



**Veterans Athletic Club**

**Newsletter**

**December 2023**



**Well done Sue McDonald!**

**British Masters Female Athlete of the Year**

## VAC Committee Members: Sept 2023 – Sept 2024

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Veterans Athletic Club was established in 1931 and is affiliated to England Athletics, BMAF, South of England AA, Surrey County AA, the Race Walking Association and the South of the Thames Cross Country Association. We offer athletic competition for men and women aged 35 and over. Cross-country, road, track & field as well as race walking - there is something for everyone. Based in London with members across the South East, we can provide opportunities to compete with other like-minded masters/veterans. A fixture list is printed in the newsletter. Please support these events. The newsletter welcomes contributions and events always need volunteers, as well as competitors. If you want to get involved, contact any of the Committee members listed above.



## Editor Angela Kikugawa Writes

First of all a very Happy New Year to you all and I hope 2024 brings you good health and running success.

I attended the European Cross Country Championships in Brussels at the beginning of December and the British team had a great success. Sadly we didn't make the veterans race on the

Saturday but were able to enjoy a full programme on the Sunday.

A highlight for me was to see Irish runner, Fionnuala McCormack take fourth place in the senior race at the grand age of 39. The previous week she had qualified for her fifth Olympics for Ireland by running 2.26.19 in the Valencia Marathon and is set to become the first woman in Irish history to compete in five games in a row. All this and only five months after having her third baby!

I was disappointed not to see the great Jakob Ingebrigtsen who was ruled out due to injury but there were some excellent performances. Overall a great event that reminded me just how good cross country is to watch.

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### Photographs

Many thanks to Cliff Hide who provided most of the photos in the newsletter. Cliff takes photos at VAC events and is happy to supply copies to members free of charge, but please give him a credit if you post the photos on social media. For copies of photos, contact him on [cliffhide10@aol.com](mailto:cliffhide10@aol.com)



## Message from Peter Kennedy

We have 659 members at present, which means we are the largest BMAF area club. Since March we have attracted 75 new members which leaves us with 29 more members than a year ago. By March 2024, I expect we will have comfortably passed the previous highest total. Subs for 2024-25 will remain at £12 for 2nd Claim members. First Claim members will pay £31 which includes the England Athletics athlete registration fee of £19 (an

increase on this year's £17).

We have had success in increasing the number of VAC officers. Stuart Matthews volunteered to take on the role of Membership Secretary in October so that I could take over the vacant role of Track & Field Secretary. Dennis Williams is now our President as well as continuing with his other roles, and Anna Garnier is staying on as a member of the committee. We also have Debbie Singleton as the club's Welfare & Safeguarding Officer.

We still need more help in two areas: First a committee officer to be responsible for communications using mass emails, social media and the website. Second, a couple of people to help in organising club competitions in the different disciplines.

Already as T&F Secretary, I organised the first London Masters T&F Championships at Finsbury Park in September with the help of Heathside AC. This was also VAC's championships. Building on the successful model, I am already working on 2024's event.

I am also taking the lead in changing VAC into a limited company which will make it easier to work with suppliers and sponsors, as well as removing the personal liability of our officers in what they are doing on behalf of VAC.

**Peter Kennedy**                      **Veterans AC Track & Field Secretary**

**Stuart Matthews**                **Veterans AC Membership Secretary**

## 2024 Fixtures

Date	Organiser	Event	Venue	Entry	Entry CD
Saturday 13 Jan.	Surrey League (Men and women)	Cross Country Races Match 3 (VAC Men's team is in Div 3/4) (VAC's Women's team is in Div 2)	Oxshott Woods, A244, Oxshott KT22 0TA	All VAC men and women (1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> claim) are eligible, subject to conditions. Details on Surrey League website.	Enter on the day. Advance notice to Paddy Clark (men) or Helen Davies (women)
Saturday 20 Jan.	VAC	VAC Open Masters Cross Country Championships	Wimbledon Common. Start near West Place, SW19 4UH.	7.5km. Men and women run together. Enter through OpenTrack. Start time 2pm. Medals in 5 year age groups	18-Jan
Sunday 4 Feb.	Runbase Events and BMAF Services	British Masters 10k Road Championships Part of the Chichester 10k	Goodwood Motor Circuit, Chichester PO18 0PH	9.30am start. Enter and pay for the race on the Chichester 10k website. ALSO register for the Masters Champs on OpenTrack (free).	Enter early! Closing date 28 January but the race may sell out in advance.
Saturday 10 Feb.	Surrey League (Men and women)	Cross Country Races Match 4 (VAC Men's team is in Div 3/4) (VAC's Women's team is in Div 2)	Lloyd Park. Start near Lloyd Park tram stop, Coombe Road, Croydon CRO 5RA	All VAC men and women (1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> claim) are eligible, subject to conditions. VAC vest necessary.	Enter on the day. Advance notice to Paddy Clark (M) Helen Davies (W)

Sunday 11 Feb.	EMAC and VAC	VAC and EMAC Indoor Track & Field Championships	Lee Valley Athletics Centre, Meridian Way, Edmonton London N9 0AR	Online entry OpenTrack. 60m, 200m, 400m, 800m 1500m, 60mH, 3000m, 2000m Walk, HJ, PV, LJ, TJ, SP	1 Feb.
17-18 February	BMAF Services	British Masters Indoor T&F Championships	Lee Valley Athletics Centre,	Online entry on OpenTrack.	To be announced
Sunday 25 Feb.	England Masters Athletics Association (EMAA)	British Masters Inter Area Indoor Track & Field Challenge. Competition for BMAF Area Clubs.	Lee Valley Athletics Centre, Meridian Way, Edmonton London N9 0AR	VAC Team selected in advance. One person per age group in most events (see VAC website for details). M&W. Age 35-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70+.	Express interest to the Entries Secretary by 17 January. Initial selections made end January.
Saturday 2 March	East Surrey League (Match 2)	Cross Country Race. VAC is a member of the East Surrey League.	Lloyd Park. Start near Lloyd Park tram stop, Coombe Road, Croydon CRO 5RA	VAC men's and women's teams. No limit on numbers. Free entry. Five mile course. Advance notice to the Entries Secretary.	VAC runners declared on the day.

