
SWAC thru' the years in the Mid Lancs XC League

The enforced pandemic lockdown has given some of us the time and opportunity to look at projects previously out of reach. One such was an attempt to recover and publish a full set of Mid Lancs XC League results. The Mid Lancs League has provided excellent cross country running for North West runners since 1931, with the exception of the 1939-45 war years. The Results Archive - not quite a full set - is now published on the Cross Country page of the [Mid Lancs web site](#) and provides an opportunity for runners to look back at their own performances and those of contemporaries over the years and remember their successes and not-so successful races. It also provides an opportunity for us to look back at the successes of Southport Waterloo AC over the years and applaud some significant performers.

Early Years and into the '80s

Southport Waterloo AC was formed in 1978 with the merger of Southport AC and Waterloo Harriers. Prior to the merger, both clubs competed in cross country. Waterloo Harriers ran in the local Liverpool & District Cross Country Union whilst Southport AC from its more northerly base was a member of the Mid Lancs League. Latterly, the club has competed in both leagues, often splitting our Senior Men's team when the dates conflicted. Our current club President **Steve James** is the first name I have found in the Mid Lancs results. A life-long athlete, Steve was 3rd at the Blackpool fixture in November 1974, his first Mid Lancs run after arriving in Merseyside and joining Southport AC. In that race, Steve was beaten only by two international runners, one who ran the marathon for GB, and the other who ran for Canada in the Edinburgh Commonwealth Games. That's a quality field! Another Southport AC runner who ran in the Mid Lancs XC League in 1975, but moved to Liverpool Harriers before the merger, was Geoff Smith, a sub 4 minute miler, a 2:09 marathoner and who ran the 10,000m at the Moscow Olympics Games in 1980.

Steve James also has an impressive pedigree as a distance runner. He was winning national races in the late 50s and 60s and was a 4:05 miler. He won the National Junior XC Champs at Peterborough in March 1959 but thinks his best cross country race was in Lyon, France, in December 1959, a race he won by beating a very good Frenchman and 2 good English runners. In a long career he has been a remarkably successful veteran runner. His extraordinary achievements on becoming an MV60 can be seen on our club [Honours Board](#) and include a World Record track 5000m. The photo here shows Steve winning the M65 class at the British Masters XC Champs in 2004.



Currently the Senior Men's team manager, Steve has been a regular runner in the Mid Lancs XC League over the past 40 years. In the late '70s and '80s, he regularly featured as a successful runner when there weren't many from the club running XC. He was 1st Mid Lancs vet in 1985/86, 1986/87 and 1987/88 and in the minor placings in other years.

Nick Hume - now the Secretary of Blackpool Wyre & Fylde AC and President of the Mid Lancs League - Terry Hanley and later Colin Hughes and Ted Maguire feature in the '80s with just a few juniors such as Clare Bolland and Matthew Thompson in the early years. Many runners with Waterloo Harriers had already left the club when the merger took place and so there were very few left running cross country for the new Southport Waterloo.

Females runners didn't compete in the Mid Lancs Cross Country League until the 1969/70 season. This inequality relates back a long time, I think, to the separation of male and female athletics and their governing bodies throughout much of the 20th century. They did have their own cross country leagues and cross country championships but not on the same scale as the men. There were few women running in the Mid Lancs XC League when we joined. By the late '80s we had our first senior women running; Sheila Marshal, Lorraine Marshal and Bev Rothwell being early names found in the results.

From small beginnings, the club grew in strength during the 1980s and gradually we saw more junior as well as senior runners taking part. Numbers of junior runners built as more and more came to enjoy the thrill of cross country running. By the late '80s we were seeing team finishes and in 1986/87 our Boys had their first team

success, as Boys (U14) Champions. Running in that team were Sean Bolland, J Morgan, Mark Allen, Andy Cooper, David Lount and Matthew Thompson.

Also in the 1986/87 season - at Blackburn in January '87 - a young **Steve Wilkinson** won his first Mid Lancs cross country race as a Colt. Steve would go on to compete for his club in XC, Road and T&F for many years; and still actively competes today.

The girls were not without early success either, finishing 2nd Minor Girls' team in 1986/87, **Ellen Hickey** taking the individual title. The girls went on to individual success the following year with **Lynsey Allen** awarded 1st Minor Girl and her team placed 2nd overall. Remarkably, the club had 8 Minor Girls competing regularly in the 1987/88 season, Lynsey being supported by Michelle Mercer, Sam Dean, S Huddleston and C Quigley to name a few. And in 1989/90 Rosie Fearon was 2nd Minor Girl, her team again finishing the season in 2nd place overall..

