

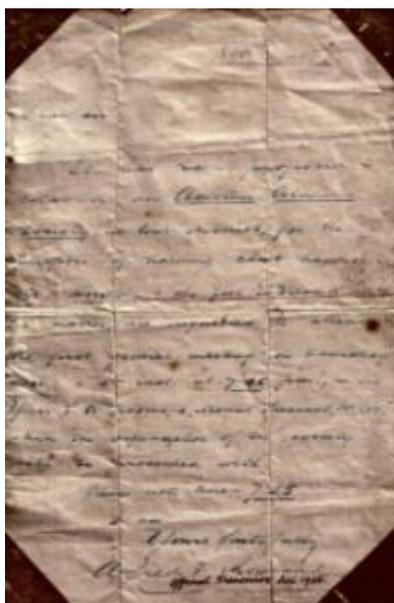
A Brief History of Southport Waterloo AC



Waterloo Harriers and Athletic Club
Season 1897-98

The Waterloo story

1. Southport Waterloo AC can trace its roots directly back to the late 19th century when Alfred G Rowland called a public meeting to establish an amateur athletic society in the Waterloo area of North Liverpool. On November 1st 1897, he posted a public notice as follows:



Nov 1st 1897

Dear Sir,

It has been proposed to establish an Amateur Athletic Society in this district for the purpose of holding club handicaps etc.; anybody who feel interested in the matter, are requested to attend the first general meeting on Thursday next, the 4th. inst. at 7-45 p.m., in the Y.M.C.A Rooms, 4 Mount Pleasant, W'loo., when the organisation of the society will be proceeded with. Please note time - 7-45

I am

Yours faithfully

Alfred G. Rowland.

The letter of 1 November 1897 calling a general meeting to establish an Amateur Athletic Society in Waterloo

2. Waterloo Harriers and Athletic Club was duly formed and was to continue in existence until 1977 when it merged with Southport AC to form today's club Southport Waterloo AC. The merged club kept alive the names of two of England's most historic athletic clubs.



Liverpool & District Medley Relay Champions 1934 to 1938

Front row: Dennis Bracey, Norman Jones, Eric Dowell, Phil Lucas
Back row: W S Drury Hon Sec, A Jones Chairman, J D Drury NCAA Rep

3. In their familiar blue and white hoops, Waterloo Harriers were a powerful force in Northern athletics. In 1967 their youth team took the prestigious Sheffield Challenge Trophy by winning the English Cross Country Championships over a fast and fairly flat course at Norwich.



The Waterloo Harriers Youth team who won the English cross-country championships at Norwich in 1967.

Left to right: Bob Cahill, Michael Wood, Mark Donovan and Philip Cory

The Southport story

4. Athletics in the Southport area is arguably of even greater historical significance than Waterloo, although athletics clubs have come and gone over the years.

5. In the middle of the 19th century, athletics was largely a professional sport with races run for prize money and a considerable amount of on-course betting taking place. Independent amateur athletics clubs started to be formed in the 1860s and one such was the Southport Athletic Society.

6. The Southport Independent and Ormskirk Chronicle of Wednesday 10th August 1870 reports, very much in the language of the times:

“The first annual festival of this society was held on Saturday afternoon last, on the Palace Hotel grounds in Weld Road, Birkdale, and the inaugural gathering has fully justified the expectations of those who predicted success to the society. Considering that muscular development has for many years past formed part of the school training of all youth, and that athletic sports have now become a popular national institution, it is rather surprising that Southport should have remained so long in the background in this respect, as the events of Saturday amply prove that they are thoroughly appreciated.*

The day being remarkably fine, a large number of persons assembled to witness the sports, and the grandstand, which extended along one side of the ground, was filled with spectators; the fair sex, whose presence on such occasions never fails to stimulate competitors to do their utmost to win their smiles, and throws a peculiar charm over these sports, being unusually well represented. There was also a large crowd round the course, and great interest appeared to be manifested in the various contests. The number present amounted to about 4000.”

