

INCH 101: Part 1 An Introduction of the basics.
by Joe Roark

Thomas Inch: born December 27, 1881 (and thanks to the research of David Horne we now know Inch passed away December 12, 1963.)

Thomas Inch was born in Scarborough, England, and became Britain's Strongest Youth, then Britain's Strongest Man (BSM). He is now known for what is called the Thomas Inch dumbbell. It weighs about 172 pounds and nine ounces, but is usually referred to as the '172'. Its very thick 2.38" diameter handle is the major preventive factor in thwarting would-be lifters of average length hands.

Inch claimed that in his lifetime he never encountered anyone who could lift the 172 from the floor to overhead using only one hand. Even further he claimed that no one could clear it off the floor. He said he had overheaded it literally 'hundred of times' sometimes lifting it twice in the same performance. Inch was well acquainted with virtually all of the strongmen in England, many of whom, he claimed had tried an unsuccessful hand at lifting his bell, and these men included some of the strongest men on the planet. Inch enjoyed explaining that 'none of them could stir it'. Is that true?

Once, in a very old magazine account he acknowledged that one man had cleared the floor with the 172, but thereafter never acknowledged that man's success again, and reverted to saying that no man had ever stirred it off the floor. There was another occasion when referring to the attempts of two men Inch said that neither got the bell 'very far off the floor' which to me means it did get off the floor, just not very high. And Inch mentioned on other occasions that a prize was given for best effort. What does that mean, if the bell did not leave the floor? Best grimace? Hey, I'm a winner!

He offered large sums of money to anyone who could overhead the bell with one hand. At one time the prize money equalled SIX YEARS of Edward Aston's earnings. Aston had worked for Inch and grew quite accustomed to trying to lift the 172, which he bewilderingly referred to as weighing 180, and he acknowledged that he could not lift it. Inch asserted that he also offered (depending on who was in the audience) certain sums for each inch that the 172 was lifted off the floor. Still, no money was ever paid out. When David Prowse (yes, of Star Wars fame) owned the 172, he used to take it to where strong men were known to be (dockworkers etc.) and offer a bottle of whiskey (sponsored by the whiskey company) to any man who could simply lift the 172 off the floor and on to an adjacent telephone book! No one could and the whiskey company knew that failure meant no publicity. So that idea was 'shot'. (sorry)

Even in more recent times no one has taken the bell one handed over the head 'clean'- that is, without the bell touching the body on the upward movement. Bill Kazmeier's lift appears to have been done in the Continental style which allows for body touching on the upward movement to the shoulder.

In the next few months, as calendar dates relevant to Inch's bell roll around, I will examine some of the situations which Inch and others have claimed about the 172- and its triplets.

There were four identical bells, which even Inch acknowledged could not be distinguished except by his inner circle of workers- which must NOT have included Aston, who once shouted from the stage when about to make an attempt on the bell 'Which bell is it!' To which Inch answered, "It's the one I'm lifting tonight".

The bells weighed 75, 140, 153, and 172 pounds. Other weights have been attributed to them, but after studying the matter for almost a year, and looking through hundreds of old accounts,

these are the figures that I believe are accurate. It does not help that all but the 172 have disappeared. The 172 is now in America, having been purchased by a collector. But the 75, the 140 and the 153 have vanished, and one can only hope that they were not among the items carried away from the Inch house after being thrown in the dumpster. David Webster tells the story of how he went by to pay his respects to Mrs. Inch, but she had moved. The neighbor explained to David that old exercise devices and large framed photos and posters of strongmen had been discarded and hauled off. Were the 75 and the 140 bells tossed? The 153 probably was not because we can trace its history away from Inch. Were these other treasures trashed? Was this situation similar to when Vic Boff stopped by to see the widow of an old time strongman hoping to buy some of his weights, only to be told that they had been thrown out? Until someone who may possess these items comes along, we may never know.

An aside: As the weeks unfold, I will limit treatment to the days relevant to our calendar-line history, so it may be that some parts of the story will be told out of order and that certain answers you would like immediately will be supplied later. In that regard, if something is supplied here that you think is incorrect please let me know via the comment button. I am NOT interested in opinion, just facts. There would be no need to study history (of any type) if all that mattered was opinion. At the risk of being misunderstood, I fancy that I have looked into the Inch history as much as, and probably more than, anyone else, and have discovered some glaring inconsistencies among the reports and claims. So if you have read something that disagrees with what I present, please anticipate that I may have also read it (900 copies of Health & Strength) and thousands of other magazines, and that I have settled on an answer that was not found in the text you present as rebuttal. On the other hand, perhaps in a magazine or book that I have not seen sleeps the answer. But there are so many discrepancies among the texts that I have read that it would require several very enlightening accounts to filter fiction from fact by opposing accounts.

Next week we will examine the occasion on which Inch left the 172 at Hengler's Circus (where the London Palladium now stands) for the wrestler Ivan Padoubny to try. Apollon was also there. Why did he not attempt the 172, which for him would have quite literally been a plaything? As an example of what the previous paragraph refers to, how long did Inch leave the 172 at Hengler's? Was it one day, one week, or two weeks? Depends on which account you choose. All those times were claimed, and in case you are thinking there was more than one occasion on which he left the bell at Hengler's, then stay tuned.

Facts to ponder: The original Inch 172 has a handle width of 4", and it was originally thought that this narrow hand spacing would prevent a wide-handed man from a fair try. This does not seem to have proven true. Mark Henry, a giant pro wrestler with the WWF had no problem fitting his hand around the bell and pulling it about chest high. The replica bell also has a handle 4" wide, but whereas the original handle is 7.5" circumference, the replica is 7.75" circumference. The relative diameters would be: original 2.38" and replica 2.47". For comparison, a standard soda can is 8.25" in circumference.

Inch claimed to have small hands. But David Webster who knew Inch does not remember Tom's hands as being smallish. There were periods in his life when Inch himself could not lift the 172- his own writing proves this, though that was not his intent of those writings.

One of the main problems in tracing the history of Inch and his bells is that because there is so much discrepancy among his various accounts, the student must choose which version to accept based on other sources, and try to blend fact from the whole picture.

It is an amazing maze as you will see.

INCH 101: Part 2 Hengler's Circus/Apollon/Padoubny and the 172 Challenge Dumbbell.

CONFUSION: So much conflicting information has been written about Thomas Inch and his 172 lb challenge dumbbell that the amount of inconsistency is almost baffling. For the same incident, details vary in important nuances. Those readers aware of only one or two accounts may have found consistency among details, but those who have read accounts spanning decades will find it harder to untangle than Crystal Gayle's hair in a wind storm.

Thomas Inch retold the story of his 172 in the American magazine *Strength & Health* in May 1939: After he left the bell at Hengler's Circus in London, "I did not go near the place for two weeks when I visited again with my friend Arthur Saxon, whose idea it was, and we asked who wanted the L200." It so happens that the wrestling championships going on at the time at Hengler's also offered a first place prize of L200. Inch continues his story indicating that some of the other wrestlers had also tried, "With one accord they all said no one could lift the d--d thing and invited me to try, which I did, carrying the bell out of the arena to a waiting hansom cab outside." [no overhead lift, and this would have been the perfect time to demonstrate to the wrestling community that even though none of them could get the bell off the floor, Inch could put it over his head. That did not happen.]

As an example of misinformation, look at Norman Miller's account of this same occasion when Thomas Inch left the 172 at Hengler's Circus, London, as recounted in *Strength & Health* magazine April 1936, starting on page 11.

Miller wrote that Inch "had a very neat little dumbbell of 250 pounds or so, with a handle so thick "that no one but Inch could lift it". Actually Inch had another bell which weighed 153. But that is not the bell that was left at Hengler's. So even if the 250 was a typo for 153, the wrong bell was being described.

Miller wrote that "With Hengler's Circus, the famous Continental show that was visiting London at the time, was Ivan Padoubny..." Hengler's Circus was not a travelling, visiting, circus, it was stationed in London. Years earlier other cities also had housed a Hengler's Circus branch. Ivan Padoubny was not 'with Hengler's'- he was competing in the Titan's Tournament wrestling championship that was taking place at the Hengler's permanent location.

Miller wrote that Inch left the dumbbell, implying a 250 pound dumbbell, with Padoubny for Ivan to try to lift. But Inch left the 172 pound bell.

Miller wrote that Inch and Arthur Saxon returned to Hengler's later that same day to see how Ivan had handled the bell. Ivan had not moved the bell off the floor, so Miller writes that Inch picked it up with one hand and walked away. "Needless to say Ivan was a bit surprised and indeed so was Saxon." Really? Why was Saxon surprised? According to Inch, Arthur had seen Inch lift the bell many times. Further, according to Inch, Arthur himself had tried for years but could never lift the bell. Inch walked to a waiting vehicle, so however far this farmer's walk with the 172 was to that vehicle, it must have been an impressive feat. If it happened.

One more factor: We know that Inch presented his 172 to a London audience for the first time on April 20, 1907, which fits the scenario. This was the day that Inch defeated Caswell in lifting. Perhaps Inch introduced the 172 elsewhere- though I can find no reference to that happening- but we know that April 20, 1907 was the first time the bell was shown to the public in London. And one other important point about which almost no one with any lifting knowledge or experience will argue (hopefully): Any lifter can clean much more on a standard diameter bar than on a 2.38" diameter bar. One of the lifts contested was a Two Hands Clean and Bent Press. Inch managed 235 pounds, and failed with 271. Now, on the ONE HAND CLEAN and bent press, Inch managed 203.5 pounds. As anyone with any experience at thick handled lifting will tell you, if you can clean

only 203.5 on a standard (1") bar, there is no way you can clean 172 pounds on a 2.38" bar. (assuming you have average sized hands; and Inch claimed smaller than average). Probably no way you can clean 140 pounds on a 2.38" bar. So if Inch lifted the 172 on this occasion, it was a one hand deadlift, not a clean, and the contemporary accounts say nothing about a clean, or an overheading of the bell, just that he 'lifted' it. Inch claimed to have invented the one hand deadlift at about the time World War I began, so perhaps that's why the thick handled bells were described only as being 'lifted'. Notice please, not 'lifted overhead'. The bell was 'picked up' and carried at Hengler's.

APOLLON/PADOUBNY: Thomas Inch wrote in Health & Strength magazine in the January 28, 1922 issue about Apollon: "When I met him he was past his best..." So when would that have been? Apollon was born January 21, 1862 and David Willoughby, the noted iron historian asserts that Apollon was at his best from 1889 to 1892. Terry Todd, another noted historian offers 1889 to 1897. So, it's fair to say that anytime after 1897 would place Apollon 'past his best'. So let's jump ahead 11 more senior years...

In 1908 three dates become important: February 10, 12, and 18. At that time there was a wrestling championship taking place at Hengler's and both Padoubny and Apollon were there. On Monday the tenth, they wrestled each other to no decision. On Wednesday the twelfth Padoubny defeated Apollon, or so the judges called it, but Apollon and many in the audience raised very loud objections, and Apollon withdrew from the tournament. So it was decided that on the following Tuesday, February the 18th that, separate from the tournament, a re-match between Padoubny and Apollon would take place. Again 36 year-old Padoubny defeated 46 year-old Apollon at the Titans' Tournament. Was Apollon 'past his best'?

So near as I can determine, the 172 was not manufactured until 1906 (contrary to popular understanding), so sometime between April 20, 1907 and December 26, 1910 was the Padoubny incident. I have been unable to ascertain whether Hengler's Circus was remodeled and then renamed the London Palladium, or whether Hengler's was razed then replaced by the Palladium. In either case, we must backdate from December 26, 1910 (The opening day as the London Palladium) to allow time for either remodelling or for new construction, so it may be that the window for the Padoubny incident was from after April 20, 1907 to, say, the end of 1909.

So this was the occasion when Inch left the 172 for Padoubny to try. February 1908, when Padoubny tried to lift the bell. Why didn't Apollon try- his 9" long hands and massive strength would have toyed with the bell- as he had toyed with heavier, thick bells?

SPORTING NEWS: SPORTING CHANCE: Some of the information above was from the SPORTING NEWS, a British publication, and a friend sent to me the accounts of the times, which I am reading about 94 years after Thomas Inch probably read those same accounts. It is my belief that Inch read the report, or otherwise became informed of the fact that Apollon had dropped out of the tournament after Wednesday's loss, (and would therefore not be on hand at Hengler's). So I am guessing that Inch took the bell to Hengler's probably Feb 13th or 14th and either left it for the day, or a week as one account says, or for two weeks as another account says. I suspect one day because we know that Apollon returned about a week later and nothing stimulated his strength energy like being told he could not lift something- plus it would have been a way to show superiority over Padoubny. Also Arthur Saxon was performing his strongman show at Hengler's and his show was reviewed on February 22 and mentioned as 'the other night' The wrestling did not begin until 10pm, so Saxon's show was earlier in the evening as part of the program called The Grand Circus Programme. One suspects that Inch would have gone to see Saxon's performance at least once, but how would that fit into the scenario Inch claims about not going near Hengler's for two weeks?