Saturday 16 March	BMAF Services	British Masters Open XC Championships. Also the EMAA Inter-Regional Cross Country Championships.	Rhug Estate, Corwen. North Wales	Details and entry on OpenTrack in due course.	To be announced .
17 - 24 March	European Masters Athletics	European Masters Athletics Championships Indoor	Torun, Poland	Registration via the EMA website or direct on OpenTrack After entry, you must complete a request for GB team approval.	Closing date 4 February for entries. GB team approval must be completed by 12 Feb.
Saturday 30 March	Victoria Dock parkrun	5km parkrun Featuring VAC “mob match” gathering. Come along and meet VAC members. Look out for VAC vests!	Victoria Dock, Siemens Brothers Way, London E16 1GB.	Start time: 9am. New parkrunners must register with parkrun to obtain a Barcode.	Enter on the day (but need your Barcode)
Tuesday 2 April 2024 (other races are on 7 May, 4 June and 16 July)	VAC	VAC Battersea Park Summer Series 5K Masters Road Race 5K Open Race Walk	Battersea Park, London SW11 4NJ Race HQ at the Bandstand.	Battersea Park, London SW11 4NJ Race HQ at the Bandstand.	30 Mar
Tuesday 7 May	VAC	VAC Battersea Park Summer Series 5Mile Masters Road Race 5Mile Open Walk Race	Battersea Park, London SW11 4NJ Race HQ at the Bandstand.	Battersea Park, London SW11 4NJ Race HQ at the Bandstand.	4 May

		<b>VAC Championships</b>			
15-19 May	European Masters Athletics	European Masters Athletics Championships Non Stadia	Porto Santo, Portugal	Details on EMA website in due course.	To be announced
Tuesday 4 June	VAC	VAC Battersea Park Summer Series 5K Masters Road Race 5K Open Walk Race <b>VAC Championships</b>	Battersea Park, London SW11 4NJ Race HQ at the Bandstand.	7pm start. Details and Online entry will be on OpenTrack in due course. Medals for the first three in each 5-year age group.	1 June
Tuesday 16 July	VAC	VAC Battersea Park Summer Series 5K Masters Road Race 5K Open Walk Race	Battersea Park, London SW11 4NJ Race HQ at the Bandstand.	7pm start. Details and Online entry will be on OpenTrack in due course.	13 July
13-25 Aug	World Masters Athletics	World Masters Track & Field Championships	Gothenburg Sweden	Details on World Masters Athletics website in due course.	To be announced
Wed. 11 Sept	VAC	VAC 10,000m Track Championships	Millennium Arena, Battersea Park. London SW11 4NJ	Three races seeded slowest to fastest.	7 Sep
Saturday 21 Sept	Vitality Westminster Mile events	VAC One Mile Road Championships VAC Medals in five- year age groups.	The Mall, London. Assemble in Green Park, London SW1A 1AA	Details in due course on the Vitality Masters Mile website.	To be announced



## New VAC Vests!

New men's and women's club vests are now available. They are made of a lightweight, quick drying, Protex fabric and feature the name Veterans AC in full on the back. The cost is £25 including postage. The men's old stock with its heavier fabric is being sold off at a discounted price of £15 including postage. The women's old stock which benefits from light fabric but doesn't have the club's name on the back is also being sold for £15 including postage.

All vests are official club vests and are available from our kit supplier, Doug Maughan of Douglas Sports. Details and sizes are on the Club Kit tab on VAC's website or email Doug at [info@douglassports.co.uk](mailto:info@douglassports.co.uk).

# News

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## Athletics Weekly Readers' Choice Awards 2023

Each year the widely read Athletics Weekly magazine creates a shortlist of athletes who have excelled in that year in various categories. Two such categories are British Masters Male and Female Athletes of the Year. For 2023, a remarkable four VAC members made the shortlists of six in each Masters' category. This is a fantastic achievement in itself.

In the men's shortlist, **Allan Long, who is pictured on the back page**, (M80) was nominated for his British M80 records indoors and outdoors at 60m, 200m and Triple Jump as well as World Indoor titles at Torun and European Outdoor titles at Pescara.

In the women's shortlist, **Zoe Doyle** (W45) was recognised for winning two Golds at Pescara including setting a new British record for 800m. **Sue McDonald** (W55) was nominated for excellent road results including Gold medals at 10k and Half Marathon at the World champs in Torun and a superb performance at September's Berlin Marathon when she smashed the British record by seven minutes. **Virginia**

**Mitchell** (W60) was recognised for her medal winning 400m and 800m performances at Torun and Pescara, including a 400m World indoor record and an 800m outdoor British W60 record.

After “tens of thousands” of votes had been cast online by readers, the results were announced in December’s edition of AW.

**Sue McDonald was voted the Female Masters Athlete of the Year!**

Her photo is on the front page and her account of the triumph at the Berlin Marathon is on Page 25. VAC’s Zoe Doyle was in a commendable second place. Steeple-chaser Kirstie Booth (W45) was third.

The man with the most votes was Paul Forbes (M65) who has set British and World records at 800m and 1500m. Second was Mo Farah and third was Guy Dirkin (M70) who won World and European Golds for Discus and set a British record for the Weight throw.

**International Festival of Athletics Coaching** by Rob Sargent

In November, I attended this event in Padua, Italy, organised by the European Athletics Coaches Association. It was led by former GB team manager Frank Dick, whose enthusiasm, energy and passion for the sport is second to none. The three-day conference was a mixture of lectures and practical sessions, featuring leading coaches such as Vern Gambetta, Aston Moore, Liz McColgan, Scott Simpson, Marco Airale and Laurent Meuwly. All disciplines of athletics were covered: sprints, endurance, throws and jumps as well as general areas like conditioning and youth retention. The information and insight given by these elite coaches will help me develop as a coach, focussing on Masters athletics. I would like to thank VAC for the grant that assisted me with meeting the cost of attending the conference.