* The Birkdale Palace Hotel was opened in 1866 and finally demolished in 1969. The grounds are now a developed residential area but one link to history remains. The Fisherman’s Rest pub in Weld Rd, the destination pub for club runners undertaking the annual New Year’s Day Run from the Coastguard Station in Blundellsands along the Sefton Coastal Path to Birkdale, was originally the coach house for the hotel. It was converted to a public house so that the hotel bar could be reserved for residents.

7. The festival events were: 220 yds flat race, handicap; running high leap; 1 mile steeplechase, handicap; 2 mile bicycle race, handicap; running broad jump; ½ mile flat race, handicap; throwing the hammer, 16lbs; 100yd flat race; pole leaping; 2 mile walking match, handicap; 150 yds 3-legged race; throwing the cricket ball; 220 yds slow bicycle race; 220 yds flat race for youths; ½ mile steeplechase, handicap; 2 mile flat race, handicap; 1 mile bicycle race; 410 yds flat race for Lancashire volunteers, in uniform, with bayonets or swords; 120 yds 3-legged race for youths.

8. On June 15, 1879, the Southport Athletic Society put on one of its athletic festivals and, in the evening, hosted a tea at the Prince of Wales Hotel in Southport and "to take into consideration the desirability of forming a Northern Amateur Championship Meeting". There already was an annual championships but it was elitist, held in Fulham, London, and invariably won by "gentleman" amateurs from Oxford or Cambridge Universities. George Duxfield of the Southport Society promoted the idea of a Northern Championships and the

Southport meeting was to put in train events that led, in August of the same year, to 13 Northern athletic clubs constituting themselves as the Northern Counties Athletic Association, later to be known as the North of England Amateur Athletic Association, the oldest athletic association in the world, finally to be reconstituted as Northern Athletics in 2006, in a sense back to its roots as a competition provider. The Southport Athletic Society was a founder member. Duxfield himself went on to become President of Northern Counties and a Vice President of the AAAs of England.

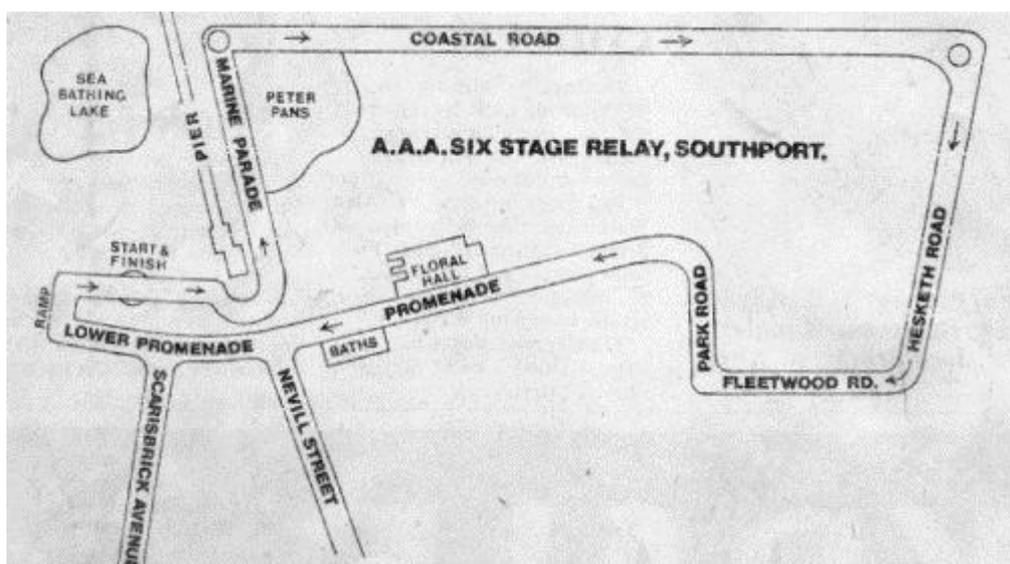
9. The Northern Counties did decide to hold an annual championships and as this was originally proposed by the Southport Athletic Society, the first championships were held on Southport's ground in 1880. The 15 events were 100 yds, quarter mile, half mile, mile, two miles, 120 yd hurdles, three quarter mile steeplechase, one mile cycling, five mile cycling, pole jump, high jump, broad jump, shot and gymnastics (horizontal and parallel bars). In 1885, the annual AAAs Championships, now being rotated between the South, Midlands and the North, were held in Southport, again on Southport Athletic Society's ground.