Another possibility is that Inch took the bell to Hengler's after the match on the 18th, if Apollon was to no longer be on hand for the remainder of the wrestling tournament. This would allow for

the one week or two week period for the bell to be left. On March 13 Saxon was in Brussels, and I do not know how long he had been there. So, the bell had to be retrieved by Inch and Saxon before then. But we can confidently place this event between Feb 13 and March 13, 1908, for the reasons given above. And my conclusion is probably Feb 13 or 14, for one day only.

Other world class wrestler's were at Hengler's for the tournament, and though Inch does not mention them by name, one wonders if any of them tried to lift the bell. Names such as Giovanni, Hansen, Woldt, Steadman, de la Calmette, Hints, Schoot, Cameron, and Mahmoud were there for that tournament according to SPORTING NEWS. Perhaps it is to these men he refers in his May 1939 Strength & Health article.

If the Inch 172 was not manufactured until, so near as I can determine, about 1906. Inch had previously mastered a regular 100 pound dumbbell with normal size handle and ordered another to weigh about 50 lbs more. [again another account says that he mastered a regular dumbbell that weighed 140 lbs before he ordered a 'much heavier bell'. But 153 is hardly much heavier than 140 in strongman terms, so he mastered the 100. This is supported by his other abilities in other lifting accounts at the time. Plus, had he mastered the 140 and ordered a bell about 50 lbs heavier, we would have a 190, which never existed.]

JUGGLING BELLS: Many have assumed this was the bell that ended up weighing 153, but in fact it was the 140 pound bell. We know that Inch's inaugural thick handled bell led to the famous unliftable (172) being manufactured later. And since it took Inch 5 years to master the 140 bell, that takes us to 1902 when according to Inch who then weighed only 140 lbs, he could put the 140 lb thick handled bell overhead with one hand. Really? In 1902 when he won Britain's Strongest Youth he could one hand clean and bent press 130 pounds- so are we to believe that he could clean the heavier thick handled 140 at that time? Again, if he lifted the 140, it was what we would now term to be a one hand deadlift.

Also Inch said in MUSCLEMAN magazine in August 1953 that as he grew older and heavier he had other bells (plural) made which were thick handled. If the 153 and the 172 followed the 140, we have the plural explained. But if the 153 was the first bell then what other bell over 153 was there that we don't know about?

W.A. Pullum, writing in Health & Strength magazine on July 10, 1952 recounts how the first bell was made, which keep in mind, Inch said was a 'mistake' with the thick handle. Pullum writes: "He commissioned a local foundry to cast him a solid thick-handled dumbbell, giving his own specifications as to size and weight." Inch ordered a thick handled bell and gave specs! It was no accident. Unable to lift the heavy bell at the time of its manufacture in 1897, Inch then suggested to the foundryman that the balls be made smaller, but was informed that was not an option. "He was then in turn advised to have the diameter of the grip reduced to get over the difficulty that way, but to this he was not agreeable, as it was EXACTLY the THICKNESS HE WANTED". [emphasis mine]

Contrast the above paragraph with what Inch had written in Strength & Health in May 1939: "So you will see I had some fun with my bell, made entirely by accident when I was a boy". Inch then adds regarding the design and specs of the bell, "The foreman at the iron factory worked things out for himself." Inch then misleadingly refers to this first thick-handled bell, "That was how the Inch challenge dumbbell came into being and it was very many years before I could lift the bell myself. I often thought it was going to prove impossible." In fact this was the first of his challenge bells but not the one that ultimately became famous as THE challenge bell. As a matter of fact when Inch began holding competitions circa 1929/1930 using this same 140 bell it was referred to as the COMPETITION bell, and because several men were able to bring it to the shoulder with two hands and then put it overhead with one hand for REPS, Inch adamantly insisted that this was NOT his famous challenge bell. His trickery had returned to haunt him.

A side point. When Inch referred to how long the 172 had been offered up for a challenge, the time span is too long. But certainly, if men failed with the 140 or the 153 then there was no chance for them to succeed with the 172, so his point, though misleading as to how long the 172 was offered, is valid in regard to the strength levels needed to lift it.

Pullum goes on to explain how Inch eventually overhauled that bell: "...he could raise the bell in one straight pick up to 'end on' rest at top of the thigh. From where, to take it to the shoulder was easy, to put it then overhead, easier still". So Inch used a Continental method, allowing the bell to rest on his thigh, after a deadlift to the knee probably, then kneeling down and shifting the bell higher on the thigh where leg thrust could help raise the bell upon standing. Remember that the British form of deadlifting in those days allowed for a bar rest above the knee, then a repositioning of the body. And please notice that Pullum does not say that Inch used only one hand for the Continental. Indeed, even Inch never claimed to lift his heavy, thick handled bells using only one hand until MUCH LATER, and a photo appearing in Health and Strength on December 21, 1929 page 725 is captioned: "Many readers wish to know how Inch gets his heavy dumbbells to the shoulder. This photograph reveals the secret- a weight-lifting position never before illustrated." The photo shows Inch using two hands to the shoulder in a Continental as his torso is leaning back. Why, by the way, if Inch had demonstrated lifting his heavy dumbbells all those years would readers not already be aware of his technique? And why has there NEVER been a photo of Inch with the 172? Circa 1913 Inch had claimed that 2,000 men had failed to lift the challenge (172) bell, and he used to claim that he lifted that bell twice nightly during performances. Would not the word have spread among lifting fans who had witnessed this and told their gym buddies? The fact is, as another researcher said to me, it is surprising how SELDOM Inch and his 172 are mentioned during the very times the bell was supposedly so famous. I also have noticed this. It was not until decades later, when other men began to deadlift the 172, that Inch introduced the idea that he had always done the lift with one hand all the way to overhead.

[In fact, the number of strongmen in those days was not 2,000. Certainly it would be expected that 2,000 'average people' would fail to lift such a heavy object. Indeed, once word spread that men such as Padoubny failed to lift the bell off the floor, what sense would it have made for the average man to even try, except for the conversational "Man, I don't see how ANYONE can lift that bell" aspect?]

Inch knew that even if Padoubny could defeat the aging Apollon in wrestling he most certainly could not outlift him, so in my opinion, Inch carefully selected the window of time to offer Padoubny a chance at the 172. All of this depends on whether Padoubny appeared in a wrestling tournament at Hengler's Circus at some other time than in the 1907 to 1909 period, a situation I have not been able to determine. But also required is Saxon's presence at the time Padoubny was at Hengler's. Right after this incident Saxon turned age 30 (April 28, 1908). But before that the bridge mishap with Saxon in Brussels had happened on March 13, 1908. Then in 1909 Saxon began his first tour of performances in the USA, and so far as I have been able to determine was not in England coincidentally with Padoubny after that. So, it appears to me that the Titan's Tournament in February 1908 was the correct time to place this incident where all factors fit.

INCH 101: Part 3 The 'Famous' Inch Challenge Dumbbell; the 172 pound bell:

In the February 22, 1913 issue of Health & Strength magazine in England, the Thomas Inch Challenge Dumbbell is referred to as famous. The bell, if my figures are correct, had been in existence for only seven years by that time. The author of the following is not credited from that issue:

"This dumb-bell has become famous as the dumb-bell which no man can lift (except, of course, its owner, Thomas Inch). It has been referred to as the 'lucky' dumb-bell. The M.C. at a recent display was asked to explain how it came to be called 'lucky,' and he promptly replied, 'Well, you'll be lucky if you lift it.'"

Now notice that the bell may be soon retired from public opportunity: [it was not apparently retired until 1931, then brought out of retirement. And maybe used for WW II factory demonstrations. But by April 8, 1933, H&S was reporting that 'thousands' of men had tried and failed to lift the 172]. But the possible 1913 retirement was announced:

"We hear that it will be in evidence at the weight-lifting meeting at the London Weightlifting Club on Friday, Feb. 28. It is just possible that this will be its last appearance in public and the last occasion on which Mr. Inch will make his different offers to the man who should be fortunate enough to lift it."

The last statement was a reference to the cash that Inch had offered to those who could elevate the bell even inches off the floor. The text continues, and keep in mind the level of lifters who have failed with it, and who is NOT mentioned as having failed with it, among the 2,000 or so men who have "...tried and failed, including among the better known- i.e., the ones with titles- Edward Aston, Maurice Deriaz, W. Harwood, Strongfort (from Denmark, not America), W. Caswell, S. Croft, etc. etc."

Was Saxon among the etc. etc.? If one wished to show the utter challenge this bell was to lift, then why not list Saxon among 'those with titles'? Inch does not mention in print (that I have located) any mention of Saxon failing with the bell until after Saxon passed away. Was there anyone more of a scientific lifter than Saxon? Why was Inch worried about the general herd of lifters if Saxon failed with the 172? Indeed in another place Inch uses Saxon as his brute barometer and says that because Saxon failed with the 172, Inch felt confident that he was safe in offering cash to lesser men.

In regard to the men listed however: "When the above made their attempts, Mr. Inch's offer was L50 (fifty pounds British money) and L1000(sic) but now that such progress has been made in the science of lifting..." the prizes were reduced to "the man who lifts it in the same way that Mr. Inch does..." or to an amateur "lifting it to his knees". The reward was lowered to L25 for a pro and a similar value clock for an amateur.

A man named C. Maw was mentioned who "It seems for several years [so how long?] Maw has been giving an exhibition with a similar dumb-bell to Mr. Inch's, and for some months has specialized on the lift, and he backs his confidence by traveling a journey of 500 miles (total) to make the attempt." Special mention was made to include Edward Aston in the challenge. (Again, was it expected that some men might be able to elevate the bell a few inches but that Saxon could never get it off the floor? This is insulting to anyone who knows lifting history. Especially in view of the assertion by Inch that Arthur tried for fifteen YEARS and never succeeded, even though Inch himself claims to have mastered it in about six to ten years. If you believe that is possible, then there really is no point in you reading any more of what follows. David Willoughby, strength historian considered it 'unthinkable' that Saxon take a back seat to Inch in grip strength.)

INCH'S TRICK LIFT; ASTON'S COUNTER-CHALLENGE: Aston replied in the March 1, 1913 issue of H&S: "Re: Inch's dumb-bell challenge, I thought I had made it clear that I did not want challenges directed at me for exhibition TRICKS [my emphasis], but Inch is so persistent in this direction that I will accept his L25 offer, and now do so conditionally on his making an attempt to lift a dumb-bell that I shall bring with me." Remember that Aston was in Inch's employ for some time and that Aston had frequent occasion to try all of Inch's four bells, and never could master the 172, so why did he feel confident that Inch would fail one-handed with a dumbbell that he (Aston) provided? This was to be a plate loaded dumbbell, with standard bar.

Aston continues: "I will lift my dumb-bell with one hand and lower it with one, and will leave it lying there for Inch to follow suit, and shall be glad if he will leave his in a like manner for me to lift." One of the tricks of oldtime strongmen was to lift a lighter, hollow, weight and carry it off stage into the wings, then come back on stage with an identical, but solid weight, and then make a challenge to the audience to lift what they [thought they] had just seen the strongman lift. [This practice began, at least in France with a man named Wolff who billed himself as 'The Rock of Luxembourg' and who Prof. Desbonnet refers to as '...the first to use phony weights in France.' Some of Wolff's weights were actually half their claimed poundage.

Two important points in Aston's challenge, in which of course, he knew he would fail with the Inch 172. He was confident that Inch would also fail with the dumbbell that he planned to bring. Why? For one thing Aston was better at the one hand clean than Inch, and laid this stipulation as part of his own challenge: one hand up, one hand down, leave it sitting there, no bell switching. Aston made Inch an offer of L50- twice what Inch was offering for success with his bell! Aston was not a fool, and given his years of acquaintance with Inch and the bells, must have felt his money was very safe because of either Inch's weakness, or the stipulation that Inch's bell remain in sight on stage.

Does this not appear to imply that Inch was using two hands to get his bell to the chest? Or that if he were using one hand for the clean then Aston suspected Inch was switching to one of the lighter bells?

Now regarding Feb 28, 1913, H&S covered the event in the March 8th issue: And I admit that this puzzles me because of missing details. Was it two hands? Which lift? The text: Inch "lifted his famous dumbbell without the slightest difficulty. E.Aston, W. Watson, A.C. Maw, and several amateurs, amongst them an Indian gentleman, all tried to lift the dumbbell, but none were (sic) successful." That was on page 260. Six pages later Aston relates how Inch claims that he was lifting injured, but still tries to break records. Aston sees this as a no-win situation for himself. If he wins he has defeated an injured man. If he loses 'a cripple will have defeated me'. Aston's strength level as of March 13, 1913 was a one hand clean of 250.5 lbs! And in the November 15, 1913 issue of H&S the published list of Official British Weightlifting Records gives two to Inch (both overhead movements) and a dozen to Aston. Inch lifted it 'without the slightest difficulty'? Which lift? What happened to Aston's dumbbell challenge to Inch? Too many missing details. And my collection lacks many of the issues of H&S from this time period. (can anyone fill in the gaps here?)

