

BINGLEY HARRIERS HISTORY 1893 - 1993

Plans for a harrier club in Bingley had been made in March 1893 at a meeting organised in the town's Old Queen's Head pub in Main Street. At the meeting were several young men who, previously, used to meet and turn out for a run from a room over the stables of the inn. At that meeting was a man called Tom Smith who was to play a significant part in the Club's history. He was elected to the committee in October 1893 and became the main driving force behind the Club for the next 50 years, acting as both Secretary and Treasurer from 1898, when the two positions were merged. The Club was named simply 'Bingley Harriers' and just 22 members were enrolled during the first season paying subscriptions of 2/-d each. Club colours were navy blue 'knickers' and a white vest bound with blue round the neck and arms with the letters 'BH' in maroon on the chest. The aim of the Club was modest: to cultivate cross-country running. Runs were organised from the first Saturday in October through to the end of March and it would take almost 100 years of this 'cultivation' for the Harriers to become English Cross-Country Champions.

In February 1897 the Club colours were changed to all blue in time for the Yorkshire Championships and in 1915 were changed again when the now familiar blue and white striped vests appeared for the first time, albeit vertically, together with black 'knickers'.

The thirties proved to be a make or break period for the Club. The recession had set in, funds were low and membership was dwindling. A scribbled note made by the Secretary, Tom Smith, against the entries for the 1931 Youth's Christmas Handicap reflects his frustration: "less than six turned out". For the 1934/35 season the headquarters were changed to the old police station in Myrtle Place but the premises were unsatisfactory and in October 1935 the Harriers were back in Slicer's Yard. This was the signal for a renewed determination and commitment to the future of the Club at a time when many other clubs were disappearing. Fund raising took place and 120 'Christmas Cheer' books were sold at 3/6d each. The minutes of a meeting held on New Year's day 1936 read: "This meeting mainly consisted of a friendly talk in procuring better turns out, so as to enable teams to be entered for the Yorkshire and Bradford Championships". In the event the Club did not enter a team in the Yorkshire Championships that season and 12 months later things had not improved much. A historic meeting was held on 30th September 1936 to decide whether or not it was worth carrying on. A proposal, made by E. Collier and seconded by W. Palmer, to continue with the Club was passed by 8 votes to 2.

An advertisement was placed in the Bingley Guardian in September 1937 in an effort to attract new members and this must have met with a certain amount of success because the minutes of 4th October read: 'Reported with pleasure that 23 turned out on Saturday last' - a figure that the Club would do well to emulate nowadays, even with a membership of nearly 500! Membership, at last, began to grow and new members regularly joined the youth as well as the senior sections. More Club competitions were organised and, optimistically, two dozen club vests were purchased which were sold for 3/-d each. The efforts of the preceding 12 months were finally rewarded when the youth team won the 1938 Bradford & District Championships at St. Bede's, Heaton. At the Annual General Meeting in September 1938 the Chairman said: "looking back on the past season, with the

youths winning the Bradford & District Championship, (this) gave promise for the future and the youths should also show gratitude to the older members for keeping the Club going through many lean seasons, no doubt the youths would follow on and still be a greater credit to the Club".

Membership prospered during the 1938/39 season but unfortunately the start of the following season coincided with the outbreak of the Second World War. Combined runs were held for the next five seasons together with Airedale Harriers, Wibsey Park Harriers and Bradford Athletic Club with runs being held from each of these clubs' headquarters in turn.

In May 1945 a meeting was held with the Eldwick Gala Committee with a view to organising races at the Gala. The Gala had been started in 1941 by the Home Guard to provide entertainment for the local children during the war. The representatives organised three handicap races:- a 1½ mile event for boys under 14, a 3 mile event for under 18's and a longer 'fell' race for those over 18. The fell race, which has now become an established part of Eldwick Gala, was first held over a course to Dick Hudson's pub and back and was a fairly low key affair. Before it was discontinued in 1953 a race was held to the summit of Hope Hill and back and a record of 17mins 19secs established. In 1967, after a 14 year break, the race was reintroduced and an extensive prize list of watches provided as an enticement for more athletes to take part. A route was taken from the gala field to the trig point on Hope Hill and back along Saltaire Road and over the Glen bridge. In the 1969 race the Yorkshire 10,000m Champion, John Waterhouse, won in a record time of 15min 11secs, a victory he was to repeat a year later. In 1970, at the request of the Gala Committee, the road was taken as far as the cattle grid at Lobley Gate from where the runners took a direct line to the moor top. However this route was considered too dangerous and was abandoned after objections from the police. The record over the present course, which has seen minor alterations to the start and finish sections, is 16mins 01sec and was set in 1981 by Dave Slater. Children's races for all ages are held on the gala field but since 1978 a separate fell race for juniors has been held. The first of these took place on Gala day but more recently the junior race has been held on the Tuesday evening before the gala from the Glen bridge.