(Note on junior categories: Until early 1990s, we had Minor Girls or Fillies, Girls or Junior Girls and Inter girls; Colts, Boys or Junior Boys and Youths. Minors and Colts were reclassified as Under 13s, Girls and Boys (or Juniors) became Under 15s and Inter Girls and Youths became Under 17s.)

The Golden '90s

As far as our junior runners are concerned, the 1990's were the golden years. Our Under 15 Boys were champions in 1991/92 (U14 Boys) and again in 1997/98. Our Under 13 Boys were champions 4 years running from 1995 thru' to 1998/99. Our Under 15 Girls were league champions in 1994/95 and 1995/96. And our Under 13 Girls in 1993/94, 1994/95, 1995/96 and 1997/98. Throughout this period, the club had a strong reputation for middle and distance running and that translated into cross country success.



In the 1994/95 season, **Catherine Terry** competed as a 1st year Under 13 Girl and was soon finishing with the leaders. In 1995/96 she was the Mid Lancs Under 13 Girls' Champion, won the Under 15 title the following year and would I think have been at least placed in 1997/98 (where we no longer know the final result). One of the club's best female cross country runners, Catherine took the North of England Under 13 XC title in 1996 and the English Schools Junior Girls' title in 1997. Maybe not on the same scale, but Catherine still holds the Under 15 Girls' 1500m [club record](#) she set in 1997.

Catherine also competed as an Under 13 Girl a year earlier, in the 1993/94 season, when, along with Melodie Burke, Celia Whelan, Sue Martin, and Kerry Thomas, they won the team title. 1994/95 was another good year for the girls, the Under 13s (Catherine Terry, Claire Farrington, Clare Dickinson, Helen Knaggs and Clare Mercer) and Under 15s (Melodie Burke, Celia Whelan, Kate Edwards, Nicola Taylor and Becky Lepp) both finishing as champion teams, a success that was to be repeated in 1995/96. And the Under 15s won again in 1996/97!

By the end of the decade, the girls were progressing thru' the age groups and Stephanie May and Emma Chandley were making their mark as young Under 13s.

Sam Dean and Celia Whelan joined the ranks of the Senior Women who throughout the '90s were never a competitive force within the league. Kath Harrison in the 1990/91 season was

perhaps the strongest runner. Christine Cutner, Anne Howdego, Susan Cooper, Eileen Walsh, Bev Rothwell and Sheila Marshal were our fairly regular cross country runners.

Southport Waterloo's boys were even more successful than the girls.

The Under 13s Boys won the title four years running from 1995/96 to 1998/99. In the 1995/96 season our winning team was led by **James Tartt** running alongside Laurence Collins, Dominic O'Dowd, Henry Stewart and Mark Donaghue. James Tartt was 2nd individual in that season with Laurence Collins 3rd. He was individual 2nd again in the following season, Mark Donaghue 3rd, with Henry Stewart, David and Mark McGinty in the winning team. James is one of only a handful of junior runners who have continued to represent their club at Senior level. He was also the Liverpool & District Cross Country Champion in 2012 and 2013, had many successes on the track and holds senior [club records](#) at 800m, 1500m and 1 mile.

Success for the Under 13 Boys continued in 1997/98 with a new team who swept all before them in the league.

This was led by **Michael Rimmer**. I am sure cross country running for the young teenager was a factor in building the endurance that helped Michael become one of GB's top 800m runners with many international appearances to his credit.

With support from Andrew Donaldson, Alex Sinclair, David Phillips and subsequently Mark Leicester and Brian Boggild, this team achieved Under 13 success in 1997/98 and 1998/99 with Michael Rimmer the individual champion in both years and David Phillips 2nd in 1998/99.

As some of the more successful Under 13s, including Messrs Donaghue, Donegan, Tartt and Collins, moved up an age group, our Under 15 Boys won the championship title in 1997/98.

Current club Secretary Chris Henders competed in Mid Lancs cross country in the '90s and, as an Under 17, went on to win the GB Catholic Schools' XC Champs in 1996. Chris Henders, Martin O'Neill, Vincent Luttman-Allen, Dave and Emlyn Owen won the Mid Lancs Under 17 team title in 1995/96. Then, supported by Kieron McGing and Matty Brown, James Tartt and Stephen Donegan achieved further success, taking the Under 17 Men's team bronze medals in the 1999/00 season. Emlyn Owen was 3rd Junior Man in 1998/99 and in the same year the Senior Men had their first team success winning team bronze medals. Kevin Taylor was the runner making the difference and he was well supported by Steve Wilkinson, Simon Davenport, Anton Crimp, Dave Farrington, Mark Jones, Gary and Neil Kenny and, of course, Steve James; MV50 champion in 1996/97 and Vet 50 silver medallist in 1998/99, on return to Merseyside.