In the January 17, 1914 issue Aston writes a letter to the editor to demonstrate the extreme measures Inch will take to be recognized as the champion:

"Sir, Lately several references have been made with regard to Inch's lift of 304-1/2 lb, all of which refer to it as a single-handed lift, and it's being described as such is likely to cause confusion with my own single-handed lift of 300-1/2 lb. Inch's single-handed lift stands at 245-3/4 lb.

"His 304-1/2 lb. lift was done by taking the weight with two hands to the shoulder and then bent pressing it overhead. Only those weights lifted all the way with one hand can justly be described

as single-handed lifts. My 300-1/2 lb. was a genuine single-handed lift, inasmuch as it was lifted all the way with one hand.- Yours faithfully, E. Aston."

In a monumental example of doublespeak to H&S, the referee of Inch's lift, Mr. Croft 'has described it to us as a single-handed bent press from the shoulder two hands being employed to raise it to the shoulder. It was a single-handed overhead bent press." Anybody ever heard of a double-handed overhead bent press"? THAT would take flexibility!

The point of all this is to show that Inch would stoop so far as to re-name lifts so he could reclaim records in that lift, even though he violated the rules and was not in fact performing the lift for which he seeks the record! Sorta like deadlifting to gain the bench press record...Is it such a surprise that someone who would misrepresent lifts in this way, would also misrepresent which of his four bells he was lifting?

David Prowse wrote to me when I was publishing MuscleSearch, The Roark Report: His letter dated April 17, 1989 from which this excerpt: "...and to be perfectly honest, I am very skeptical as to whether Inch ever lifted the dumbbell successfully himself. I say this because Edward Aston, who worked for him, told me when Inch was challenged to lift the dumbbell he ALWAYS [emphasis mine] substituted one of the lighter ones, as they all looked similar."

I am missing most of the issues of H&S from 1914 to 1920, so ignorance is all that I can offer from that period. In 1920, however, Inch tried to make a comeback at age 38. Then in 1921 in the November 26th issue of H&S Inch wrote about some of the strongmen he had known. He mentions that John Grun Marx never attempted to lift the 172, but that Arthur Saxon, who coincidentally had died three months before this was penned by Inch: "But, on the other hand, Saxon was even stronger than Marx, and had a huge hand and was also used to lifting thick bars; and, as he could do nothing with my dumb-bell, I fail to see where Marx's chance came in."

Marx's chance came in because he had deadlifted the 226 lb Desbonnet dumbbell which had a handle of 2.36" instead of the 2.38" of Inch's 172 bell. The diameter is not a factor when 54 pounds less is being lifted on a bar only .02" thicker! And remember Inch did not list Saxon among those who failed with the 172 when Saxon was living! Marx had died in 1912. Inch also claimed that the other Saxon brothers, Hermann and Kurt repeatedly failed with the bell. Inch added that the Saxons had a bell similar to his made, and took it on tour offering money to anyone able to lift it. The Saxons mastered their own bell but when they returned to try Inch's 172 after the tour, they all again failed. Isn't this wonderful fiction! Arthur's hand length at 9" would have negated the thick handle, and his hand width, we now know, was not a hindrance. In my view, Saxon would have handled the 172 with success.

Marx's hands were 8.5" long. Other feats ascribed to Marx show that he would have lifted the Inch 172 if given a chance; to wit:

Marx one hand snatched 154.25 lbs on a bar whose diameter was 2.75". (much thicker than a modern 12 ounce can of soda or beer) And Marx himself offered for challenge a couple of dumbbells, whose weights were 132 and 143 lbs, each bell having a handle diameter of 2.75" which was wrapped in metal foil to make it even more slippery. It is generally conceded that Marx was second only to Apollon in all round hand/grip strength. The 226 lb bell with 2.38" handle that Marx could deadlift with one hand, Apollon tried to snatch with one hand, but lost his grip as the bell was going overhead and the bell landed (not rolled) several feet behind him. Marx, and Apollon, whose hand length was nine inches, would have toyed with Inch's 172.

Regarding Marx, Inch wrote, "Personally, I don't think he could have lifted it, though I remember Pevier once told me that he would have swung it." The reference is to 'The Swing' lift, in which

one could always lift less than in the clean, so Tom Pevier meant that Marx would have had no difficulty in cleaning the 172.

For reference, here is a list of those who tried and never tried, to lift the 172:

Those who Inch claim failed:

Maurice Deriaz
Strongfort (Denmark)
Edward Aston
Harold Wood
Max Sick
Monte Saldo
Hindoo wrestler 6'6"
Padoubny
Wilfred Diamond
Hackenschmidt??
Sandow??
Saxon??

Those who never tried:

Apollon
Primo Carnera
Manger
John Grunn Marx
Leon See
Jim Pedley
Louis Cyr
Vansittart (Vansart)
Batta
Saxon (belongs in this list in my view)
Vandernocke

As any strength fan knows, the 'never tried' list contains the very names of the strength athletes MOST LIKELY to succeed with the 172! These were the grip masters of the day.

Inch's deliberate confusion regarding which bell was being lifted would return to haunt him as we shall see in future installments.

INCH 101: Part 4 Some Memories, Estimates, Guesses, Regarding Thomas Inch:

First a reference frame: Because Inch was born Dec 27, 1881, he turned age one on Dec 27, 1882. but for only five days of 1882, so it is more communicative (if no specific date is offered by history) to refer to 1882 as when he was (mostly) age one. So when Inch moved to London at age 21, then he moved there either the final five days of 1902, or more probably, he moved there in 1903, which is when I place him as moving from Scarborough to London.

Here is a list of the four dumbbells which appeared to be identical in size and shape but varied by more than 129% in weight: Inch referred to the 75 lb bell as weighing 'less than 80 lbs', then pins the weight down to 75 lbs. I have been unable to determine the date the 75 was made other than to know that it was before March 1907, because it was on hand when Maurice Deriaz visited Inch to try his hand at lifting the 172.

1897 acquires the 140 pound bell 1902/1903 manages to deadlift the 140 with one hand 1904 acquires the 153 pound bell 1906 acquires the 172 pound bell pre 1907 acquires the 75 pound bell oddly, there is a 'new' dumbbell mentioned circa 1930, and I can find no more details about it beyond that it was mentioned. Also there has been mention of a 130 lb bell, but I have found no reference to it. This new bell was puzzlingly referred to as a barbell.

Inch recounts in Health & Strength magazine in the Jan 21, 1922 issue about Deriaz: "One day I received a letter from his manager asking if Deriaz could try the thick- handled dumb-bell, with a view to winning my L100. I agreed at once. Deriaz had heard of it, and he could not see what would prevent his lifting it, especially WHEN I QUITE OPENLY DECLARED THE WEIGHT OF THE BELL" [emphasis mine] This is the only time I have found when Inch acknowledged that the weight, 172, was revealed to anyone. Are we expected to believe that Deriaz did not inform fellow lifters of the bell's weight?

Deriaz arrived from Paris and Inch tells two versions of the story.

First version: Inch found Deriaz likeable and extremely muscular in the thighs, upper arms and neck, but, "He could not stir the dumb-bell, and after many futile efforts asked that I should show him how." Now, please notice what Inch showed Deriaz: "I picked up the bell and actually carried it round the garden, a distance of perhaps 150 feet!" No overhead. A farmer's walk.

Second version from Strength & Health May 1939. Inch refers here to the one bell at 80 pounds but we learn elsewhere it weighed 75: "I had a practice bell a little lighter [yes 97 lbs lighter] for my left hand and picked up BOTH bells carrying them around a large garden one in each hand; ever after Maurice always gave me a very good word for grip strength." Allow me to guess something here. We know the bells looked identical, with the 75 being hollowed out, so Deriaz shows up at Inch's house, sees two identical dumbbells. If he had grabbed the 75, Inch would have said, 'That's my left hand practice bell, the other bell is the Challenge bell.' But, what if Deriaz grabbed the 172 first, and assumed the identical bells were of the same weight? Then after he failed and watched Inch pick up both bells to walk the garden perimeter, would not Deriaz have assumed that he was witnessing a farmer's walk with 354 lbs? Again, no overhead lift.

Both these versions refer to March 1907, the same month Inch signed papers to contest against W.P. Caswell for April 20, 1907, which as previously mentioned was the debut to a London audience for the 172. Inch no doubt felt confident after Deriaz failed to move the bell. So we know the 75 also existed at that time.

HELLO LONDON I CHALLENGE YOU: In the May 10, 1930 issue of H&S (23 years after the match) the story is told of that inaugural challenge following the Inch/Caswell match. "At the end of the match I introduced for the first time to a London audience the Inch challenge dumbbell." He

continues, "The bell did not look very heavy or difficult to lift, and when the audience, mainly composed of strong men (the venue for the match was the German Gymnasium) learned that L100 would be given to the first man to raise the bell overhead, there was a rush to the stage." Inch requires that the bell be lifted overhead to gain the L100, yet we have no evidence that Inch himself had ever overheaded it.

Then he leaves the bell for others to struggle against, and goes to his dressing room, where word reaches him that the audience is clamouring for him to lift it to show that it can be done. "...I went up to the bell and raised it with ease." Overhead, two hand clean, deadlift? He writes in such a way that closure demands the reader assume he lifted it as the audience had been required to. Did he, with ease? Why then in the match with Caswell was Inch able to hoist in the one hand clean only 203.5 lbs on a regular, much easier, one inch diameter bar? There are literally dozens of men who can one hand clean 203.5 lbs these days but do not have a prayer against the 172 thick handled bell.

To confuse the issue Inch reveals, "The best attempt was made by a tall man who gave me his name and received a prize." How does one judge the best effort unless the bell left the floor? Yet after this Inch always insisted that no one had ever been able to lift the bell off the floor, and that remained his story forever after, except for the other occasion mentioned in a previous Iron History where two men did not get it very far off the floor, which is to say, of course, that it left the floor. These two men were also removed from the story later. In SUPERMAN May 1941 he recalls "During a period of over forty years [so pre 1901?] it has never once been lifted an inch from off the ground, except my myself..."

TRICKS OF THE TRADE? In S&H May 1939 Inch tries to explain why the bell is so difficult to lift: "I can state right away that it is a combination of weight and a thick handle which, acting together present an almost insurmountable difficulty to the lifters, and many thousands have made the attempt." In some doublespeak he continues, "...and I developed 'will power' and the ability to put forth a terrific effort just for the moment, to an unusual degree." How then could he walk 150 feet around a garden with the 172, or stand addressing an audience while holding the bell in his hand, if the required strength level was so extreme that he could summon the will power only for a moment?

And where was the will power in 1931 when the Pathe Film Company shot footage of him lifting the bell? Again in S&H May 1939 he refers to the 1931 film, but says that the film 'is about to be released'- eight years after being made? In the film Inch is shown, he says, "...lifting the dumbbell and bringing up another [dumbbell] to make a two dumbbells anyhow of 276 lbs." So if the 172 was employed, the other bell would have to weigh 104, and therefore could not have been one of his other thick-handled challenge bells.

In SUPERMAN May 1941 he remembers: "Only a few years back, when well over fifty years of age, I went into training and lifted it for the Pathe Frere Film Company. I made a supreme effort, got it up after warning that operator that he must make no mistakes as I would never lift it a second time, then put it down with a bang. Judge my consternation when I heard him say, 'Sorry, Mr. Inch, I was terribly interested, I forgot to turn the handle.' I used some language, and it took me several hours before I could get it up again, in fact, I would never have done so if it had not been for Wally May's help with massage, at which he is a past master." Inch turned 50 in 1931, and by that time had lost his ability to summon instant strength. Also, notice that he had to go into training to be able to lift the bell, so how long a period had he been out of shape and unable to lift it? Yet some insist on believing that Inch was able to lift it eighteen years later at age 68 (circa 1949).

Perhaps he had forgotten his endorsement for Bovril in 1929 in which he stated that after becoming tired in trying for a successful lift he drank some hot Bovril and "...I felt a new lease of energy and achieved the record at the very first attempt."

DUMBELL COMPETITION WITH THE 140:

In H&S March 2, 1929 Inch wrote, "I am out for a title before I grow too old and would like to hear from heavy-weight lifters on the matter, also from your numerous readers. I want to make it definitely clear that I claim to life (sic) more One Hand Anyhow, Two Hands Anyhow, Two Dumb bells Anyhow, than any other British heavy-weight, and on this I base my claim to a title."