VAC members are welcome to join Rob’s group of mainly Masters runners which meets at Cricklefields Stadium, Ilford, on Tuesday evenings. For details, email Rob at [robrun26@live.co.uk](mailto:robrun26@live.co.uk).

# Track and Field

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## European Masters Athletics Championships, Pescara, Italy

By Andy Murray

These championships followed the World's a year ago in Tampere, Finland, and the last European's in Jesolo, Italy, in 2019.

Pescara is a pleasant city with a long beachfront on the Adriatic coast. The event used three venues: the Pescara football/athletic stadium and two others about 15km away in Francavilla for throws and Montesilvano for distance races. The stadia were poorly set-up initially, but GB and other team managers were able to remedy the shortcomings so that athletes could compete effectively and efficiently, including using shuttle and public transport options.

65 VAC athletes had nearly 200 event entries, competing as part of the Great Britain and Northern Ireland team. They made great contributions to GB & NI's second place in the final medal table. The host nation, Italy, topped the table with 391 medals, including 162 Golds, compared with GB's 278 medals and 108 Golds. Germany was third with 237 medals and 83 Golds.

Medals won by VAC members at Pescara are shown in the table. There were many fine performances. Here are some highlights. Five members won four medals each: Zoe Doyle, Maureen Noel, Glen Reddington, Ros Tabor and Paul Wignall. Allan Long and Zoe Doyle each won two individual Gold medals, both setting new British records for the M80 200m and W45 800m respectively. Virginia Mitchell's Silver medal winning run in the 800m set a new W60 British record. She also won individual Gold for 400m and a Gold for the 4 x 400m relay. Nikki Sturzaker excelled at 800m (Gold), 1500m (Silver) and 5000m (Silver). She looked likely to win the 1500m but was tripped close to the finish. Others who took home three medals were Adrian Day, Jane Georghiou and Emily McMahan. Individual Golds were won by Emily McMahan (W70 80m Hurdles), Maureen Noel (W60 20k Walk), Ian Richards (M75 5000m Walk) and Brian Slaughter (M65 Decathlon). Fiona Bishop must

have walked/run the furthest by completing five distance events (5000W, 8k cross country, 10k Walk, 20k Walk and Half Marathon). She won Silver team medals for the 10kW and HM.

Many members put themselves forward for the track relays and made great contributions in medal-winning teams. David Hinds has written an account of their successes on page 14.

<b>VAC Members Medal Winners at European Masters Championship, Pescara</b>			
<b>Age Gp.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Medal</b>	<b>Event</b>
M35	Craig Cox	Bronze	4x400m
M45	Gavin Stephens	Silver	400m
M45	Adrian Russell	Bronze	10km Road M35 Team
M60	Glen Reddington	Gold & Silver	4x100m (G) & 4x400m Mixed (S)
M60	Glen Reddington	Bronze x 2	100m Hurdles, 300m Hurdles
M60	Brian Steene	Gold	4x100m M60 Team
M65	Brian Slaughter	Gold	Decathlon
M65	Adrian Day	Gold	4x400m Mixed Relay
M65	Adrian Day	Bronze x 2	4x100m and 4x400m
M70	Paul Wignall	Gold & Silver	4x400m (British M70 record) (G) & 400m (S)
M70	Paul Wignall	Bronze x 2	4x100m and 4x400m (M65 team)
M70	Wally Franklyn	Gold x 2	4x100m and 4x400m (British M70 record)
M70	David Hinds	Gold x 2	4x100m and 4x400m (British M70 record)
M75	Ian Richards	Gold	5000m Walk
M80	Allan Long	Gold x 2	100m and 200m (British record)

M80	Barry Ferguson	Silver	80m Hurdles
W40	Jessica Franklin	Silver	7km Cross Country W40 Team
W45	Lizzie Amos	Silver	200m
W45	Zoe Doyle	Gold x 2	1500m and 800m (British record)
W45	Zoe Doyle	Silver & Bronze	4x400m Mixed Relay (S) & 4x400m (B)
W50	Sarah Loades	Silver & Bronze	400m (S) & 300m Hurdles (B)
W50	Nikki Sturzaker	Gold & Silver x 2	800m (G), 1500m (S) and 5000m (S)
W60	Virginia Mitchell	Gold x 2 & Silver	400m (G), 4x400m (G) & 800m (S) (British record)
W60	Fiona Bishop	Silver x 2	10km Walk W50 Team & HM W60 Team
W60	Maureen Noel	Gold	20km Walk
W60	Maureen Noel	Silver x 3	10km Walk and W50 Teams 10kmW & 20kmW
W65	Julia Galea	Silver	10km Road W65 Team
W70	Emily McMahon	Gold & Silver	80m Hurdles (G) & 200m Hurdles (S)
W70	Emily McMahon	Bronze	4x100m
W70	Ros Tabor	Silver	5km Cross Country W70 Team
W70	Ros Tabor	Bronze x 3	800m, 1500m and 5km Cross Country
W70	Jane Georghiou	Silver x 2	10km Road W70 Team and HM W65 Team
W70	Jane Georghiou	Bronze	Half Marathon

## Golden Relays at Pescara by David Hinds



The GB team had great success in the relays at the European Masters Athletics Championships in Pescara, taking 12 gold medals, 7 silver medals and 6 bronze medals.

VAC members took part in 7 of the gold medal teams, one of the silver medal teams and 2 of the bronze medal teams.

**In the men's 4x100m relays**, Sylvester Juwe (VAC) led the M45 team off to their victory, while in the M60 category, 100m finalist, Brian Steene (VAC) anchored his team home to theirs. The M70 team comprising four 100m finalists enjoyed a convincing win. The team was led off by Wally Franklyn (VAC) followed by David Hinds (VAC) and brought home by 100m bronze medallist, Simon Barrett (SCVAC) followed by 100m silver medallist, Chris Monk (MMAC). Their time was second on the GB M70 all-time list.