Seniors make an impact in the '00s



As every team manager knows, team success depends on having some outstanding performers and then getting numbers out on a regular basis to back them up. The legacy of success in the '90s was that more of our junior and senior athletes were running cross country and success breeds success going forward.

For the Under 13 Girls, the story was one of individual rather than team success, although the girls did win team medals in 2003/4 and 2005/6. In 2001/2 **Rhea Ellis** came on to the cross country scene winning races as an Under 11 and then as an Under 13. In 2003/4 she won all 5 of her Under 13 Girls' races taking the individual title that year and, with Stephanie James, Lydia Hurley and Lauren Brennan they finished 2nd team. By 2005/6, the 3rd placed team medallists were Amelia Peacock, Emma Lyons, Laura Riley and Jane Ingram.

Moving up to Under 15, Rhea and team-mate Stephanie James continued to impress, Rhea the 2004/5 and 2005/6 individual champion, winning all 5 of her races as a 2nd year Under 15. Surprisingly, there were no team wins but Rhea, Stephanie and Louise Leek continued to compete as Under 17s, Rhea picking up more individual medals. Southport Waterloo was the first club to take the Under 17 Women's trophy in 2001/02. Between 1992 and 2001, the Under 17 Women ran as Under 20s.

Interest in cross country running amongst our Senior Women was growing through the decade. **Sue Cooper** was probably the most prolific and making a name for herself as a veteran runner,

going on to win British Masters titles as a W45 to W60 and earning an England vest as well as taking numerous vet awards in the Mid Lancs XC League.

With participation growing, the team strength grew reaching a high point in the 2004/5 season winning the Senior Women Division 1 trophy. But generally, the Women were yo-yoing between Division 1 and Division 2, winning the Division 2 title in 2008/09 and again in 2012/13. The winning team in 2004/5 included Katherine Sweatenham, Celia Whelan, Sam Dean Howard, Ann Eggington, Christine Cutner, Michelle Mercer, Nicky Taylor and vet runner **Sue Cooper** who was 1st LV45 in 2003/04. With some great running from Amanda Crook, Katherine Ward, Angela Delaney, Karen Faloon and others in the latter half of the decade, there could have been more team successes but participation was patchy and lacking the sustained effort needed to bring team success. They did, however, win the LV45 team trophy in 2009/10.

Our Boys won the Under 13 team title in both the 2004/5 and 2008/9 seasons. Tom Vandermeer was 3rd overall, supported by George Scally and Joe & Patrick Vis who must take the award for 'most improved runners' over the decade. Liam Ellis, an individual silver medallist in 2007/8 and 2008/9, led the team with Michael Panes, Gary Clark and Owen Williams who won every fixture in 2008/9.

Harry Boyd took the individual Under 15 title in 2005/06. Our Under 15 Boys took team medals in six years of the decade, winning the title in 2006/7, led by Jai Vernon-McGuigan, Paul Gavan and the Vis brothers; Joe and Patrick Vis having further success as Under 17s.

At the start of the decade, our Senior Men were in Division 2. Despite an early and temporary promotion to Division 1, they fell back to Division 3 in 2004/5 but within 6 years, they had built in strength and won the coveted Senior Men's Division 1 championship by the end of the decade. Success was built in part by the return

of **Rob Berry** - a track distance and steeplechase specialist - to run cross country for the club, winning a string of individual fixtures and the overall Senior Champion in 2006/07, the only Southport Waterloo runner ever to do so! Rob was also a 3-times winner of the Liverpool & District XC Championships. Over the decade, he was well supported by Richard Shearer, Steve Wilkinson, Rob Ashworth, David Hamilton, James Tartt - 7-times club Senior Cross Country Champion - and, by the championship winning year, Joe and Patrick Vis moving up to run the Senior race and taking silver and bronze individual Under 20 Men medals that year, with more successes to come. And Steve James continued to win Mid Lancs Veteran medals.

Veteran Success in the '10s; Bringing the story up to date.