Apparently, around 1929 Inch also began holding competitions with his competition bell, not his challenge bell. The competition bell weighed 140 and contestants were required to clean the bell (two hands were permitted) and then repetition jerk it as many reps as they could using only one hand. Not surprisingly, several men were able to manage this imposing requirement. I miss some issues of H&S, and hopefully any of you who may own them can correct or amend the following which stands correct so far as I know from the sources I have examined.

In H&S October 8, 1932 Inch outlines plans for his tour involving a challenge with dumbbells (plural).

By 1933 Inch was holding a 'South vs North' competition regarding the 140, but there is a puzzling statement "Mr. Inch gave an excellent lecture, and also ran a competition on his new mystery barbell." New? Barbell? This is one of two references I have seen about a barbell challenge, and frankly, it must have been a mis-statement, because references following this all revert to dumbbell. SUPERMAN Nov 1933 was announced as the M.C. at an upcoming event and it was remarked that he may "...possibly run his barbell competition." It is un-nerving that writers for H&S and SUPERMAN would confuse a dumbbell with a barbell, but I fear that's what happened.

H&S June 3, 1933 regarding April 27, 1933 "Two special gold medals were won by Mr. Chowles of the Pembroke Club, and Mr. Spacey, of the Greenwich Club, for special feats with the dumb-bell in an endeavor to follow Mr. Inch's example of lifting the bell all the way single-handed OFF THE BELT" [emphasis mine]. This is in regard to a continental lifting belt which was used for a rest stop and repositioning during a lift. The larger the buckle, and this buckle must have been large to accommodate the 140 for a stopping place, the more dangerous the buckle could be as Inch discovered on another occasion during a barbell continental attempt when he inaccurately gauged where the bar was and brought it up under the bottom half of the buckle forcing the top half of the buckle to pivot into his heart area. This is why some lifters would place a thick cloth beneath the buckle- to lessen the 'sharp' impact which of course would work in reverse if you successfully continentaled to the top of the buckle thus forcing the bottom of the buckle to pivot into your lower abdomen.

So were two hands allowed to the buckle, from where one hand alone was required to bring the bell to the shoulder? This does not seem to be the case in some of these 140 competitions, but it does seem to be the situation in others. I simply don't have enough source material to make a call.

But Inch "wishes to impress upon everyone interested that it is not the famous Inch Challenge Dumb-bell (retired two years ago). It is a competition bell which can be lifted as Messes. Newman, Chowles, and Spacey have proved." This was a point that Inch again made not too much later in H&S Oct 21, 1933. Apparently the bells were so identical in appearance that onlookers and competitors at first assumed it was the Challenge bell. By March 31, 1934 H&S reported that W. Newman ...has lifted the Thomas Inch Dumbell-(single handed jerk from the shoulders) 7 times in succession. Not the TI Challenge bell but weighed about 140. On Mar 17, 1934 Fairbrother lifted it 6 reps.

The condition was that the competitor had to lift the bell in the same method as used by Inch, and because two hands to the shoulder were allowed, what can we conclude but that is how Inch overheaded the 140?

So at this point we are aware that two dumbbells existed, and that makes Willoughby's mention in SUPER ATHLETES bewildering regarding a 1956 incident at Aberdeen, "...it developed that there was a second Inch dumbbell. somewhat smaller than the 'number one' [i.e. the 172], and weighing 153 pounds. It also had a 2-1/2-inch handle. This dumbbell is said to be (or to have been, in 1956) owned by a Welsh amateur lifter named Tom Fenton, who was formerly a pupil of Inch's". So, wait! This is now the third, not second dumbbell, and how is it that those participating at this event were not aware of the events and competitions in the early 1930s? Baffling.

It was this 153 that John Gallagher and Jacobus Jacobs one hand deadlifted in 1957. On a separate occasion Hubert Thomas also managed that lift.

Tom Fairbrother died in 1973; he was an Inch pupil often featured at Inch's lectures and John Valentine, a friend of Fairbrother's who once attempted to lift one of the Inch bells says that Fairbrother "...was never very gossipy on the subject." It turns out that Valentine was trying to lift the 172 because he traced it to David Prowse.

So, there were four Inch dumbbells, which either experienced lifters did not see lined up together, or saw a different one on different occasions, and because of their similar sizes, thought it was the same bell. I suspect Inch never brought the 75 out very often because certainly it would have been conquered by many, and would have exposed the fact that it existed. If a lifter fails to move the 140 off the floor, then certainly it could weigh 240 and he wouldn't know the difference (except of course for size in this case).

INCH 101: Part 5 The BAWLA (British Amateur Weight-Lifters' Association) honored Inch on this date. The story is told in Health & Strength magazine Mar 9, 1912:

"We, the members of the British Amateur Weight-Lifters' Association, desire to place on record our sincere appreciation to the great services you have rendered to the cause of Physical Culture in general, and especially to Weight-lifting.

"Unflagging in your energy, enterprising in making use of every opportunity, resourceful in emergency, and undisturbed amid the vicissitudes which are a part of the work you have undertaken and carry through with such remarkable success, you have never spared yourself in promoting Physical Culture by such means as have, from time to time, presented themselves.

"In the early days, when Weight-lifting was looked upon with suspicion, if not with actual disapproval, you clearly saw its possibilities as an effective means to a worthy end, and took a foremost part in pioneering and popularising it.

"From its inception you have taken a deep and generous interest in the progress of our Association, its rapid growth and increasing influence being largely due to the public-spirited manner in which you have supported it.

"If our Association achieves its objects- that of raising Weight-lifting from a state of chaos into a place well-regulated and honourable conducted sports, its success will be due, in no small measure, to your continual help, your many acts of generosity, and the kindly and sportsmanlike spirit which has conceived them.

"We feel quite unable adequately to express our gratitude, and must content ourselves by saying that there is no Physical Culturist, and especially none who enters into its most strenuous form- that of Weight-lifting- but is under a heavy debt to you for your conspicuous services, which have been, at once, signal, sustained, and effective." It was signed by E. Stewart Smith, Harold B. Nunn, Charles Coster, W.D. Ford, Ben Gray, Frederick G. Horton, Walter House, Frederick Mogford, Thomas Edward Pevier, Charles F. Savory, E.J. Wollaston, A.B. Gunnel.

Roark References #1: Here is a list of the Kings of Strength series that David P. Willoughby ran in Ironman magazine from May 1957 thru June 1963. The # indicates the description that DPW gave to the chapter. You will notice that these numbers are not in chronological order.

May 1956 p 25 #1 From earliest times to present day
Jul 1956 p 24 #2 Middle ages to early modern
Sep 1956 p 36 #3 Thomas Topham
Nov 1956 p 34 #4 Early American strongmen
Jan 1957 p 28 #5 Early American strongmen 1873-1891
Mar 1957 p 30 #6 Donald Dinnie and other British strongmen
May 1957 p 28 #7 Early German & Austrian strongmen
Jul 1957 p 34 #7 Early Viennese strongmen
Nov 1957 p 32 #8 Early European strongmen, Italians 1840-1896
Jan 1958 p 28 #8 Italian & French strongmen
Mar 1958 p 28 #9 Apollon, emperor of athletes
May 1958 p 22 #9 When Apollon became angry
Jul 1958 p 32 #10 Continental strongmen of the 1890s
Sep 1958 p 28 #11 Sampson & Cyclops: coin breakers
Nov 1958 p 34 #11 The Rasso Trio
Jan 1959 p 26 #12 The coming of Eugen Sandow
Mar 1959 p 22 #12 How good was Sandow?
May 1959 p 30 #13 When WL was first organized in Germany & Austria 1891-1906

Jul 1959 p 23 #13 Early German & Austrian strongmen
Oct 1959 p 26 #14 Strongmen who tried to dethrone Sandow
Jan 1960 p 26 #14 Some early American strongmen
Feb 1960 p 24 #11 Famous American strongmen of the 1880s
Apr 1960 p 28 #11 Famous American strongmen of the 1880s
Dec 1960 p 24 #16 Louis Cyr, daddy of'em all
Jan 1961 p 30 #16 Louis Cyr, daddy of'em all
Mar 1961 p 26 #17 Some mighty French-Canadians
May 1961 p 30 #17 Famous old time French-Canadians
Jul 1961 p 28 #18 First weightlifting championships of 1898
Jan 1962 p 22 #18 George Hackenschmidt, the strong man
Mar 1962 p 30 #19 George Lurich, Russian world champion 1900
Jun 1962 p 26 #19 Famous early Russian strongmen
Oct 1962 p 26 #20 Famous old time French strongmen
Dec 1962 p 28 #20 Famous old time French strongmen
Feb 1963 p 26 #21 Champion Continental athletes of the early 1900s
Apr 1963 p 24 #21 Strongmen of the early 1900s
Jun 1963 p 32 #22 Early European professional strongmen
[chapter 15 was never published. DPW referred to the series as 'incomplete'. But the above list reflects every installment that Ironman presented]

INCH 101: Part 6

The March 15, 1941 issue of Health & Strength magazine mentions that Thomas Inch had taken his lifting demonstration/competition to a factory in Guildford on March 6th. Though more details are covered in the next week's issue of H&S we will treat the matter this week. "...and after his usual lecture and demonstration arranged a weight-lifting competition. Although one or two workers were exceptionally able performers, Inch, after 45 years active participation in the Iron Game showed them- in defeating them- that 'Strong men don't die young'. The consolation prize was won by Lgr. T. Wright."

Though no more details are given this was probably a version of his dumbbell competition with the 140 lb bell, because another reference H&S Aug 2, 1941 relates how he "...attends large factories..." and "...after 40 years weight lifting, still issues his challenge with valuable prizes to anyone who can lift his challenge dumb-bell". The text then reveals that as of that time no one had yet succeeded. Though this is called the challenge bell (172) it no doubt was the competition bell (140) or even the 130 as Inch was age 59 at this time, and had been unable to lift the 172 for quite a while.

Perhaps Inch could have used a dose of the humility that Edward Aston exhibited when he toured a factory and watched the workmen. Muscle Power Sep 1947 recounts the incident which has to do with what we now call 'specificity' of training. page 40, where Wilfred Diamond remembers: "Aston himself, after I had taken him through the Barrow Hematite Steel Works, and he had seen men pushing wheelbarrows full of iron ore up a steep incline to be dumped into the furnaces, decided that he had no right to the title - [World's Strongest Man] he could not do what he saw these laborers do." Certainly the laborers could not have matched Aston's lifts in the bent press or other specialized movements, but Aston had the humility to know that not everyone can be best at everything. So who wins depends on which movements are included in the contest.

Mar 17, 1934 On this date another of Inch's challenge competitions with the 140 lb bell was staged, though it had originally been scheduled for Mar 17th. Coming into this competition "So far, three men have lifted the competition bell off the ground, and their names are Mssrs: Fairbrother, Spacey, and Chowles." Apparently getting the 140 to the knee with one hand was still a starwalt accomplishment because Inch was promising "a Really splendid trophy for merely raising the dumb-bell to the knees single handed".

So after the regionals had been staged, the finals of the competition were held on March 17 and the competitors were the above named men plus W. Newman. The Chowles was a C. Chowles, which I suspect was a typo for G. Chowles. Newman had managed to single hand jerk the bell seven reps from the shoulder coming into this competition, but on this night, apparently, Fairbrother won with six reps. I lack some of the magazines which covered this event so cannot offer more information. Inch was stellar in his announcement that the bell was the 140, not his challenge bell. And, of course, two hands were allowed to bring the bell to the shoulder, before the single handed jerk attempt.

George Chowles was Ron Walker's up and coming competition as outlined in The Superman magazine June 1933. Chowles I think was born in 1912, and at the time of the competition weighed 210 lbs or so "...and his frame is modeled on such massive lines (he has an eight inch wrist) that it will probably take another stone [14 pounds] without overloading." Perhaps there was a C. Chowles, though, about whom I am ignorant.

INCH 101: Part 7

Thanks to the kindness of David Gentle I have more information about Aston/Inch/ and the challenge bell as offered in the British Amateur Weightlifter and Bodybuilder, the combined Sep/Oct 1950 issue:

On Feb 28, 1913 at the London Weightlifting Club Edward Aston was present, abounding with confidence that he would be able to lift the Inch bell. The way the text reads is that Aston was familiar with what he thought was the challenge bell and was certain he could and would lift it: "Aston made his effort amidst a silence which could be felt. His supporters expected him to lift it easily and were stupefied when it defied his mightiest efforts."

"Aston was distinctly and obviously annoyed, and made no secret of the fact. So much so that he declared THAT IT WAS NOT THE ORIGINAL CHALLENGE DUMB-BELL BUT ONE SPECIALLY PREPARED BY INCH [emphasis mine] for the particular occasion." Does Aston mean that this was a bell he had never seen during his employment with Inch?