**In the men's 4x400m relays**, the M60 team (including two M65s) won an unexpected victory in a tightly fought race. The team was led off by M65 400m finalist, Adrian Day (VAC) and brought home by M65 400m bronze medallist, Tennyson James (EMAC). In the M70 race, the GB team who are pictured above won by a large margin and broke the British record by almost 5 seconds. Once again, the team comprised four 400m finalists, but this time it included 3 VAC members. 400m silver medallist, Paul Wignall (VAC) led the team off, followed by Wally Franklyn and David Hinds, while 400m gold medallist, Simon Barrett brought the team home.

**In the women's 4x400m relays**, 400m gold medallist (and World Masters W60 400m indoor record holder), Virginia Mitchell (VAC) anchored the W60 team home to victory, while in the mixed 4x400m relay, Adrian Day led the X65 team off in their winning race.

The other British gold medal winning relay teams were the M40s, the W35s and the W65s in the 4x100m relays and the W65s and the X75s in the 4x400m relays. The W65 team set a new British record in the 4x100m relay.

The VAC medallists in other relays included 800m gold medallist, Zoe Doyle (silver medal, X45 4x400m), Paul Wignall and Adrian Day (bronze medal, M65 4x400m) and Emily McMahon (bronze medal W70 4x100m).

## **England Masters Inter-Area Challenge, Nuneaton, 6 August**

The date of the annual competition between nine area Masters clubs was later than usual and slipped into the holiday period. The organisers made some welcome changes to the events schedule so that men and women were offered the same events. This benefited the older women's age groups which previously had limited opportunities. However, timetabling constraints meant that some of the older men's events were dropped to achieve equality.

VAC had a numerically weakened team, with many vacant slots, but there were great efforts from those who made the trip to the Pingles

Stadium. Every place counted for a point. VAC was officially eighth overall but, on a recount, should have been seventh. Another 20 points would have put the team in sixth.

Particular highlights were the double firsts for Gavin Stephens (M35 200m and 400m) and Mike Vassiliou (M60 200m and 400m) plus first places for Chris Taplin (M50 400m), Tim Carter (M70 Long Jump) and the M60 relay team. There were also six splendid second places and eight third places. Many team members did more than one event, with multi-eventer, Bilen Ahmet, scoring well in eight events. Fiona Bishop did five events and Natalie Mann did four.

### **VAC and London Masters Open Track & Field Championships, Finsbury Park, 9 September**

VAC's T&F championships took place during a heatwave at London's Finsbury Park athletics track. In a new venture, VAC expanded the club championship to include an open London Masters tournament. The event was successful and attracted over 150 entries, with half of these from non-members, many experiencing their first Masters competition in age groups.

Despite the heat, there were fine performances, with many athletes competing in several events. VAC's multi-eventer, Bilen Ahmet, completed 12 events! London Marathon ever-present, Bill O'Connor, completed seven events, including all five track distances.

VAC was grateful for the support of the London Heathside club at its home track and particularly for the vision and organisation provided by Adrian Essex and Adrian Day of Heathside and Peter Kennedy of VAC. Other local clubs also rallied round and provided officials who served for many hours in the high temperature to ensure a successful meeting which VAC plans to repeat and build on in 2024.



## **VAC 5,000m and 10,000m Championships, 21 June and 13 September**

**The 5000m Championship** was held at Tooting Bec's newly re-laid athletics track, which promised fast times, although the evening was unhelpfully hot. There were 54 finishers, spread over four races.

Peter Giles (M75) won the first race in 22:20.37. Julia Chi Taylor (W60), after a 10-year break from the track, was the first woman in 23:02.85. In the second race, Martin Daoud (M60) was the clear winner in 19:36.07. Clare Norris (W45) was the first woman in 20:50.85, with fast finishing Lucy Woolhouse (W60) just a second behind in 20:51.60.

Jonathan Moore (M50) won the third race in 18:01.25. Nikki Sturzaker (W45) continued her fine form and was awarded the women's Champion's Trophy as the fastest on the day with a time of 18:37.03. The final race was seeded with the fastest runners. Chris Loudon (M35) was a convincing winner in 15:30.92, claiming the trophy for VAC's Men's Champion. Ben Paviour was second in 16:12.47, winning the M50 gold medal and leading a group of six men under 17 minutes.

**The 10,000m Championship** was held at the Millennium Arena, Battersea Park, in warm weather with the first race in daylight and the third under the floodlights.

Andy Bond (M50) retained his 10,000m champion's title, tracked by the 2021 winner, Duncan Woolmer (M40) who gradually lost ground. Andy's time of 33:11.82 set a new M50 Championship Best Performance, just a fraction of a second ahead of Simon Baines's previous mark of 33:12.22 set in 2022. The first woman was Lara Bromilow of EMAC in a good time of 36:23.31, an all-comers' record for W40. Madeleine Armstrong-Plieth was VAC's first woman. The Champion's trophy which was a fitting reward for her first track 10k.

Ruben Carvajal (M40) from Queen's Park Harriers won the middle race in 38:08.10, pursued by Jeremy Garner (M45) in 38:16.89. In the early race, Pete Woodward (M40) of Crowborough Runners was dominant followed by Clare Norris (W45) who led the main field, finishing in 43:03.01. All results are in the results section of VAC's website.

# Cross Country

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## **East Surrey League Cross Country, Lloyd Park, 7 October**

Hot sunny weather and dry ground made an unseasonal start to VAC's cross country campaign but the team of thirteen tackled Lloyd Park's traditional course with enthusiasm and determination in a very competitive first match of the East Surrey League.

Jani Kraner (M40) led the team home with a splendid second place finish. Also in the top ten were Mark Tennyson (M55) in eighth place followed by John Foley (M55) in ninth, just four seconds behind. VAC's fourth scorer was Terry Booth (M55) whose 17th position cemented VAC's excellent second place in the men's team competition. VAC's Alex Baird (W40) was third in the women's competition, followed by Victoria Carter (W50) in seventh place.