The 2010 years were not the club's best for Junior cross country running. Only in 2015/16 did our Under 13 Girls win team medals, bronze, with **Olivia Logan** moving up from Under 11 to join Lilly-Ann Grayson and Freya Walsh. Emma Alderson took two individual medals in 12/13 and 13/14 but without any team finishes in support. Triathlete Olivia developed into one of our best cross country runners, taking individual Under 13 silver in 2016/17 and going on to be the individual champion in '17/18 and '18/19. There was little success in the Under 15 Girls' category in the first half of the decade until Olivia came through with Jessica Dean, Lilly-Ann and Freya to take team medals in 2016/17 and 2017/18. At Under 17 level, Jessica Dean and Olivia Logan scored well in the last years of the decade,

At Senior level, good numbers of our women cross country runners continued to compete in Division 2 of the League with just two brief promotions up to Division 1. They won the Division 2 title in 2012/13 and finished 2nd in Division 2 in 2017/18. Fell runner Michelle Spencer, a regular stalwart of the team, with Tracey (Peters) Allan and, latterly, Nicola Simpson were our fastest cross country runners. But the real success has been in the Vet category. The Ladies have won team titles at LV45 and LV55 - twice - and won several team place awards at all veteran levels from LV35 to LV65. At individual level **Sue Cooper** won the LV55 individual title in 2010/11 and 2011/12 and **Sue Stewart** won the LV65 title in 2015/16 with silver and bronze awards in subsequent years.

For the Boys, 3rd place team success was achieved in 2010/11 but we had to wait until the latter years of the decade for any real potential to show. Sammy Pickerill was an



individual winner at Under 11 level and **Monty Barr** was the 2019/20 Under 13 Boys' champion. For the under 15 Boys, Andrew Kershaw, Liam Ellis, Michael Panes, Luke Tyson and Jonathon Foster made up a strong squad to win the team championship in 2010/11 and team silver the following year when Andrew took the overall individual silver award. After that, finishing an Under 15 Boys' team was a rarity but Liam Ellis, Niall Cullen and Jonathon Foster were 2nd team in 2011/12 and Andrew Kershaw was an Individual 3rd place winner as an Under 17 in 2012/13. Andrew went on to run for the Senior team, as did Patrick and **Joe Vis**, boy runners from the previous decade, Joe being the Under 20 Mid Lancs champion in 2010/11 and again in 2011/12. Success at Under 17 or Under 20 level is itself a rarity and is rightly applauded as good runners progress through to the senior ranks.

In the early years of the decade we witnessed the close contest at the top of Senior Men's Division 1 between Southport Waterloo and Barrow & Furness Striders. By this time, we had no shortage of men running cross country and, in 2010/11, with James Tartt, Richard Shearer, David Hamilton, Steve Wilkinson and Steve McLean - to name but a few - we won the title over Barrow for the second consecutive year. The following year Barrow took the honours with Southport Waterloo 2nd, but we finished top of the pile again in 2012/13. **James Tartt** also took

two individual Senior Men's silver awards in 2011/12 and 2012/13 and **Joe Vis** was 3rd Senior Man in 2013/14. At Senior team level, it was all downhill from there, finishing the decade with a relegation to Division 2. The Vet men, however, were going from strength to strength and were the backbone of our Senior Men squad. The club won the MV40 Div 3 title in 2002/03, won the MV40 Div 2 title in 2004/05 and, during the 2010s in Division 1, won 10 sets of MV40 team medals in the decade - champions 4 times, and runners-up 6 times. As runners moved thru' to the next veteran category, six MV50 championship titles were taken, in 2011/12 and then each year from '15/16 to '19/20 - and one MV60 championship win in 2017/18. At individual level, **Matt Thompson** took the MV40 individual title 4 years running between 2012/13 and 2015/16. **David Hamilton** won two individual MV50 titles, **John Sprackland** one MV50 title, **Rob Johnson** two MV60 2nd place awards and **Francois Rafferty** took another individual award, an MV50 2nd place. And they had many more top ten individual finishes. Over the years, Southport Waterloo AC has recorded 46 Mid Lancs team and 29 individual wins. Only two clubs have more male team wins than Southport Waterloo; Clayton le Moors Harriers and Blackburn Harriers - and Blackburn only overtook us in the 2019/20 season! Like all clubs, participation and success can be inconsistent with good harvests some years and famine in others. But, looking at where we are now, one can't help conclude that it is not a healthy position for the club to have its strength in cross country running resting mainly with veteran runners. I wish all our veteran or Masters runners continued success but we need to see more youngsters coming through. There are several young athletes with potential like the multi-talented **Olivia Logan**, **Sammy Pickerill** and **Monty Barr**; but what we need is more young athletes being exposed to the joy, exhilaration and freedom of cross country running - a sport that can provide a lifetime of enjoyment, camaraderie and running fitness. Apologies for any errors or omissions.



Ron Scott
18th July 2020