The following puzzles me- which lift is meant? Deadlift? "It refused to leave the floor although, as soon as Inch made his onslaught, it seemed to obey his slightest behest."

Then, exactly one month later to the day:

On Friday March 28, 1913, "Mr. Thomas Inch will attempt to break the two hands and one hand anyhow heavyweight weightlifting records at the London Weightlifting Club, North St., just inside Kennington Rd. S.E.. Only a few reserved seats are left unbooked." And it was at this event that Aston had offered to bring his own plate loaded dumbbell for Inch to attempt, and when he adds the determining element perhaps in reference to what had happened on Feb 28, "I will lift my dumb-bell with one hand and lower it with one, and leave it lying there for Inch to follow suit, and shall be glad if he will leave his in a like manner for me to lift." Was this a reference to Feb 28 when Inch switched bells?

Mar 25, 1933 at the Holborn Empire in London for the annual H&S Display Day: Inch was the M.C. "Here comes Thomas Inch before the curtain. What a roar of applause greets him- Inch, holder of three world's records and one British record; Inch, whose famous challenge dumb-bell has never been lifted- though thousands of strong men have tried!".

Surely this does not refer to professional strongmen, but to men who have done some weight training, because there were not in fact thousands of men who were in the business of making an income by strength. It is similar to saying that thousands of men have tried to dunk a basketball with two hands but only a few have done it. Flawed sample. The text continues on page 387 of the Apr 8, 1933 issue of H&S where Inch is listing 40 best tips to increasing strength. In #37: "By studying psychology you will learn to get the last ounce out of yourself when in a tight corner or when records are on the tapis. This was the secret of my famous challenge dumb-bell- no one was ever able to concentrate sufficiently upon a certain set of muscles." If this logic is applied to the professional strongmen whom Inch claims to have failed to lift his 172 lb bell, then Arthur Saxon (according to Inch) must be included, which is a pitiful attempt to disparage one of the greatest mental and physical lifters the world has known. In addition it was but a year or two before this that Inch had experienced hours of delay trying to lift the bell for a second rep when that Pathe Frere film was being shot. Where was the concentrative power then?

INCH 101: Part 8 On Mar 30, 1903, Thomas Inch, age 21 was to make an appearance: "Mr. Thomas Inch, well known as the 'Scarborough Hercules', also as a writer and instructor of Physical Culture, has arranged to hold a reception at the Health & Strength Physical Culture School, 21, New Bridge Street, Ludgate Circus, on Monday and Tuesday, March 30th and 31st, from 1.30 to 3.30 and 5.30 to 9.30. Mr. Inch will give advice to visitors free of charge, and will also perform several feats of strength, etc., in addition to demonstrating the new Whitely-Hendrickson Exerciser. Readers are heartily invited."

On Mar 30, 1912, Thomas Inch set a new record for the Two Hands Anyhow by lifting 326.75 pounds at the London Weightlifting Club. He was age 30. He had failed twice to lift 312.75 lbs., but made that amount on the third attempt, then succeeded with the new record on his first try.

He remembered this occasion in his Strength & Health retrospect in May 1939, when after his challenge with the 172 lb bell, he left the stage and went to his dressing room and "...one of my supporters ran excitedly into the dressing room and called out, 'Mr. Inch, come quickly, the money's gone.'" Inch took this to mean that the L200 that he had left in the care of the M.C. had in fact been robbed from him, but in fact several men were waiting a turn at lifting the 172 but, "The cause of the excitement was a huge Hindoo wrestler standing over 6 ft. 6 inches in height with a large turban upon his head making him look gigantic. He was over 24 st weight [336 lbs] and had a chest well in excess of 60 inches. Neck and upper arm 22 inches, thigh over 30, and to cheer me up a little someone said he was the only man in the world who could swing a pair of Indian clubs weighing 100 lbs each."

Did Inch measure the man, or did someone else? Why be specific about arm size but mention thighs as 'over' 30"? So he must have been using hyperbole, as may have been the case with the mention of being able to swing a 100 pound Indian club in each hand! This is something of which I cannot conceive, but certainly, had the man been able to do it, the 172 would not have thwarted him. We now return to our story...

"I certainly thought my money was as good as lost, but to my relief the wrestler's strength did NOT lie in his hands and he made but a poor attempt and after that I felt somewhat secure, because he really was a surprisingly large man, the biggest I have ever seen in my life." Now, assuming Inch was using the proper tense of language, then as of 1939 he had never seen a larger man.

To fortify my point: It is not possible for a man to swing a 100 lb Indian club in EACH hand and of that man for it to be correctly said that his strength 'did NOT lie in his hands'! Frankly, I conclude that the 100 lb Indian Club claim was false, because keep in mind that Paul von Boeckman had an 80 lb Indian Club that required his two hands to shoulder, and he certainly could not swing it with one hand. Perhaps more circus barking by Inch to elevate the 172 beyond anyone (but his) capability?

INCH 101: part 9 At the German Gym in London on April 20, 1907 Thomas Inch lifted against William Penton Caswell, who was usually referred to as W.P. Caswell. Inch would win with total poundage of 1,211.5 lbs to Caswell's 829 lbs.

It was after this contest that the Inch Challenge dumbbell, the 172 pounder, was first presented to a London audience. By my figuring, Inch probably had the bell manufactured in 1906, and the hole drilled into the center of the handle sometime after that. Inch would have been age 25 at the time of this contest.

The question arises, why did Inch have a hole drilled in the center of the handle? He claimed that the hole was a vent hole in the casting process, which we now know is ludicrous. It is my opinion that Inch used some sort of hook for a twofold purpose: to stop the rotation of the solid bell, and to gain a better 'grip' on the bell. This was probably achieved by using a ring with an under-stud to fit into the hole, or a glove with an impregnated stud at the base of his middle finger. These are guesses on my part, but in looking for a reason why the hole would have been drilled, I seek an alternative to the idea that the removal of the amount of weight from the perhaps ¼" hole would have afforded Inch the ability to thereby lift the weight. The placement of the hole- dead center on the handle is critical for the use of a stud.

Writing in Health & Strength magazine in the May 24, 1930 issue, Inch recounts that April evening some 23 years earlier. He left the bell on stage with the promise of cash to anyone in the audience able to lift it. "The bell did not look very heavy or difficult to lift, and when the audience, mainly composed of strong men...learned that L100 would be given to the first man to raise the bell overhead, there was a rush to the stage." One supposes based on other texts that only one hand was allowed. Anyway, Inch left the bell on stage and went to his dressing room, only to be summoned, after multiple failures by the auditorium of strongmen, to return to the stage and demonstrate. "I went up to the bell and raised it with ease'. Overhead?

Returning to the match: Caswell had suffered a leg injury just before his match against Inch and his total can be explained by the fact that he completed only four of the six lifts before he retired from the contest. Inch was using plate weights, Caswell used globed bells.

How was Caswell faring compared to Inch on the four lifts that W.P. completed?

One hand clean and jerk: Inch 203.5, Caswell 194

Right hand anyhow and bent press Inch 213, Caswell 194

Right hand bent press Inch 235, Caswell 201

Clean and jerk Inch 252, Caswell 240.

Notice anything curious? If Inch used plate barbells with a standard 1" bar, and could manage only 203.5 lbs in the one hand clean and jerk, does it not seem odd that using the 2.38" diameter Inch Challenge bell he could one hand clean and jerk it at 172? There are literally many, many men who could one hand clean and jerk 203 and more who cannot deadlift the Inch bell. Should not Inch, with his great overhead strength, have been able to one hand clean and jerk much more on a standard bar?

Afterwards in the dressing room Aston disclosed to Inch that his goal was to someday take Inch's middleweight title as his own.

As of tomorrow [April 20, 2002] 95 years have elapsed since Inch introduced his 172 bell to a London audience. By the time Inch died on Dec 12, 1963 no one else had managed to lift the bell one handed to overhead; indeed only a handful of men had been able to get it off the floor. Inch, of course, proclaimed that he had lifted it 'hundreds of times', implying an overhead lift. In the 38 years since Inch has passed, powerlifting, Olympic lifting, strongman contests, and some brutally strong bodybuilders have provided some very strong participants to the strength scene.

Yet, no one has been able to clean and jerk, one-handed, the 172 lb Inch bell. Actually, no one has even been able to clean it one handed. Does this situation not cause anyone else pause to ponder? Is there anyone who would argue that Inch is on a level of strength with the modern bulls of strength? If Inch (in his prime strength) could have been on stage at the 2002 Arnold Classic with the few strongmen who attempted to clean and jerk the 172 replica, does anyone really, intellectually, believe that Inch would have 'lifted it with ease' when these giants of power could do little with it? This would imply that Inch, in addition to having a much, much stronger grip than these other men- whose hands were larger than Inch's, would have exceeded their levels of strength in various aspects of the upright row, or curl, or clean.

Final thoughts: A 2.38" handle is in the hand of Mark Henry; another is in the hand of Thomas Inch (in his prime). A cable leads from one handle to the other as it passes around a pulley fixed on the floor, so that as the men pull, they are pulling against each other's grip around the pulley. Would Inch pull Henry's hand down toward the pulley, or would Henry pull Inch's hand down toward the pulley? Or, another scenario: Inch and Henry stand facing each other each grasping a solid rod 2.38" in thickness. Each tries to wrist roll the rod toward himself. Which direction would the rod turn? Toward Inch or toward Henry?

You may substitute other men for Henry- David Horne, Richard Sorin etc., and decide in your own mind what the outcome would be.

BUD JEFFRIES as you may know now has an Inch replica and is working toward a one hand clean with it. Kim Wood, who has been strength coach at the Bengals since a chariot driver's license was issued to Methuselah, witnessed Bud easily two hand clean the replica, then 'side press' it overhead, first with one hand, then with the other. Bud responded to Iron History's request for some answers, and here are parts of his email:

"Have I deadlifted it yet? No. Deadlifted it with two hands, let go with one and held it for about two seconds."..."Deadlifted 170 on a dumbbell with 2" handle."

"Most reps I could put it overhead after a two hand clean? Two."

"Haven't really tried much rep pressing with it, but will be working on that. I wonder if anyone else who has pressed it has noticed or said anything about it being more difficult to press than a regular dumbbell because of its thickness and shortness of the handle, odd balance and tendency to roll and twist. Also did any of those who pressed it use a wrist wrap of any kind? I was just wondering. I have been doing it bare handed, but thought a tight wrap might help because of the dumbbell's tendency to move."

"Can I clean it one handed? Not yet." "I'd say the handle makes the press much harder because I have pressed 212 lbs with my right hand on a regular dumbbell and I have one hand snatched 165 on a 7' barbell and done a one hand high pull with 220 chest high."

Then Bud switches topics to partial squats: "I did PR yesterday on quarter squats. Locked out 1800, set 2000 on the rack, moved it off the pins about an inch, but couldn't lock it out."

You couldn't lock out a one ton quarter squat and you call yourself a man?! Seriously, I think we all know it will be happening probably before years end, and we wish you good fortune. I'm sure we don't need to remind you to warm-up properly- you know, with a mere 1,000 or so...

Regarding the use of a wrist strap, please don't. Kim may have mentioned to you the technique that helped his son John one hand deadlift the original Inch, and the more difficult replica? They set up a teeter-totter. Place the Inch on one end, and place off- setting weight on the other end. If you can deadlift 135 on the 2.38" bar, then place the replica on one end and 37 pounds on the

other end. When you can consistently do that, remove some weight from the off-set end, so in reality you will be lifting 'more of' the replica. It is a brilliant idea.

AN APPEAL: If anyone reading this ever saw Inch lift the 172 bell in person, please contact me. And, if anyone has seen the handles of his other three identical challenge bells, did those also have a hole drilled in the handle midway between the globes? And to David Prowse, I ask, the Inch practice handle that you received when you also bought the Inch 172 from Reg Park- did that practice handle have a hole drilled in it? And where is that handle now?

Apr 21, 1960 issue of Health & Strength announced: "Mr. THOMAS INCH, World- renowned Physical Culturist and Bodybuilding Instructor, has been appointed President of the Health & Strength League."

Apr 25, 1907 Inch set a new world's record in the one hand swing by managing 160 lbs at a bodyweight of 161.

Apr 13, 1912 issue of H&S carried Aston's challenge to Inch that in order to settle the matter of which of the two was stronger, Aston would be willing to contest on one lift only- and that a strong lift of Inch's- the Two Hands Anyhow With Barbell and Ringweight. In the Apr 27 issue of H&S Inch declined the challenge! Letters and counter-letters flowed thru the pages of H&S in the following weeks, and readers' eyes were left with more fatigue than either lifter. Months passed, and we'll pick up the story at the appropriate time later in our chronology.