VAC scored well in the age groups. Jani Kraner was first M40-49, Mark Tennyson first M50-59 and Hugh Balfour first M60+. The full race results are in the results section of VAC's website.

## **Surrey Cross Country League**

### **Men's Matches – the push for promotion!**

#### **Epsom Downs, 14 October**

A great turnout of 19 VAC men contested the combined Division 3 and 4 race. On arrival most were drenched by a heavy shower but by the time the race started, it was sunny. Despite the rain, the 8km, two-lap, course past the iconic grandstand, was firm underfoot.



Richard Batchelor (M45) was VAC's first finisher in a hard fight for 11th place. Mike Webber (M55 and pictured left) was next, making a great contribution in 19th place, followed by Vic Maughn who topped the Division's M60 results' listing. Clive Rolfe, Ian Barnett, Gary Ironmonger, Malcolm Davies, Tony Harran, Ben Revill and John Foss completed the scoring A team which finished in a fantastic second place out of the 14 clubs in Division 4. The B team of the next nine runners matched the A team by coming second in the B team competition.

Newcomers, Mike Webber, Ian Barnett, Ben Revill and John Foss were welcomed. Their fine performances definitely bolstered VAC's team standings.

### **Hurst Green, 11 November**

Holland Sports AC hosted the fixture on a new 8km course from their HQ near Oxted. Clubs had been warned to expect mud and after weeks of heavy rain, there was certainly plenty of it. On the day, bright sunshine and cool air presented ideal weather conditions. A magnificent turnout of 22 men represented VAC.

The race began with a sprint round a waterlogged playing field before the first of two bridges and a narrow path leading to open fields. After a long upward slope, the route dropped to the first sticky section where trail shoes and cross country spikes came into their own. And so it went on, from field to field alternating between being somewhat muddy through to downright bogs. After two gruelling laps, a short sprint over the bridge led to the finish line.

Richard Batchelor again led the team, finishing 26th of the 351 finishers in the combined race and eighth in Division 4. He was followed by Peter Lee and Simon Moore in 23rd and 29th. Next were Malcolm Davies, Richard Evans, Ian Barnett and Bruce McLaren, all in the top 50. Charles Hampden-Smith, Stewart Bond and Ebe Prill (with a shoe in his hand) completed VAC's scoring A team of ten which finished third in the Division 4 match. VAC's remaining runners pushed for every place for the B team and were rewarded by coming first in their competition.

Newcomers Peter Lee, Simon Moore, Richard Evans, Charles Hampden-Smith, Stewart Bond and Petros Hahladakis were welcomed. They made great contributions.

Overall, after two matches, VAC's A team are in an excellent second place, maintaining the push for promotion to Division 3 (two are promoted). Everyone is needed for the next two matches! In the age group contests, Richard Batchelor (M45) is second in the M40-49 category. In the M60 rankings, the top five places are taken by VAC's runners.

## **Women's Matches – VAC going from strength to strength!**

### **Epsom Downs, 14 October**

VAC's team of nine competed strongly in the combined race for Divisions 2 and 3 at Epsom Downs in sunny, but cold, conditions. The two-lap, 6km course was a mixture of rough gravel, dirt tracks and grassland, with a steady climb up the Down and a fast descent to Tattenham Corner.

Lucy Woolhouse was VAC's first finisher, 25th in Division 2 and first W60 in the combined race. Next was Lisa Thomas (W55) in 43rd position followed by Brigid Hibbert (W55) in 62nd place. Anna Garnier (W65) and Gina Coulson (W65) completed the scoring A team which finished a commendable 8th out of 15 A teams. The next four finishers, Patricia Thomas, Sarah Allen, Catherine Porter and Lesley Bowcott scored for the B team which also finished eighth. A warm welcome was

given to new VAC members, Brigid and Catherine. Also running for the first time in VAC's Surrey League team were Lisa, Gina, Patricia and Lesley who all made great contributions.

### Hurst Green, 11 November



The women's race was the last of the day and the muddy course, described in the report of the men's match, was by then well and truly churned up. The women's 6km course missed out some of the men's mud but it was still very sticky underfoot as testified by several who had taken tumbles or whose shoes had been claimed by the bog. A record turnout of 11 (10 pictured above) demonstrated that VAC's team is going from strength to strength in participation and performance in the second season back in the league.

Lucy Woolhouse was again the first finisher with a splendid 34th place in the combined race of 296 finishers, and 26th in Division 2. Her time was convincingly the best in the W60 age group contest. The scoring A team was completed by Lisa Thomas, Pippa Major, Brigid Hibberd and Anna Garnier, and placed a good seventh A team on the day. Having a full B team was a boost and was rewarded by a sixth place out of the

Division's 12 B teams. Overall, after two matches, the A team is in an admirable 8th position.

### **Surrey League Matches 3 and 4**

VAC's men and women are at the same venues. January's match on 13 January is at Oxshott Woods. February's is at Lloyd Park, Croydon, on 10 February. Every VAC runner is welcomed and appreciated.

First-claim VAC members are eligible to compete for VAC. Also second claim members can run for VAC **as long as they have not competed for their first claim club in any of the previous matches in any of the Divisions in the 2023-24 season.** Members from outside Surrey are very welcome, although the Surrey fixtures often clash with those of other county leagues.

Ten are required for a complete men's scoring team, and five for a Ladies team, but there is no limit on the VAC turn-out. The more team members we have, the greater the strength in depth and the bigger the impact. Please let men's team manager Paddy Clark ([paddyclark@hotmail.com](mailto:paddyclark@hotmail.com)) and women's manager Helen Davies ([helendavies@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:helendavies@blueyonder.co.uk)) know if you wish to join the teams this season or next.

### **All Positives when you run in a team of SUPER VETS**

**By Anna Garnier**

Veteran runners are those over 35. Super vets may be classed as those over 50. VAC's Surrey League cross country squad of wonderful ladies currently ranges from over 50 to nearly 80, although "youngsters" are of course very welcome.

