



Mark Weston

(30th March 1905 – 29th January 1978)

was born at Oreston near Plymouth and assigned female at birth. The young Weston proved a talented athlete, winning national titles at discus, javelin and shot put, and representing Britain at the Olympic Games.

Weston, however, suspected that something was different. As he had grown older his voice had deepened and he had started to need to shave.

Much later, having become a national celebrity, he told some of the story to the Reading Eagle (28th May 1936): “I always imagined I was a girl until 1928. Then, competing in the world championships at Prague Czechoslovakia, I began to realize that I was not normal and had no right to compete as a woman. But I only had the courage to see a doctor this year, when a London specialist said I ought to undergo two operations.”

The specialist in question was Lennox Broster, a consultant at Charing Cross Hospital who had made a career of treating intersex patients. Several stories of “sex changes” made the newspapers in the 1930s and Broster is said to have assisted in at least 24. Broster also operated on some patients to help them maintain the gender they had been assigned at birth. The ability of the patient to conform to gender stereotypes (including heterosexuality) seems to have been important to Broster and his psychiatrist colleague, Clifford Allen, in deciding on what treatment to give. The reason for Weston’s decision to seek treatment became clear later in the year. On August 10th he married Alberta Bray. The pair had been best friends growing up, and that friendship had blossomed into romance.

1936 was also the year of the notorious Berlin Olympics, at which Jesse Owens upstaged Adolf Hitler’s attempt to demonstrate Aryan superiority. Less well known are the stories of Dora Ratjen who, competed for Germany in the women’s high jump, and the sprint rivals, Stella Walsh and Helen Stephens. After Stephens won the 100m, she was required to undergo a “gender test”, one of the first Olympic athletes ever to do so. She passed and kept her medal, but later both Walsh and Ratjen were found to have some intersex characteristics.

Weston, despite having given up competition, got dragged into the press coverage. He was asked whether he should give up the records he had won competing as a woman. He said that he had believed that he was a woman at the time, and had won in good faith, but was now willing to give up the records.

Mark Weston lived a long life, dying in a hospital in Plymouth in 1978. Less well known is his brother, Harry, who was also assigned female at birth and became a patient of Lennox Broster. With no childhood sweetheart for a companion, Harry fell into depression and took his own life in 1942.

Cheryl Morgan – Co-Chair, OutStories Bristol

Dr. Sonja Erikainen – University of Edinburgh (June 2020)

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