By 1950 membership had been steadily growing and now numbered over 70 (more than 80% being under 21) but there were some matters that needed attention and the AGM of 1950 brought with it several major changes, not the least of which was a change of name. The Treasurer, Bill White, suggested that the name of the Club be altered to include "Athletic Club" to indicate that activities included more than just cross country running. Over the last few years it had proved impossible to obtain new supplies of vests with vertical blue and white stripes in a "modern" style. In May 1950, Lumley's Ltd. of Glasgow were approached but they had only been able to provide vests with 1" blue and white hoops. These were rejected at first but at the A.G.M. they were adopted as the new Club colours along with the addition of "Athletic Club" to the name.

Until this time membership had been restricted to male athletes and the only connection between ladies and the Club had been in a supportive role. A discussion was held at the end of the meeting relating to the proposed formation of a Ladies' Section and despite some reservations being expressed about changing accommodation and the suitability of cross country as a sport for ladies, a small majority voted in favour of the proposition. A public meeting was held in September to which ladies interested in athletics were invited to attend and during the next 12 months 43 were enrolled as members. The Club became affiliated to the Yorkshire Women's Cross Country Association and in March 1951 finished 3rd team in the Yorkshire Ladies' Championship.

Early in 1951 David Humphreys, then 16, was recruited to the youths section. David's short athletic career lasted just seven years until 1958 when he was forced into a premature retirement owing to a kidney illness. During that time, however, he achieved some outstanding successes not least of which was the distinction of becoming the Club's first senior international representative. As a youth he won the Halifax, Bradford and Yorkshire Championships and was 4th in the 'National'. He won the Burnsall fell race three years in succession in 1955, 1956 and 1957, breaking the record twice. His best time of 13min 56.8sec in 1957 had, at that time, only ever been bettered by the legendary Ernest Dalzell. In 1957, as a senior and having finished 10th in the 'National', he was selected to run for England in Lille where he was the country's 6th counter in 39th position.

During the sixties the variety of activities continued to grow. Road running was by now an established activity and there was a growing involvement in fell racing which, hitherto, had mainly been restricted to local events at Eldwick and Burnsall. During 1960 forays were made to Ben Nevis and also to the Three Peaks Race where the first of eight team victories to date was recorded by Geoff Garnett, Oliver Gilbert and Donald Mitchell. The Club has since enjoyed a long association with this event and joined the Three Peaks Association when it was formed in 1964. One of the Club's most consistent performers in 'The Peaks' during the seventies was Alan Spence who very rarely finished outside the top ten places and who was a member of three winning teams. It was not until 1989, however, that Ian Ferguson became the first Harrier to win the 23½ mile race, a feat he repeated in 1991 and 1992, his 1991 time of 2hrs 51min 41sec was a course record. An article written by Bob Smith, the Club's Secretary, in 1966 describes the attraction of the race which in those days started and finished at the Hill Inn:

"A light mist hung over Ingleborough but the long ribbon of runners negotiated it without apparent difficulty. The descent from Penyghent is usually one of the pleasanter sections of the course commanding as it does a magnificent view over the Ribbles Valley and one can see the tiny moving dots of runners by now spread out over several miles. This year, however, it was a succession of tumbles as the runners struggled to maintain equilibrium in the mud and odd patches of snow which lingered persistently. Whernside can be best described as a bad dream (and) is carried out in utter silence save for the odd moan or grunt. All the previous bonhomie of comrades facing a common enemy is forgotten in the grim determination to reach the distant summit. The final desperate lunge

onto the top is accompanied by a wonderful feeling of release and there only remains the short, sharp descent on wooden-like legs to the finish".

A brand new Sports Centre at Nab Wood was opened in September 1975 and the Club were quick to move their Headquarters there with the promise of exclusive use of a changing room. However the new facilities turned out to be somewhat disappointing. Attempts to book the gymnasium for both the Tuesday and Thursday training sessions proved impossible and suggestions that track and field facilities might also be provided came to nothing.

