscriptions of two shillings and sixpence—that amount, as now, creating a member—was discontinued in favour of hiring the ground on Good Friday and taking the entrance money. The success of the alteration has been of late years assisted by the growing taste for athletic sports; the prizes offered for competition have been considerably increased in value, and the charitable institutions of the two counties have been proportionately benefited. Up to the present time the donations handed to these benevolent associations have reached the amount of four hundred guineas. Great credit is due to Mr. Margetson for the persevering manner in which he has stuck to the Society through all its vicissitudes during a period of over forty years. But for his wise counsels, the dangers which so frequently menaced the well-being of the Institution might have proved fatal. A wrestler himself in his younger days—and one of the very best at his weight (11 stone)—before he was twenty years of age he had thirty belts hanging up in his father's house in Westmoreland. Mr. Margetson had the honour of winning a belt at the Ferry sports at Windermere, when Professor Wilson was present