We read a lot about individual older women who practise yoga, weightlifting, running, gym work, boxing and the rest. It is far less common to read about teams of older women running cross country – in fact I don't think I ever have. This is what inspired me to write a few words about the wonderful ladies from VAC who have been running in the cross country league in muddy Surrey this season. Age is no

barrier, and we hold our own amongst much younger teams. Here is a rough analysis of the top teams in our division and the total ages of their five scorers at the last league match in November.

1 <sup>st</sup>	Fulham A team	125 years
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Woking	139
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Dorking, Mole Valley	139
4 <sup>th</sup>	Fulham B team	145
5 <sup>th</sup>	West 4 Harriers	250
6 <sup>th</sup>	Croydon	175
7 <sup>th</sup>	London City Runners	165
8 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Vets AC</b>	<b>290</b>
9 <sup>th</sup>	Holland Sports	170
10 <sup>th</sup>	Kingston & Poly	190

Running in a team of ladies has always been a highpoint for me. It is all about positives. We are all friends and up for the race. There is plenty of support and chat before and after. When the shout of '5 minutes to go' is heard, we brave the elements and run to the Start Line with a mixture of excitement and trepidation as we listen for the hooter for the OFF.

There is a certain magnetism of racing cross country, and it gives me a warm glow (nerves too) knowing it is going to be tough and testing. The incredible feeling of accomplishment and the elation of crossing the finish line, mud spattered and being part of a wonderful team, is very special.

These are some of the positives of racing at an age where many 'mere mortals' think we are past it. We head back home knowing that we have done our best, run our hearts out, feeling and looking healthy, and walking on fresh country air. What more could we want?

## **VAC Cross Country Championships, 20 January 2024**

Entries are open for VAC's annual championships on Wimbledon Common. All Masters athletes are welcome. There will be one race for men and women, starting at 2pm. Last year's course will be used again, and we now have a set of age-group course records to aim at.

The distance is 4.8 miles, comprising two laps of a circuit which starts and finishes at the grassy area adjacent to West Place/The Causeway (SW19 4UH). The route heads towards the Windmill, descends for a loop of the Queensmere pond, returns via a steep climb and then follows a long fast track to test your finishing speed second time round. It's a challenging, fast, course but the event is friendly and supportive.

Please support Vets AC and come along and run on the 20th and join us socially afterwards at nearby Belgrave Hall for the medals' award ceremony. We also need plenty of marshals so if you are injured or not inclined to run, your help on the day would be much appreciated. Please let Maggie know if you can assist ([entries@vetsac.org.uk](mailto:entries@vetsac.org.uk)).

## **British & Irish Masters Cross Country International, 11 November**

Tollcross Park in Glasgow was the venue for the 34<sup>th</sup> staging of this prestigious, highly competitive annual competition for teams from England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Each country selects men's and women's teams in five-year age groups from V35 to V75. The weather was cold but sunny. The course was pleasant undulating natural grassland which was firm underfoot but energy sapping. There were four age group races and an open race. Adding together the scores in the age groups, Ireland won the women's competition whilst England won the men's. Overall, England were the champions.

Twelve VAC members were spread throughout the races. Stand-out individual performances came from Clare Elms (W55) and Nikki Sturzaker (W50) who won Silver and Bronze medals in their age groups. Ben Paviour (M50) narrowly missed a medal by finishing fourth in his age group.





Each VAC member selected is worthy of commendation. The others in England's team were Adrian Russell (M45), Andy Bond (M50), Jane Georghiou (W70) and Maggie Statham-Berry (W70) both pictured left. Chris Loudon (M35) represented Scotland and Liam O'Hare (M75) represented Ireland. They also contributed to their nation's team scores in each age group and some were rewarded by team medals. In addition, Jess Franklin (W45) and Joseph Gonzalez-Armas were selected as reserves and ran in the Open race along with Steve Smythe. Jess won the 6km race

outright. Joseph was sixth in the 8km distance and second M50.

2024's match will be hosted by Northern Ireland in Belfast on 12 November. There will be a selection race for England's team in September or October.

## Road running

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### Triumph at Berlin!

By Sue McDonald, W55 British and European Marathon record holder and AW Masters athlete of the year.

September's Berlin Marathon was a total dream race for me. I was under-confident on the start line. My mum had been reminding me of my two previous Berlin marathon failures, with her well-meaning "third

time lucky” comments. I had failed to hit marathon pace through most of my training and it seemed that at 56, my age was finally catching up with me and I would have to accept the inevitable age-related slow down. I felt uninspired by Berlin - it all seemed very grey and featureless. I wasn't sure what I was doing there or how I would motivate myself through 26.2 miles.

I had, however, worked hard to get there. I had followed a training plan to the letter, improved my nutrition to help with long standing auto-immune knee issues, used a CGM (Continuous Glucose Monitor) for fuelling information and for the first time, spent 3 weeks in basic conditions training at altitude. I'd worked with a movement coach to improve my gait, balance and mobility and 1:1 with a running coach on all aspects of marathon running. As I scanned my usual list for post-race excuses, I realised there were none left. Race conditions were perfect.

I personally run best by feel and without pressure - so there was no real time target, other than to just run to the best of my ability on the day. I would have been very happy to better the W55 British record of 2:54:39 but anything under 3 hours would also have been OK, as long as I left nothing out there.

It's fairly usual for me to start fast and Berlin was no exception. I caught sight of the clocks at 5k, 10k and halfway - I had equalled my half marathon PB of 82:44. “Damn it, I thought - too fast yet again!”. I mentally accepted that there would be a slow-down in the second half and aimed to minimise the damage, stay relaxed and keep ticking off miles.

The second half of the race was tough, but it always is. I developed some cramp in both calves from 20 miles onwards and I was using various mindset tools to chip away at my pain cave. In the end, the slow-down over the second half was less than 2 minutes. I know it can still fall apart metres from the finish line, so only when I had crossed the finish line did I look at my watch and allow myself to celebrate. 2:47:19! We all train so hard for moments like this. It's hard to describe how happy I am with this race result - I am still totally elated!