Poor track facilities in the area coupled with the loss of the use of a gymnasium meant that many athletes began to turn their attention to other branches of the sport. A small group of Harriers had regularly been taking part in various fell races which had grown steadily in popularity over the previous ten years. There had always been good support for events at Burnsall and the Three Peaks and when the Fell Runners Association was formed in 1970 Geoff Garnett, Donald Mitchell and Jack Bates were among its first members. Harriers began to compete at Pendle, Fairfield, Harden Moss and Skiddaw with varying degrees of success. Martin Weeks, who had won the 1973 Burnsall race in a new record time of 13min 11sec, achieved a great deal of success over the next few seasons but during 1974 and 1975 he turned his attention to the track where he concentrated on the steeplechase and 5,000m events. During 1976 he returned to the fells and became the first ever Yorkshireman to win the Fell Runner of the Year Award and in doing so set new records at both Burnsall and Pike O'Bliscoe.

During the early seventies a nucleus of youngsters were brought to the Club who showed so much promise that their coaches felt there was a strong possibility of putting together a youths team that could do well in the Northern Championships. They actually laid the foundations upon which, a decade and a half later, the Club was to win the National Championship twice with a bulk of home grown talent. So strong was this group of youngsters that for ten years, from 1975 to 1985 they produced the strongest competition in Yorkshire on the road, fell and country. During the 1975/76 season Colin Moore won the Yorkshire Boys' Cross Country Championship and the following year the junior squad was strengthened when another Keighley youngster, Steve Binns, was recruited.

In the early 1980s the nation experienced a tremendous upsurge in road running which increased participation and interest in this particular branch of athletics. Marathons in both London and Bradford attracted a great number of people, many having had no previous connection with the sport. There was a dramatic increase in the membership of the Club which rose from 100 in 1980 to around 500 in 1985. The Harriers had tried to cater for the upsurge of interest in marathon running by organising 'marathon training sessions' on Sunday mornings from Nab Wood Sports Centre. They may have been somewhat taken aback when, on the first morning, around 300 keen novices turned up for training. Although many fell by the wayside quite a few joined the Club and are still active members. This increase in membership meant that the Harriers could now compete at a very good

standard in every branch of athletics. During the eighties Bingley Harriers were able to field strong teams at district, county, regional and national level in cross country, track, road and fell events. Junior teams and individuals were prominent in many areas whilst the ladies section continued to prosper.

In spite of the fact that, after some 30 years of trying, Bingley Harriers were still without training facilities at its headquarters, 1988 proved to be a very special year on the track. Having won the AAA 10,000m Championship Steve Binns was selected to represent Great Britain in the Olympic Games in Seoul. Steve spent 10 weeks in S. Moritz and 2 weeks in Japan preparing for the Games but, running almost a minute outside his best time, he finished 13th in his heat and unfortunately missed out on qualification for the final. The Club continued to produce international athletes at this distance and in 1990 both Richard Nerurkar and Colin Moore, having finished first and second in the AAA 10,000m Championships in Gateshead, were selected to run in the European Championships in Yugoslavia where Richard finished 5th and Colin 18th. Richard went on to compete in the World Championships in Tokyo in 1991 and the following year was selected to represent Great Britain in the Olympic Games in Barcelona where Bingley Harriers once again saw one of their number competing, this time in the final of the 10,000m.

The growing popularity of fell races did not escape the attention of the Harriers and in June 1981 Peter Jebb organised the first Buckden Pike Fell Race over a distance of about 4 miles, held in conjunction with Buckden Village Gala. The race, which is noted for its testing final descent, regularly attracts 200 competitors and in 1991 was featured in BBC Television's Look North programme. Peter completed the 72 mile 'Bob Graham' round in 1981 with Barry Peace and Ian Ferguson and also won the 62 mile Fellsman Hike. Peter's eye for the longer distance events was turned in 1984 to the 270 miles of the Pennine Way. In 1975 Clayton-le-Moors Harriers, using 24 runners, had established a record of about 35 hours which had been reduced by a number of clubs and now stood at 29hrs 46min. After an unsuccessful attempt in 1984, the Harriers succeeded in reducing the record to 29hr 39min 16sec the following year only to see it wrested away from them shortly afterwards by Holmfirth Harriers. An attempt was made in 1989 to reclaim the record when a 'race' was organised over the route between Bingley and Pudsey and Bramley Harriers. This attempt floundered in bad weather and the following year the Harriers once again set out from Edale with renewed determination. Unfortunately, the time of 29hr 8min 20sec was not recognised because of a dispute over a shorter route taken by Holmfirth Harriers when a quicker time was achieved by them.

During the eighties more and more Bingley athletes became involved in fell running including a few lady members. Maggie Dunn during 1988 won the 62 mile Fellsman Hike, set a new ladies' record in winning the Lakeland 4 x 3,000 event and went on to become the first and so far the only lady member to complete the Bob Graham Round.