Apr 27, 1933 at the Pembroke Athletic Club "Mr. Inch gave an excellent lecture, and also ran a competition on his new mystery barbell" Huh? New? Barbell not dumbbell?

"Mr. Inch, I am informed intends to offer a solid silver cup to the one who ultimately succeeds in lifting the bell in the same manner as the method employed by him. The competition will probably run for at least a year, in order to encourage lifters from all parts of the country to participate."

A Mr. Newman won this first heat with seven repetition jerks from the shoulder. In the few mentions I have seen of this event, there is no mention that Inch ever repped with the bell, which I assume was a dumbbell (of 140 lbs) and not a barbell.

Apr 30, 1910 issue of H&S shows "Mr. and Mrs. Inch at their country residence, The Cedars, Castle Donington." Wife's name was not mentioned, not have I ever encountered it. Anyone know what it was? Or the names of his two daughters?

Apr 30, 1932 there is an ad in H&S for consultation services from Inch.

David Chapman's offerings to the Iron Game are sterling! His abilities to translate from French, and, from German give him access to knowledge so that those of us without such skills in language (me) , and indebted to his selfless work in the sport. Often he translated for Iron Game History, and thereby delivered to us jewels that would have remained unpolished to us in non-translated texts.

David is a thinking-collector and has marvelous resources, which he uses when he writes for Ironman magazine in his Gallery of Ironmen series, which, in my view, enriches that magazine. Plus, David is one of the genuinely nice people in the sport!

INCH 101: part 11

Jun 3, 1911 Inch vs Aston. Inch was 29 and lost to Edward Aston. Just weeks before this rematch Inch had fallen badly out of shape. He was able to barely clean 170 on a one inch diameter bar so how could he have claimed to be able to clean the 172 thick-handled Inch bell? He also could clean only 210 pounds with two hands, and could bent press less than 200. So in the time period from Apr 20, 1907 until Jun 3, 1911, whatever Inch was doing was causing him strength loses, not strength gains.

But that was a few weeks before his match with Aston, at which time Inch was able to two-hand clean just over 264 pounds, one-hand clean 210.

May 17, 1913 Health & Strength issue: "Mr. Thomas Inch emphasized the necessity for testing the scales whenever records are made, and on the motion of Mr. Monte Saldo, seconded by Mr. Aston, the following resolution was unanimously passed: 'That a Government inspector of weights and measures shall in future be engaged to test and pass all weights and scales that are used for weighing the bells whenever any records are attempted under B.A.W.L.A. rules.'"

May 19, 1960 issue of H&S 'The Mighty Inch' by Gilbert Odd includes these goodies: "He saw such stars as Apollo, Atlas & Vulcana, Ajax. Lionel and Milo (later known as Brinn)."

Then the story is recounted of how in 1897 Inch at age 15 was demonstrating his strength at a visiting circus.

"Not long afterwards there appeared the first Inch Challenge Dumbbell. It formed part of his strength act and was the forerunner of the now famous dumbbells that have appeared on many a PC programme throughout the country." Never, again I say, never, have I encountered a reference to Inch presenting more than one challenge dumbbell at a time in a performance- he may have switched bells and thus involved more than one, but the audience did not know of this.

May 19, 1879 Opening day of Hengler's Circus in Dublin.

References to the Apr 20, 1907 intro to the Inch dumbbell appear in the May 24, 1930 issue of H&S as well as Jan 24, 1963.

May 27, 2001 I visited Kim Wood whom I have known for many years. I gave him a Jackson 1-A barbell set and he gave me an Inch replica. We were both happy. Years before, a friend and I had stopped by Hammer Strength headquarters, and while I was visiting with Kim, my friend was put through a high intensity workout by one of the staff members. It was about noon.

While I was driving toward Columbus for the Arnold show, my friend fell asleep, and later told me he had never before been put through such a difficult workout! After that he adopted the high intensity way of training and made great progress.

INCH 101: part 12

On Jun 11, 1910 Inch, though he had suffered an injury three weeks before, met and defeated five challengers at the German Gym in London for the title British Heavyweight Championship Man . The five were Fred Hall, Wilfred Harwood, Teviotdale, James Evans, and Tom Cressey.

When Health & Strength reported on the event in the following week's issue, in an article entitled "Monster Weight-Lifting Tournament' there was hope in the tone of the message: "The science of weight-lifting in this country has for many years been in a state of chaos. Notwithstanding the fact that a vast deal of interest is taken in this particular means for the development of physical strength, there has been a singular lack of organization. The Amateur Gymnastic Association has not for ten years held any competitions, and therefore all the amateur championships have become almost as much matters of ancient history as W.G. George's mile record or Captain Webb's Channel swim.

"As for the professional championships, these were all (with the exception of the middle- weight-lifting championship of the world, won by Thos. Inch in 1907, and which he has now surrendered) apparently non-existent. The foreigners have all this time been allowed to have things their own way, while Britain's weightlifters dragged on their desultory way."

But the contest on Jun 11, 1910 flickered hope for a new direction "An association to govern this most important branch of physical culture is imperative, and it is the intention of the Editor of 'HEALTH and STRENGTH' to take the initial steps toward its formation."

Inch had hurled an open challenge claiming that he was the champion weightlifter of Great Britain. Replies poured in from men, who because the Gymnastic association cared little for this off-shoot sport they supposedly 'governed', had negligible opportunities previously to strut their strength. Now they heard Inch's call to overhead-arms! Arthur Saxon sent money to support the event as did his two brothers.

The men participating were noteworthy: Harwood was champion of Yorkshire and the north of England; Teviotdale was champ of Scotland.

Four lifts were agreed upon:
One hand clean all the way
Two hands clean all the way
One hand snatch
One hand anyhow

As a result of a drawing, some men participated in the afternoon session, some in the evening. The former were Evan, Hall, and Harwood; the latter: Teviotdale, Inch, and Cressey. But Hall was unable because his employer could not spare him, to compete in the afternoon, so it was agreed that he alone would compete/lift at 7pm, an hour before the other three competitors began at 8pm.

This was a noted event attended by Prof. Szalay, Ferdinand Gruhn, Ernest Gruhn (author of The Textbook on Wrestling) and other notables.

The totals for the lifts were:

Inch 826 lbs 8 ozs; Hall 780 lbs 12 ozs; Harwood 779 lbs 8 ozs; Teviot. 739 lbs 14 ozs; Evans 599 lbs 14 ozs; and Cressey who completed only two lifts, 358 lbs 6 ozs.

Inch won the one hand clean with 213/14; and the one hand anyhow at 230/8 Hall won the two hands clean with 252/2 Teviotdale won the one hand snatch at 139/12

Inch later wrote "At last the proud title I have coveted since the age of 12 is mine!" He then explained that he had won because of superior science and superior strength. And although he had injured himself performing a practice snatch in training, he was able to win the title.

Then using a technique that Bill Gates could use these days, Inch opened the door for others to have a chance to take his title from him, but he set the stakes so high, that only a very rich person could gather so much money and chance losing it: "Well, no more excuses. I won the cup, and will defend my title, same rules and lifts, for not less than L100 a-side against any man of British birth". One Hundred Pounds British was a huge sum in those days!

Inch humbly then concludes: "In conclusion, I can only hope that every competitor, and every reader of 'H. & S.' believes the best man won. "I know I do!"

From the collection of Larry Aumann, here is a letter from Willoughby to Webster regarding the measurements of the Inch dumbbell:

Feb 9, 1957

Dear Mr. Webster,

I hope the enclosed photos of Sandow reach you in time to do some good! I have lately been putting in close to 60 hours a week at my daily job, which has left me little for anything else.

My article on Donald Dinnie appears in the current (March, 1957) issue of IRON MAN. I hope it meets with your approval.

Please let me have the information (weight, dimensions, etc) of the Inch 'Challenge Dumbbell, as soon as you have obtained it. It has just occurred to me that if the handle of this dumbbell is only 4" in length, the reason that Arthur Saxon could not lift the bell was because he couldn't get his hand (which was about 4-3/4" wide) down between the spheres far enough to get ahold (sic) of the bar! In any event, I refuse to believe that his grip was inferior to Inch's.

If you have any photos of British old-timers (Elliott, Pevier, Aston, et al), I would be pleased to have copies in exchange for the enclosed prints of Sandow—provided, of course, that you have duplicate copies to spare.

With kind regards,

Sincerely,
Dave

This week we start with INCH 101: part 14, because of Mark Henry's successful one hand clean and push press with an Inch replica on Jun 22, 2002 in New Jersey.

Let's start with an explanation of how I date the events in Inch's life:

Inch was born Dec 27, 1881, but if no specific date is offered for an event in his life then his Dec 27th birth date is ignored and rolled over to Jan 1. In other words, if something happened to Inch when he was age one, then technically it could be said to have happened in 1882- but only four days of 1882. So when Inch says he acquired his first thick handled dumbbell at age 15, that would be 1896, but unless he acquired the bell during the final four days of 1896, it is more communicative to say he acquired it in 1897, or at least during the first 360 plus days of 1897. Of course, if a specific date is offered then it is used in age calculations and references.

Chronology of some events regarding Thomas Inch. These are based on comparing many, sometimes conflicting texts, and trying to filter fact from fiction. Some of these are not definite, but are my best thoughts/guesses on the matters at my current knowledge. And, there are presented in chronological order:

It was announced at the Oldtimers' dinner when Henry made his lift that the 172 had been manufactured in 1898. A careful comparison of the various stories about the 172 reveals that not to be the case.

1881 Inch is born

1897 Inch acquires the 140 pound thick handled dumbbell

1897 Saxon Trio performing at Grand Theatre in Sheffield

1899 late in this year the Saxon Trio toured South Africa and India

1901 Saxon Trio in Leipzig, Moscow, and England

1902 Arthur Saxon in Manchester, England

1903 Inch moves to London at age 21; meets Arthur Saxon

1903 Inch finally manages to lift the 140 off the floor

1904 Saxon visited every Sandow school in England

1904 Arthur Saxon bent presses 331 in Liverpool

1904 Inch acquires the 153 pound thick handled dumbbell

1904 Inch acquires the 75 pound thick handled dumbbell (for his left hand)

1905 Arthur Saxon bent presses 335.75 in London

1905 Inch becomes able to continental and jerk the 140

1905 Arthur Saxon bent presses 370 in Stuttgart, Germany

1906 Inch acquires the 172 pound Inch Challenge Dumbbell

1907 Introduces the 172 to a London audience

1908 Apollon & Padoubny wrestle three times at Hengler's Circus, London; this, I believe, I when Saxon and Inch took the 172 to Hengler's for Padoubny to try. Apollon, over a disputed decision in wrestling had withdrawn from the tournament for a few days, and it is my belief that Inch used this window of time to avoid Apollon having a try at the 172. Various reports have stated that Inch left the bell for one day or for two weeks. The one day fits history better, because Apollon returned within one week, and had the bell been there he would have played with it.

1908 Saxon's mishap in Brussels

1909 Saxon's first tour of America

1910 Saxon bent presses 300 at Attila's Gym in NYC

1911 Saxons performing in America

1911 Inch staying with the Saxons in England, training

1912 Saxon in Vienna

1913 Saxon home to England to see his wife

1913 The Inch 172 is now referred to as 'famous'

1913 Inch moved to Scarborough

1914 Saxon in Germany
1914 World War One begins
1914 Saxons perform in Leipzig, Geneva, and Berm
1920 Inch showed how the 172 'should be handled'
Aug 6, 1921 Arthur Saxon dies
Nov 26, 1921 Inch, for the first time, asserts that Saxon was not able to ever lift the 172
Circa 1929 Inch began competitions with, not the 172, but the 140 lb bell, which he called his Competition bell. Two hands were allowed to the shoulder and then reps in the one hand jerk from the shoulder determined the winners.
1931 The 172 is retired until World War Two.

By a careful study of that list, you can determine that Inch's claim that Arthur Saxon tried for '15 years' to master the 172 bell, cannot be accurate. If the bell was manufactured in 1906, and if Arthur did not return to England after 1914, then an eight year span is the most exposure that Arthur could have had to the 172- PLUS those eight years were hardly a period of uninterrupted concentrated training on the bell.

The Thomas Inch Challenge Dumbbell at 172 pounds and 2.38" diameter handle, or the more recent replicas of the same with 2.47" diameter handle have become a topic of considerable discussion and debate in recent months. Quite frankly, until we began examining the history of what turned out to be four almost identical dumbbells with weights of 75, 140, 153, and 172 pounds, most sources of history claimed there were only three Inch bells.

Also, Inch claimed to have lifted the 172 bell overhead literally 'hundreds of times' in his lifetime, and at a bodyweight much, much lower than anyone currently seriously thinking of having a chance to clean and push-press, or clean and jerk the 172. In 1937 Inch made this 'hundreds of times' claim even though the bell had been retired for six years at that time, so if he acquired the bell in 1906 which is my opinion based on an incredible amount of study, and if he stopped trying to lift it in 1931, which he acknowledges, then those hundreds of times must have happened in the quarter century from 1906 to 1931. But we know there were periods in that span when he was unable to lift it; this knowledge comes by his own, perhaps inadvertent, admission.