Berlin was my 'A' race for 2023 but six weeks later, I was back on a marathon start line in New York. This was always destined to be a fun marathon. I don't think it's possible to be in peak shape for two marathons so close together. New York is a harder course than Berlin and although I had been warned about the hills, I still felt the need to test them for myself. So, yet another fast start, reaching halfway in 1:23:45 but this time I couldn't maintain the pace for the second half. The hills took their toll and the second half slowed considerably with some severe cramp, digestive issues and a finish time of 2:54:36. However, I'm very happy with the end-result and how the year has gone for me. It is so much more than I ever dreamed of!

## Battersea Park Summer Series



VAC held four successful road races and race walks in April, May, June and August. The first three races were featured in the last newsletter.

August's event is usually depleted by holiday absences and hot weather. Not so this year when 101 runners and 12 walkers completed the 5k race in ideal cool conditions. VAC's Duncan Woolmer was the winner in an excellent 16:05 which set a new M40 course record for a VAC member, 14 seconds inside Steve Surridge's previous record of 16:19 set 20 years earlier in July 2003. The record-

breaking continued when Mark Cursons set a time of 17:14 which convincingly bettered David Ogden's M60 record of 17:39 set in 2021. Other age group winners were David Williams (M50), Richard Tomlinson (M55), Peter Hall (M65), Ged Ruffle (M70), Peter Giles (M75) and Michael Johnson (M80).

Prolific marathon runner, Melissah Gibson, the women's winner of April's race, dominated the field of 25 women to cross the line in 17:35 which improved her own W35 all-comers' record of 18:10. Next was Nikki Sturzaker (pictured above), new to the W50 age group. Her time

of 18:04 wiped over 40 seconds off Anna Critchlow's record of 18:45 set in 2021. The fourth woman was Maria Heslop of Tonbridge AC who set a phenomenal W55 all-comers' record of 18:22, well inside the record of 19:55 for a VAC member held by Lisa Thomas since 2021. Another splendid record was set by Penny Elliott whose time of 28:47 improved on her own W80 record of 29:02 set in June. Other age group winners were Lucy Woolhouse (W60), Lynn Wilson (W65) and Annie Ross (W70).

In the Open Walk, Dave Annetts from N Herts RR won in a fast time of 23:32 followed by Ian Richards (M75) of Steyning AC in 27:43. Melanie Peddle (W50) from Loughton AC was third in 28:11 and became the ladies' winner for the third time in the series. A promising junior athlete, Trejan Checheku-Boamah from Blackheath & Bromley AC, was fourth finisher in a time of 30:18. One to watch! VAC also welcomed two guests from Hong Kong who had chosen the race while holidaying in the UK.

## VAC Battersea Park Grand Prix



Each year, the person with the highest average of his or her three best age-graded Battersea performances is awarded the Snow Cup, a beautiful trophy which dates to 1950. Thirty VAC members did at least three of the races and qualified for the 2023 Grand Prix.

Congratulations to Neil Danby (M55 and left) the worthy winner of the 2023 competition with an outstanding average age grading of 93.19%. In each of his three races, Neil set new M55 records for the Battersea Park courses. In April's 5k race, his time of 16:29 beat his own course record of 16:33 set in 2021. He went even better in June's race by posting 16:25 to win VAC's 5K championship outright. In May's 5 Mile championship race, he won M55 Gold against top opposition and set a new course record of 27:35.

Nikki Sturzaker (W50) was second in the Grand Prix with an average of 89.64%. Nikki set new W45 course records in April's 5k and May's 5 Mile races, and then, having turned 50, set a W50 5k record of 18:04 in August's race which was actually faster than her W45 record (18:16). Richard Tomlinson (M55) was third in the series with an average of 88.53%, closely followed by Joseph Gonzalez-Armas (M50) with 88.02% and Simon Shaw (M50) with 87.91%.

Six members were ever-presents, contesting all four races. They were Andrew Cornish, Martin Daoud, Jay Hadfield, Caroline Helder, Nikki Sturzaker and Tony Tuohy.

Thanks go to all the VAC members and open runners who competed in the races over the summer. The series resumes on 2 April 2024 with a 5km race followed by VAC's 5 Mile championships on 7 May. Other races will be the 5km championships on 4 June and a further 5km race on 16 July.

### **VAC One Mile Championships, 23 September**

Nineteen VAC members enjoyed the Westminster Mile's traffic-free course along the Mall, past the Horse Guards parade ground and back along Birdcage Walk to the iconic finish outside Buckingham Palace.

VAC's Chris Loudon (M35) won Wave One in style, breaking the tape in a fantastic 4:26 chip time. Paul Howard was the second VAC finisher, clocking 4:43 as the first M40 in the race. Gina Galbraith was VAC's first woman in 5:27, placing second in the combined times for Waves 1 and 2, and first W45. VAC members dominated the age groups. Other age group firsts were achieved by Lucy Woolhouse (W60), Peter Hall (M65), Avril Riddell (W65), Peter Kennedy (M70), Maggie Statham-Berry (W70) and Bill O'Connor (M75). Lucy's time of 6:05 translated to a magnificent age-grading of 95.22%. Pamela Whitter and Avril Riddell also achieved over 90% with a further five members above 85%. Full results are on VAC's website.

This really is a splendid event. There is nothing like a one-mile blast to get the runners high. Please consider doing it next year on 21 September. We gather in Green Park before and afterwards to welcome new members and old friends.

## The Algarve Challenge by Dave West



A number of runners, including members of Vets AC, make an annual trip to Portugal to take part in various low-key races and some warm weather training. The regulars were joined by some newcomers like me, who had never had the Algarve experience.

Monte Gordo is an architecturally uninspiring resort town, formerly a small fishing village, that was carved out of woodland planted to stabilise the sand dunes. It is close to the border with Spain and a popular holiday destination for the Portuguese and Spanish. Whilst it may be lacking in authentic Portuguese character, it is very quiet at this time of year and still surrounded by a fringe of woodland with numerous sand/gravel trails and fronted by 14km of quiet golden beaches with long stretches of firm sand all perfect for running.