Although there were always a few Bingley vests at most of the major events it wasn't until the second half of the decade that the Club began seriously to threaten the likes of Keswick and Kendal in team competition. Martin Weeks, Peter Jebb, Barry Peace, Ian Ferguson, David Weatherhead and Gordon Brooks had all been prolific competitors but it wasn't until Bob Whitfield joined from Kendal in 1987 that Bingley were able to raise teams that were sufficiently strong enough to make any impact. That year saw Bob Whitfield win the FRA English Championship, juniors Andy Peace and Steve Hawkins selected to run in the World Cup in Switzerland and the Club, which had finished 3rd in the FRA Championship, win the Calderdale Way Relay for the first time. At Burnsall the fell race was dominated by Bingley athletes with wins by Mick Hawkins, his brother Steve, and also Andy Peace who was to record the first of three successive victories in 1989. In finishing second to Andy in 1989, Steve Hawkins recorded, what was the fastest ever descent at that time, of 3mins 50secs. Both Mick and Steve Hawkins had competed successfully in professional guides' races in Cumbria, the Dales and Scotland and on being granted amateur status had joined Bingley Harriers in 1985 and 1986 respectively.

Places in the English World Cup Team were won by Andy Peace (senior) and Steve Brooks (junior) in 1989 and by the Club's Welsh international, Jill Teague, in 1990 and 1991. In 1992 Steve Hawkins, who had won the British Fell Championship, and Ian Holmes, who had become the first Harrier to win the Northern Counties Fell Championship, were selected for the senior World Cup team in Italy along with Matthew Whitfield who competed in the junior event.

The English Fell Championship was won, for the first time by the Harriers, in 1991. During that year Bob Whitfield won both the English and British Veteran Fell Championships and Bingley teams were successful at the Three Peaks, Burnsall and Ben Nevis with Andy Peace, Ian Ferguson and Ian Holmes all prominent. 1991 was also the year that the Harriers took their turn to host the FRA Fell Relay Championship at Kettlewell. The Harriers were once again able to demonstrate their organisational skills and the occasion was a perfect setting for the team to record the first of their two wins to date in this competition. Bingley Harriers' teams at last were able to compete on equal terms in fell relay events recording wins in both the Ian Hodgson Relay and the Calderdale Way Relay during 1992.

In cross country competition Bingley came close to victory in the English Championship in 1987 when the team were runners-up and Steve Binns finished in 2nd place but any hopes that might have been raised were quickly dashed when in the 1989 the Club could not even field a full senior team. Success finally came in the 1990 Championship at Roundhay Park, Leeds, when ex-Bradford Grammar School pupil and former Oxford Blue Richard Nerurkar won the English Cross Country Championship, an achievement he went on to repeat a year later. Nerurkar, coached by Bruce Tulloh, had spent some time in Kenya training at altitude and his cross country prowess earned him a place in several World Cross Country Championships. The signs were that the Club meant business. In the 1991 'National' at Luton 98 years of cultivation at last paid off when, under the guidance of a newly appointed Championship Team Manager, Peter Moon, Bingley Harriers finally became English Cross Country Champions. The winning team consisted of five internationals, Richard Nerurkar,

Steve Brooks, Colin Moore, Mick Hawkins and Steve Binns with Martin Peace as 6th counter clinching the victory. Success in the English Championship was a momentous achievement and one which was made all the more satisfying by the fact that all but one of the team had begun their careers as juniors with the Club. Steve Brooks' performance in the race was good enough to earn him a place in the World Championships alongside Richard Nerurkar. The success of 1991 was repeated two years later at Parliament Hill Fields during the Club's Centenary year when the Harriers once again became English Champions. Richard Nerurkar gained his third National title and, supported by Colin Moore, Mick Hawkins, Andy Peace, Steve Green and Shaun Winstanley, led the team to a significant 146 point victory over their nearest rivals, Tipton Harriers.

In the Centenary year the Club's membership stood at just over 490, including 150 veterans, 140 ladies and 150 juniors.

So what does the future hold in store? A tremendous amount of progress has been made over the years and yet many opportunities and challenges lie ahead as the Harriers enter into their 2nd century. The Club continues to strive for a headquarters with proper training facilities, whilst athletically there will always be something for everyone of all ages and abilities to aim for. Whatever trophies or facilities the future may bring it has been the determination and dedication of the Club's members that has brought us to this milestone and that is what will deliver us to the next.

Taken from 'The Story So Far' by Mick Watson © Bingley Harriers & A.C.