So if Inch could one hand clean and jerk the 172 at will using his powers of concentration directed at the specifically involved muscles, and he began doing this nearly one hundred years ago before modern training methods, and enhanced nutrition, and drugs, why is it that we were awaiting SOMEONE of any size, who gained that size by any means, to step forward and not hundreds of times, but simply a single time, grab hold of the 172 and clean it one handed and thrust it overhead? Inch claimed that of all the contemporary strongmen who tried, not a one succeeded. Being careful to await Saxon's death, Inch then claimed that Arthur himself never mastered the bell even after years of trying, and of having his own replica manufactured, which he did conquer, but somehow the magical mystery tour of Inch's bell escaped the skilled hand of Saxon. Hogwash.

First, of course, Inch never lifted it in this manner hundreds of times, or dozens of times, indeed, he never cleaned and jerked it at all, but would instead substitute one of the lighter bells, according to Edward Aston, who was in Inch's employ for awhile. Indeed, the very reason that Inch refused to disclose the dimensions of the bell was that if he had so disclosed, then anyone with a scale and a tape measure might catch his slight of hand. He did claim to reveal the actual weight of the bell to Deriaz. Aston, finally tiring of being challenged by Inch to lift the 172, countered and told Inch to lift the bell one handed, put it down one handed, and LEAVE IT sitting on stage so that Aston could immediately try to lift it. Aston, in my opinion had seen Inch numerous times lift one of the lighter, identical bells, then carry it off stage and later that evening return with the 172 to offer his challenge. Aston therefore accepted Inch's challenge, but to my knowledge Inch never agreed to those terms. Why not? Hundreds of times but he did not want to lift it a single rep for Aston?

Inch also claimed a biceps of 19-7/8 at a bodyweight of under 200 pounds. This is remarkable considering that for a period of about five years as a youngster in training he did not increase his bodyweight at all, and claimed to have slender wrists, which to fit the limiting ratio of 3:1 wrist to upper arms could not have taped more than 6.6", but in no photos I have seen of him did his wrists appear so small, nor did his hands appear to David Webster to be unusually small, as Inch liked to assert. He also claimed 15" forearms (measured straight, not goose-necked) and this would have been a ratio of the impossible size of 2.3 to 1 for forearms. So, if you have 7" wrists, to match the ratio that Inch claimed, would require 16.1", and 7.5" wrists need 17.25", measured non-goose-necked.

Remember the number of photos taken during those 'hundreds of times' that Inch had the 172 overhead, or was in the process of one-hand cleaning it? That number is zero. Of the thousands of audience members who through the years must have witnessed some of these successes, no one has a photo to offer? Not even Inch offered any photos of himself lifting it. There is a photo so described in an old issue of Strength & Health, but that bell is clearly not the Inch 172, but a plate loaded bell. Inch was a masterful businessman who knew how to market himself, so why no photos of the 172 overhead in one of his hands?

Hopefully, in the past few installments of Inch 101, we have presented enough evidence to demonstrate that Inch never cleaned and put overhead, with one hand, the 172. Indeed, when a photo explaining his technique to shoulder the bell is offered, he is shown using two hands in a continental, not a clean, with the bell resting on his rearward leaning torso.

Indeed when men like Kaz and Phil Pfister need to continental the bell to the shoulder instead on cleaning it, one suspects that Inch may not have quite had the cleaning power of these two mastiffs. Phil indicated this week that he cannot yet one hand clean his replica, but he plans some surprises at the next Arnold Classic in Columbus, Ohio, next year.

So, this year on Jun 22, Mark Henry was planning to try to clean and push-press, or clean and jerk, with one hand in either case, the 172, if his injured triceps would permit. I now present an email from Terry Todd of the U of Texas. I have added dates with brackets for clarity.

An email from Terry Todd dated Friday, June 21, 2002. This was the day before the Oldtimers dinner in Saddle Brook, New Jersey:

"Joe, "Just a note to let you know-because I think your work has earned you the right to be the first to know the complete details- that three weeks ago, [May 30] on Thursday at 4:50 PM, in the Varsity Weight Room at UT [University of Texas in Austin] , Mark Henry cleaned a replica of the Inch Dumbbell with one hand. He didn't touch it with the other hand at any time during the lift and it was caught high on the shoulder.

"He had first tried to lift the Bell three weeks before [circa May 9?], after first cleaning a smaller bell I'd had made for him (made from two 8" long pieces of 6" bar stock joined by a 6" handle made from a piece of 2.5" bar stock) weighing 154 pounds. This was his first chance to lift the smaller bell, and it was still hot from having just been made at the machine shop. I didn't think he'd try the Inch that first day, but as he lifted the small one so easily I suggested that he make an attempt. So twice, he pulled it up, turned it over to his shoulder, but caught it so that it drifted away from his laterally. He was away for two weeks, [May 23?] then did the exact same thing again—warm up with regular dbs to 150, then lift the small one, then turn the big one over twice but fail to "fix" it. That day, however, I had Jan take a videotape so he could see what he was doing wrong,, which was to not step slightly forward with his right foot (he cleaned with his right hand) so as to get under the bell and "trap" it. When he saw the tapes I think he quickly understood what to do and a week later, [May 30] after another easy clean with the light bell he stepped forward and made the historic clean. Jan was in a meeting that day and so we have no

photos or films, but we had two witnesses besides me. Mark was very happy. "He'd have been practicing much earlier, but about two weeks after the Arnold he partially tore the triceps on his right arm and so has been unable to do any sort of normal press or arm training. In fact, the doctors told him to lay off entirely for six weeks or so from all upper body training. But as he began to recover we learned that he could catch a light db in a clean without pain and so I suggested that he make an attempt to play catch- up and try to do what we'd been hoping to do—make an "official" attempt to clean an Inch replica at Vic's dinner. When Mark first hurt himself I was disappointed—both because he was hurt and because we'd spoken earlier about how he could practice with his Inch replica and maybe learn to clean it in time for Vic's gathering.

"Following his first clean, he was back two weeks or a bit less and made another attempt, but this time jammed his thumb with the small bell when it bounced back up and hit him as he dropped it to the platform after the clean. So we decided to get the bleeding stopped and wait for perhaps one more chance before the 22nd. [June] That chance came this past Sunday,[June 16] when he made an easier clean with the Inch after his normal warm-up and a clean with the smaller bell. This time about ten people in the gym saw him, including Jan. So we have some confidence that he'll be able to make the clean in front of all the old heroes at the dinner. He weighed just a pound or two or three under 400 when he made these lifts, and he was 30 when he made the first and 31 when he made the second. So far I've kept the attempt more or less a secret, although I've had to tell a few people to get clearance to do the thing so it won't upset the program. So if you would don't alert the troops until it happens. I'll let you know how it goes. We're doing it this way in part as a way of thanking Vic for all his years of work.

"I wish Mark could have trained on the push press, but I've advised him not to put the bell overhead even if it feels light as it would be a shame and set him back in his training and ringwork if he re-injured the triceps. I told him that anyone who really knew lifting would know that the difficult thing about the Inch was that it would be very, very difficult (thought to be impossible by DPW) [David P. Willoughby] for anyone to clean with one hand but not all that hard to elevate overhead. I told him he'd have plenty of chances to put it up for reps down the line.

"I have to say it was a fine thing to see him clean it, especially the first time, and I wish you could have seen it, too. I might add that he says he can get a much better grip on the smaller bell because the handle is wide enough to allow him to get the whole hand down on the handle—something he can't do with the narrower Inch.

"T

"PS By the way, I really liked the photo you took of Mark lifting the Wheels—the one that ran with David's article about the Arnold. I'd very much like to have a copy, and I know Mark would, too."

Keep in mind when Thomas Inch claimed to be able to one hand clean and jerk the 172 pound challenge bell, his bodyweight was 210 pounds, so the bell was 82% of his bodyweight. I hasten to add that I do not believe Inch was ever able to perform this feat, but such was his claim, and further, that he was able to perform this feat, during his strength career, hundreds of times, while hundreds of other men who tried, all failed. [for Mark Henry, 82% of 400 pounds would be 328 pounds, or roughly the Inch replica plus that 154 pound warm-up bell combined!]

Inch weighed 210 circa 1909 when he was about 26 years old.

So in Saddle Brook, New Jersey on Saturday night June 23, 2002, with a camera crew from the World Wrestling Entertainment company (formerly WWF) standing by, and with about 250 people watching, Mark Henry came out, and with one hand, power cleaned (dipped very little) the Inch 172 replica and push-pressed it overhead. He did keep the bell overhead for a couple of seconds, though it did not appear to be stabilized and still, before he threw it down from his right hand. He

also deadlifted the bell with his left hand and carried it a few feet to a table. In my opinion, this is the very first time that an Inch 172 has ever been one handed all the way by anyone. If Mark weighed about 400 pounds, then the bell represented 43% of his bodyweight (for comparison, a 200 pound man would need to succeed with an 86 lb replica, to have proportionate strength). And lest anyone pooh-pooh this comparison, keep in mind that weight classes have been a part of weightlifting for more than a century.

For the record, Mark's success came at 11:15 pm- thanks to 3Crusher of the grippage.com for the exact time.

Nonetheless, honor to Mark Henry for being the first man of any weight to conquer the Inch 172. Who will succeed next? Will a woman ever be able to join this group? Will anyone ever be able to clean and then jerk or push press a replica in each hand at the same time? Or to farmer's carry an Inch in each hand? John Wood has already grabbed a replica in each hand, off a table, pivoted, walked a few steps and held the bells for a total lapsed time of 45 seconds which his sister snapped some photos (see Iron History Gallery for two of those shots).

In May 1911, Inch's strength level had descended to a point where he could one hand clean, on a standard 1" bar, only 170 pounds; so logic demands that he could NOT have lifted 172 on a 2.38" bar! So somewhere between when he introduced the 172 in 1907, and four years later, whatever training regimen he was on was slowly zapping his reserve of power. His system was called Miniature Weightlifting. Perhaps Going Backwards in Progress would have been more apt. Of course, Inch was telling people that an 8 pound (yes, eight pound) dumbbell was heavy enough for training.

INCH 101: part 14

Backtracking to pick up July 6, 1956. In Health & Strength magazine of Aug 14, 1957 there appears a letter to the editor from Thomas Fenton owner of the Inch middleweight challenge dumbbell (not the 172):

"Enclosed please find remittance to enroll my daughter in the Health and Strength League. Would you kindly enroll her from the 6th of July, as this date is her first birthday.

"I am sending you a photo of her with Mr. Thomas Inch's 'middleweight Challenge Dumbbell, of which I am now the owner."

[some notes: the un-named daughter was born July 6, 1956; how long had Fenton owned the middleweight challenge bell, and what was its weight?]

"Whenever she goes into my room, she always makes straight for the bell, almost making me think she has designs on it. My wife and I are already keen Leaguers." Signed Thomas Fenton, Cathays, Cardiff"

[notes: the wife is also un-named, but in England there surely must exist her name and the daughter's name. David Horne, are you listening? Wouldn't you enjoy tracking down the middleweight bell? The daughter would currently have celebrated birthday # 42 on July 6, 2002, and she may well know where the bell reposes]

Now to Jul 10, 1952 where an article appeared in H&S that roused Tom Fenton's sense of accuracy which seems to appear in H&S Apr 23, 1959 on page 20 (7 years after?):

Fenton refers to the time Reg Park attempted to duplicate three of Inch's challenges when Fenton writes:

"He [Reg] certainly did not close the Inch grip and in view of the fact that Inch was contesting and record breaking at 68, I am sure you will wish to correct this error in fairness to an old favourite."

In the Sep 13, 1913 issue of H&S p 276 Inch writes to H&S to protest the implications housed in a letter written by Edward Aston:

"There is one statement in Aston's letter that I take keen exception to. It is the statement that 'persistent ill-health prevented me from doing better in the wager'. This is calculated to do me harm in my profession of health specialist, and I wish to point out as strongly as possible that there is nothing whatever in my letter which appeared in your issue of August 23rd to warrant the use of these words.

"The wager ran twelve months, and in a nutshell, my position was: For the first seven months it was impossible for me to attempt records on account of my injured knee (the result of an accident). In May I smashed my ankle, (another accident) which incapacitated me for a further two months. Just as I completed my training for my important attempts on July 25th I took a very severe chill, which led to pleurodynia, and which made it impossible for me to lift by August 20th. I would like to point out that the trained athlete is, like a racehorse, particularly susceptible to chills. There is nothing in the above to warrant any statement about 'persistent ill-health'.