10. Shortly afterwards, in about 1902, Southport Harriers was formed and continued until the early 1960s when it, too, folded. In 1969, Ray Bishop, Larry Hyland, Johnny Wright and others formed Southport AC, merging with Waterloo Harriers in 1977.



One of the last photographs of Southport Harriers before it was disbanded

back row 3rd left is Larry Hyland, late Chairman of Southport Waterloo 1995 -2003 and far right standing is Johnny Wright



Southport Course for the AAA's 6-stage road relays

11. The other major contribution Southport has made to athletics is the AAA's 6-stage road relays which Southport AC and then Southport Waterloo AC staged in 1970, 1971, 1976, 1979 - the 100th anniversary of the historic meeting in the Prince of Wales Hotel - and again in 1985. The start and finish was in Kings Gardens, with the course following the traditional route of Marine Parade, Coastal Road, Hesketh Road, Fleetwood Road and the Promenade. Note the limited extent of the coastal road in those days.

Southport Waterloo AC

12. Formed in 1977* by the merger of Waterloo Harriers with Southport AC, the club has had a long tradition in road running, cross country, road relays and track & field. With no headquarters of its own, Committee meetings were held in the homes of committee members. However, the main training venue in the 80s and 90s was the Chaffers athletics track, a traditional cinder track off Glenwyllin Road, Crosby, in the Rimrose Valley parkland. Athletics training for youngsters was also held in the north of the borough at Christ the King and latterly Greenbank High Schools.

** There is some uncertainty about exactly when Waterloo Harriers and Southport AC merged. However, there is evidence that the new club competed in the Liverpool & District and the Lancashire Road Relays in September and October 1977 respectively, runners having competed for their old clubs earlier in the year. So, we assume the club dates from 1977.*

13. When Edge Hill University built a synthetic track at their Ormskirk campus, middle distance and sprint training squads from the club used the facility from about 2000 until 2006. A separate squad trained on the synthetic track at the Kirkby Stadium.

14. For many years, the club campaigned for its own all-weather synthetic track to replace the cinder track at Chaffers and bring all the track training together. When the National Lottery was established and started to give grants for sporting projects, a bid was made and was eventually successful around 1995. However, perhaps because of the increased availability of funds for such projects, costs escalated and the bid-for funds were no longer sufficient.

15. Some years later, funding became available from schools sources and, together with substantial support from Sefton Council and the Football Association, the redevelopment of the Moss Lane, Litherland, playing fields was established with a 6-lane, 8-lane straight, synthetic track with a shared club-room and changing facilities in a purpose built leisure centre.



Layout of the proposed Litherland Sports Park and athletics track

16. The Litherland Sports Park athletics track was opened in 2007, with training starting there on 11th July and later that month the first athletics match was held, a 4th round of the Mid Lancs League. With 51 athletes turning out, we won the males match and were 2nd in the female division. An open relays meeting was held in September and Southport Waterloo has hosted an open T&F meeting at Litherland each year.

17. The club has had a long tradition of hosting road races including; the Southport Town Centre 5K; the Southport Half Marathon; the Southport 10k; the Larry Hyland Autumn 5; the Good Friday 10K and latterly 4 mile races; and the ever popular Waterloo 15K multi-terrain race. All these races had disappeared from the racing calendar by 2013 when a new series of races commenced, the Sandgrounder 10K, 5K and 3K races in Victoria Park in Southport. Regrettably that event lasted only until the end of 2014.