

THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PAPER No.: 35

PREPARED BY: Grahame H. Cumming

DATE: 10 April 1997

EDGAR LAURENCE (DUNC) GRAY
(1906 - 1996)

The first Australian to win an Olympic gold medal in cycling, Edgar L. Gray was born at Kingsdale, near Goulburn on 17 July 1906. 1.

He was one of a family of four boys and two girls who lived 5 km from the Bourke Street primary school, so Edgar had to learn to ride a push-bike.

When he was three, he started riding a tricycle around his mother's family fruit orchard but the bike his father purchased from Bennett and Wood in Goulburn for Edgar's seventh birthday was to be the start of his great career.

Young Edgar liked sport but he was not particularly outstanding at athletics, football and swimming but he loved riding his bicycle and, by the time he was 16, he and his older brother, Ellis, were competing with the Goulburn Amateur Cycling Club.

As Ellis and Edgar were both 'E. Gray', Edgar became 'Dunc' to distinguish him on programmes from his brother Ellis. 2.

In 1925, Dunc Gray competed in his first state championship but he was 'boxed in' by other, more experienced riders and he lost the one-mile race. In the five-mile race, he sped to the front with two laps to go and stayed there.

His win was the first of the 25 state and 20 national titles he accumulated between 1925 and 1943.

His first national title was the one mile race in 1928, and as a result of his performance in these championships, he was selected to represent Australia at the 1928 Olympic Games held in Amsterdam. 3.

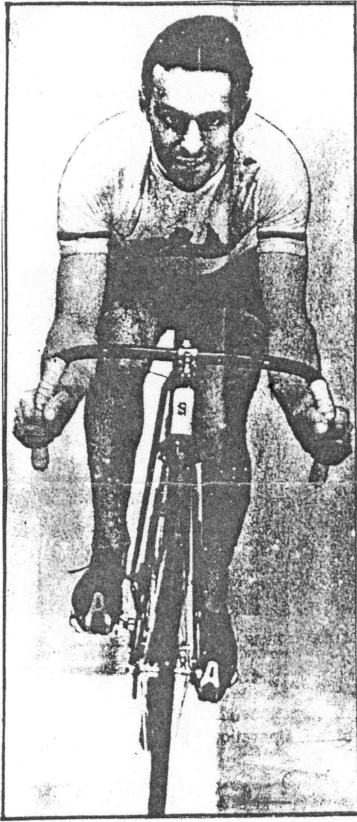
The Goulburn Club funded the 360 pounds needed for Gray to compete.

Dunc had earlier told his mother of his ambition to ride in the Olympic Games. She had replied:

"Son, you've got as much chance of going to the Olympics as what man of flying to the moon !"

Years later, Dunc said:

"Poor old Mum, she was wrong on both counts."



EDGAR 'DUNC' GRAY

At the Games only one competitor could enter each event and Dunc won the bronze medal in the 1000 metres time trial. 4.

He had no coach and he simply learned from those who he considered to be better riders.

Gray continued to win Australian Championship titles and he was chosen for the 1932 Olympic Games at Los Angeles.

He was the sole Australian cycling competitor.

Dunc Gray realised his ambition when he became the first Australian to win an Olympic Gold Cycling Medal in the 1000 metres time trial.

He won the Gold Medal for the 1000 metres time trial at the London British Empire Games in 1934.

Dunc competed at the 1936 Berlin Olympics but he was eliminated in the quarter finals of the 1000 metres sprint.

Back in form, he won the 1000 metres sprint Gold Medal at the Sydney British Empire Games in 1938.

The race was held at Henson Park and it was his last representative appearance.

It was an intensely proud Dunc Gray who captained the Australian team and carried the flag.

He continued to compete in Australian championships and he won the sprint title in 1939.

He held two world records:

1932 1000 metres Time Trial - 1 min. 13.0 sec.

1937 Quarter mile Standing Start - 28 sec.

In order to finance his racing career, he left his job as a carpenter and joiner to become a salesman and later a factory manager.

He was often compared with Bro. Hubert Opperman and was described as the 'Opperman of the Amateurs'.

Bro. Snowy Baker wrote: 5.

Just, as many years past, the name of Hubert Opperman and Australia has been a synonym for marathon cycling, so has Duncan (sic.) Gray stood for super sprinting in amateur cycling.

In each case, too, an overseas trip saw their reputations soar from national to international fame. "Oppy's" record - slashing victory in the last Paris - Brest - Paris race inscribed his name in the cycling book of fame. Also by the record route.

Yet another analogy - this truly great pair of world-beaters are also boosters for Australia. No; that is not the right term - sporting ambassadors is better. For Opperman and Gray are splendid types of citizens - men who, on and off their bicycles, can worthily represent a nation.

He is something of a paragon is this country rider. He does not drink; he does not smoke; he's a good churchman. He is well spoken. Things intellectual and communal have a deep interest for him, and he is very much a man's man.

In Duncan Gray, then, Australia has not only a world-breaking cyclist, but also an excellent personal representative. With him is another good "Australian" - a Speedwell bike. It shares in Gray's triumph.

As Gray leaves the stage, *The Referee* voices the all-Australian thought that he leaves only to return after greater triumph.

In the meantime a steady job would not come amiss. Gray has had a fairly hard time.

Gray rode a 'Speedwell' and Opperman a 'Malvern Star' and, for generations of schoolboys the rivalry between the two was only replaced by 'Commodore' versus 'Falcon'.

Gray was a true athlete and Professor Cotton of the University of Sydney, who pioneered research in exercise physiology in Australia, often used him as a 'guinea pig' for his experiments.

Gray received the Helms Award as the outstanding Australian athlete for 1932.

On 11 February 1941, Dunc married "my Grace" whom he had met in a Sydney bike shop, and they had four children. 6.



EDGAR 'DUNC' GRAY

After Dunc's retirement from fibreglass manufacturing, he and Grace moved to Kiama where he died on 30 August 1996 survived by Grace, his four children and six grandchildren.

He was a great Australian.

Bro. Edgar Laurence (Dunc) Gray was initiated into Freemasonry on 13 April 1932 in Lodge Duke of Edinburgh No.76, United Grand Lodge of New South Wales, meeting at Goulburn.

NOTES

1. Reet and Max Howell, *Aussie Gold*, Brooks Waterloo, Victoria, 1988, p. 56.
2. *Loc. cit.*
3. Peter Fitzsimmons, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 June 1996, p. 32.
4. Darren Chester, *Mosaic*, Retailers Digest Pty. Ltd., Bundall, Qld., Vol 2, 1995 p.3.
5. Reet and Max Howell, *op. cit.*, p.57.
6. Peter Fitzsimmons, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 August 1996, p. 10.