INCH 101: Part 18 H&S Sep 20, 1913 Some Reasons Why- in Plain Language- Inch

On Sep 26, 1871 Ivan Padoubny was born. Inch claimed to have left the Inch 172 lb bell at Hengler's Circus while Padoubny was wrestling there, which, as near as I can determine may have been 1908 because there was a wrestling tournament going on there then and Padoubny faced Apollon on Feb 10, 12, and 18th. Ivan defeated Apollon in a controversial match, and it is my studied view that Inch heard of this defeat and Apollon's angry withdrawal from the tournament, and brought the bell by Hengler's when Apollon was absent. This most certainly fits if Inch brought the bell by between Feb 12 and 18th (Apollon returning on the 18th) Padoubny was 36, Apollon age 46.

Inch certainly knew better than to give Apollon a chance, especially a challenge, in regard to the 172. Apollon had a famous block weight with a ring the total which weighed 176 lbs which he often used, so he would have scoffed at the 172. Inch avoided this. This scenario works if one of the three time tables presented is accepted. The bell was left at Hengler's for one day, one week, or two weeks. One day is likely because one week would have encompassed Apollon's return, and even though at age 46 he might not outwrestle Ivan, no one would assert Ivan's lifting was anywhere in the neighborhood of Apollon's.

When did Inch or other writers first refer to this Hengler's situation above? Miller mentioned it in Apr 1936 in Strength and Health, and three years later in that mag, Inch himself wrote of it. Then Inch again wrote of it in Health & strength on Dec 20, 1956.

When did Padoubny die: 1949. I have never found a response from Ivan about the Hengler's/Inch bell claim. Has anyone reading this seen any text from Ivan about the incident?

INCH 101: Part 19

In H&S Oct 10, 1931 Inch recounts details of his Jun 3, 1911 match with Edward Aston. Please keep in mind that whatever amount of weight you can successfully clean with one arm on a standard 1" diameter bar, will be considerably more than you can one arm clean on a bar with 2.38" diameter. With that in mind, think about the implications for Inch's strength levels before this match when he wrote:

"When I state that I had lost form so completely that I only managed 210 lb. two hands clean, 170 one hand clean, and under 200 bent press, it will be recognized that no expert would have taken 100 to 1 upon my chance of defeating Aston."

If 170 lbs on a 1" bar was his limit at about that time in the one arm clean, then only the ignorant would claim he could add two pounds to the weight and add 1.38" to the bar diameter, thus having his challenge bell specs, and be able to clean it.

He of course gained strength, but the point here is that for whatever amount of time he had descended to his lower level of strength, then he was unable to clean the Inch 172 using only one hand. Keeping in mind that he had introduced the 172 in 1907, then sometime within the next four years he lost the ability to clean it.

Before the match mentioned above, he began training a few weeks ahead, of course. By match time he was able to clean 210 lbs and 10 ounces on a 1" bar with one hand. Still, as we now know, due to the prevalence of Inch sized handles and Inch replicas- a WORLD away from cleaning the thick handled 172. Indeed, if all you can clean is 210 on a standard bar, you will not be able to get the Inch OFF the floor!

Of course, he never used the word 'clean' in reference to the bell in that era; he always wrote about 'lifting' it- which could mean simply dead lifting it. He used words cleverly.

In H&S Oct 21, 1933 reference is made to an article in the Oct 7 issue; Inch writes: "Sir: In the Oct 7 issue, in Mr. Valentine's article, reference is made to my performance at Leeds. Lest there be any misapprehension regarding what he described was a challenge dumb-bell, I wish to make it clear that I was using my competition dumb-bell and not the challenge dumb-bell, which for thirty years has withstood every effort of challengers to lift it off the ground."

So for 30 years- means that the challenge bell (172 lbs, 2.38" diameter handle) had been around since 1903? More likely 1906, but perhaps Inch was generalizing the date.

Of course some of this confusion can be traced directly to the doorstep of Mr. Inch, who for many years did not reveal the existence of his four identical-looking but vastly differently weighted bells: 75, 140, 153, and 172. I have an Inch that weighs 152 and one that weighs 172. From more than six feet away it is very difficult to distinguish which bell is 20 lbs lighter. If a person were in the audience, he would have NO chance of this discernment. The hollow 75, and the solid 140 also appeared to be the same size.

So Inch's trickery over the years, in which, after he lifted one of the lighter bells, he would, later in the program offer his challenge, and bring out on to the stage the 172, which was not the bell he lifted, but the unknowing audience thought it was. So, when, Fairbrother and Spacey and Chowles were able to lift the competition bell off the floor, a clarification was needed from Inch to protect his reputation, because many assumed that the bell was the bell that Inch had called his challenge bell all those years.

How much did the competition bell weigh? About 140 lbs.

INCH 101: part 20

On Oct 19, 1957 Inch had his bell at the Mr. Universe contest in London He was age 75 then, though the report in H&S says 76, 'This great old timer who has trod the pages of strongmanism for many years got a lot of praise and a good deal of laughter from the appreciative audience. Scottish lifter John Gallacher (sic) got the prize for the best attempt'.

In H&S Oct 21, 1933 page 500 Inch writes to the mag to clarify that the bell used recently at Leeds was NOT the challenge (172) bell, but the competition (140) bell. He further claims that the 172 "for 30 years has withstood every effort of challengers to lift it from the ground.' Other passages from the mags indicate otherwise, of course, but perhaps Inch was banking on what many writers bank on- the ignorance of the reader regarding the history of the situation being discussed. 30 years would indicate that the 172 had been around since 1903. Perhaps Inch was speaking in general terms, because it appears the 172 was not manufactured until circa 1906.

Oct 22, 1929 was the day Inch performed a two dumbbells anyhow of 276 lbs via 220 in one hand and 56 in the other- this at age 47. Also in Inch's dumbbell competition, a man named Newman won with four reps in the jerk. This would be the 140 lb bell not the 172, and two hands were allowed to clean the bell. I am uncertain when Inch first retired the 172- it appears to have been 1931, even though he had been holding his competitions with the 140 before that time. And he may have brought the 172 out of retirement during World War II, but that is also vague.

Oct 19, 1957 Now to add confusion comes the 153 lb Inch bell, affectionately known as the middleweight dumbbell (are we to infer there were three bells, and that this at 153 was 'midway' from the 140 to the 172? Only rarely does Inch mention his 75 bell hollow bell. Please keep in mind that the 172 had a diameter of handle which was 2.38", but the others may have had 2.47 or 2.5 inches diameter- hardly discernable with the naked eye from a distance of a few feet. I'm rambling- so to the point.

"The Inch middleweight dumb-bell [153 lbs] was then brought on and only two men, John Gallacher [John Gallagher?] and Jacobus Jacobs, succeeding in lifting it off the floor- John lifting as high as the thighs. Later, backstage however, Jacobs lay on the floor, pulled it on to his chest, stood up and then hoisted it over his head. This info from the Reg Park Journal, which shortly thereafter mentioned the weight at 155, not 153 lbs, and said the handle was 2.25". Give me strength! Further, 'The heavyweight [172] Inch dumb-bell is now in our warehouse for all to attempt' Park offered. Also at the warehouse was the Inch practice handle, which remains in the possession of David Prowse to this day.

[please see the photo of Curt Bolding with the three bells in the gallery by clicking on the intro page above. Which bell is the 152- green or black?]

Oct 25, 1910 Inch was among those present to start the formation of the British Weight- Lifters' Association. He was elected chairman of the pro division, and Tom Pevier served in that capacity for the amateurs. For 1911 and 1912 the following were named as the official lifts for amateurs: Right Hand Clean, with jerk or bent press allowed from the shoulder. Same with left hand. And, the Two Hands Clean and Jerk with Barbell. This article in The British Amateur Weightlifter and Bodybuilder also traces the split between the pro and amateurs sections and how the names evolved. By the way, 3 months later Inch was elected Treasurer of the Pro division.

INCH 101: part 21

Nov 3, 1912 regarding John Grun Marx:

"He gave a strong show of the old type, dumb-bell and bar-bell lifting. He was a huge man, with enormous hands, standing over 6 ft. and weighing over 17 st. He used to challenge anyone to lift his two dumbbells. They had enormous handles, and no one could do much with them. Some said the handles were loose, and that there was some kind of trick. I don't know whether this was so, but I think the weight of them (over 100 lbs. each) and the thick handles were quite enough to safeguard his money without anything else.

Then Inch continues regarding the fact that Marx never tried to lift the Inch bell: "Personally, I don't think he could have lifted it, though I remember Pevier once told me that he [Marx] would have swung it."

Then Inch claims that because Saxon had more hand strength than Marx, and because Saxon failed to lift the Inch, he doubted that Marx would have succeeded. Of course, Inch waited until both these men were dead to make these statements. Perhaps Inch was ignorant of Marx's ability to one hand deadlift, with either hand, a bell outweighing the Inch bell by about 54 lbs, the handle of which was 2.36", so .02" smaller than the 2.38" original Inch. Frankly, anyone who does not think Marx could have increased the handle size by .02" and REDUCED the weight by 54 lbs and still have lifted it, is someone with whom I care not to discuss the situation. That person is free to skip merrily to wherever it is his mind is at peace. And I with clean shaven face and giddy smile will skip in the opposite direction where the facts and figures for forgone physiques foment.

INCH 101: Part Conclusion.

Rather than repeat arguments from previous editions of ironhistory.com here, please use the search button via 'Inch101'.

Conclusion:

Sometimes the most innocent looking data can be very revealing. In Health & Strength Nov 15, 1913 p 510, there appeared the Official List of Professional Weightlifting Records in England. Edward Aston held 12 of those records, E.C.Smith one, J. Watson, one, and Thomas Inch held two.

Put your thinking caps on. Aston's one hand clean record was 243 lbs. When the lift turned into a one hand clean and jerk, his amount dropped to 199-1/2 lbs.

Inch, in regard to his two lifts did not have to one hand clean the weight. His right hand push record was 163-3/4 lbs, and when more strictness was demanded, his right arm military press amount descended to 106 lbs. and 10 ounces.

See a problem yet? Many years after this, Inch would claim that the full feat of lifting the 172 lb Inch bell was one hand clean and then overhead. He would further reflect that he had mastered this since about 1906. Well, here we are in 1913, after, according to his version, he had been putting the 172 overhead, at will, on dozens upon dozens of occasions. Now the problem with the 172 of course was the thick 2.38" diameter handle. But if all Inch could push overhead with one hand in 1913 was about 8 lbs less than 172, how are we to accept the cleaning of the 172 by Inch AND PUTTING IT OVERHEAD for the past seven years? Even if he could clean it, he lacked the strength, according to the record books, to push it overhead. Please do not mention bent press- Aston held that record at the time as well, and Inch NEVER even claimed to bent press the 172. Also, remember that a couple of years before this, Inch was down to a strength level that allowed only a 170 pound clean on a REGULAR diameter bar- which strength level would preclude clean two pounds more on a thick handled bar.

Further, as we now know from the scattering of Inch replicas around America, many men who can clean 172 lbs on a standard size barbell handle CANNOT in many cases even get the Inch replica off the floor, or at best manage a deadlift. ANYONE (read Mark Henry) who can clean the Inch replica, would certainly surpass Inch's one hand push record, and in spite of the bodyweight differences between Henry and Inch, actually because of that bodyweight difference, we are coming to understand that Inch had no basis upon which to make his claims in regard to the 172.

Inch asserted that Aston was unable to clean the Inch, indeed even clear the floor with it, but Aston held the one hand clean record of 243 lbs, not Inch. Could the thick handle make that much difference to Aston who, again, in the one hand clean and jerk managed the record of essentially 200 lbs?

Inch, in my view, and I no longer call it an opinion, because one must be a dunderhead not to read the facts as they have been preserved- not as they were presented, but preserved, and sitting around for years in yellowed magazine pages waiting for someone to thoughtfully read and compare all the variations. Frankly, this I have done, and without arrogance may I remind students of the Inch 172, that until the research performed here at ironhistory.com and the discussions on the grip board, no one, to my knowledge had ever asserted in print the conclusions we have revealed this year. Oh- there had been rare whispers about Inch switching bells, but the supposition seemed to prevail that had push come to shoving it overhead, he could have cleaned and put overhead the 172. I think we have presented facts and analysis to thwart that position.

Further, though certain websites and other sources may continue to assert that Inch was able to do what he claimed, they seem to make this assertion based on faith without study. But just as in working out with weights where progress is not made by simply repeating what is easy, so it is with the study of old time strongmen and feats of strength. To simply cull unchecked facts and format new articles from them continues the original disservice of laziness. To those who bemoan that their sacred cows have been slaughtered, perhaps some other readers will acknowledge that it is rare in our medium that well done research yields such a meal of truth to enjoy. I began this study accepting that Inch was able to do what has always been claimed. Facts guided me to the opposite conclusion.