The trip is normally planned to coincide with the iconic X Milhas do Guadiana race which crosses the bridge between Spain and Portugal

(reversing each year). Billed as a 10 miler, but actually more like 11¼, the date is often confirmed only after flights and hotels need to be booked. This year we picked the wrong week and missed it by a few days!

We devised three low-key self-organised races during the week over local trails which comprise uneven stony gravel paths with numerous short, sharp hills, sand and even short road sections. There was very little flat terrain and no ideal shoe choice as I discovered. Certainly “Super-shoes” would be of limited value!

The first race was an out and back three miler starting with a short hill before following an undulating trail past pigeon lofts and back. Mike Mann had been unwell and started cautiously, allowing me a gap of around 30 seconds, which I maintained to the end. A rare victory for me. 83-year-old SCVAC member Dave Moorekite impressed all week and was ahead of Ros Tabor, Andy Murray and others who all finished within a minute. Cliff Hide completed all three events despite struggling for fitness; it's rare to see him without a camera in hand!

The following day was a 1500m over a flatter, albeit sandier, surface with an uphill finish. Once again Mike and I were ahead but Mike unfortunately had to drop out leaving me leading but with footsteps close behind. As the youngest person in the race (a mere 51 years old) swept by, I could only try to hang on up the incline to the finish with Ros not far behind.

After a day's rest, we took on the final event, the 10km, on the warmest day of the week. This is the hardest course by far with more varied terrain and hills. Mike seemed back to his old self and so it proved. Following the now customary pattern and running together to halfway, we both accelerated but Mike gradually pulled away on a loose, dusty gravel track and had a 43 second advantage over me at the finish, despite a 10-year age gap. Ros and Andy again ran well with Cliff having a lonely run to complete the series. A tough way to end the week.



With ages ranging from 51 to 83, the only way to try to assess performance is through Age Grading across the three races. Ros came out on top with an overall score over 85%. All-in all a great week and with the participants ages averaging 69, proof that the passing years are no barrier to close and enjoyable competition.

### **London Marathon draw**

It's great to have such an iconic event on our patch, but it's a challenge to get an entry. VAC is allocated one club place which we simply award to the first interested member whose name is drawn out of a hat at the November Committee meeting.

For the 2024 TCS London Marathon on 21 April, 14 members expressed interest and the lucky winner was **Dean Saliba** of Victoria Park & Tower Hamlets AC. Good luck Dean!

## **Indoor Track and Field**

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### **Indoor Inter-Area Challenge, Lee Valley, 25 February 2024**

VAC has entered men's and women's teams. There is a full range of the usual indoor track and field events, most of which are contested in four age groups (35-49, 50-59, 60-69 and 70+). We can only select one person per event per age group. Popular events tend to be over subscribed. Expressions of interest are invited from VAC members. Please let the Entries Secretary (Maggie Statham-Berry) know by 17 January if you are interested in being selected for VAC's team, and which event(s) you favour.



# Race Walking

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## **VAC and Four Counties 10k track championships, Purley, 30 September**

The annual VAC and Sussex, Surrey, Middlesex and Hertfordshire County championships took place at Woodcote High School in good racing conditions on a picture-perfect autumn afternoon with cloud cover and a modest breeze. With a rail strike and a number of regulars racing in Holland, there was never going to be a big field, but there were ten on the start line.

The men's race was won by Blackheath's junior Jonny Ellerton in an excellent time of 57:19.1. The ladies' race, Surrey County and VAC championship, was won by Penelope Cummings in a time just outside the hour, with Sian Baum from Herne Hill Harriers taking second place in the same championships in her first attempt at this distance. Both ladies were commended for their style. Flying the flag for Sussex, Paul Gaston (SWC) took the County honours, and Ron Penfold (Steyning AC) won the men's VAC championship.

## **Jack Fitzgerald Centenary Memorial Walks Tilgate Park, Crawley, 4 November**

VAC was pleased to host the eighth running of this event round popular beauty spot, Campbell's lake, once used as the test bed for attempts on Britain's water speed record. The race raised funds for Blind Veterans UK, as a tribute to Jack Fitzgerald, a former RAF fighter pilot. The event was particularly relevant this year, 100 years after Jack's birth.

The heavy rain persisted until the event had finished. VAC was grateful to the judges and officials, especially in the difficult weather conditions, in particular Ron Penfold had monitored the state of the course before the event. On the day, the usual loop was roughly halved, and the route became an out and back due to flooded patches.

In the headline race over 9.52km VAC was pleased to welcome back Trevor Jones from Steyning AC on his second win for the men at this event. The overall and ladies' winner was Melanie Peddle from Loughton AC, who is having a very successful year.

## Parkrun

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### Peckham Rye



15 VAC members assembled at Peckham Rye Park for our parkrun meet-up in September. It was a lovely morning – sunny and still, but not too hot for running. The course is a twisty three-lapper with a slight uphill at the end of each lap. The run was quite congested at the start and the paths are narrow and uneven, but we all settled down and enjoyed ourselves. Cliff Hide was present to encourage us and take photos.

Results for VAC were impressive. We had the first finisher for men and women (Andy Bond pictured left) and Nikki Sturzaker. The first seven on age grading were all VAC members. Andy (M50), Adrian Russell (M45), Nikki (W50), Ros Tabor (W70), Lucy Woolhouse (W60), Peter Hall (M65), and Avril Riddell (W65) were all first in their age groups.

## **Octogenarian and Nonagenarian parkrun, Bushy Park, 1 July**

VAC members led the way at the sixth annual gathering of the over 80s. Eighty-five octo- and nonagenarians came together to set an unofficial record amongst the 1453 finishers at the 937th parkrun at Bushy Park, the home of parkrun. Never have so many over 80s started together. VAC member, Richard Pitcairn-Knowles (M90) is one of the founders of the annual meeting which includes prosecco and cupcakes as rewards. He was one of four over 90s to complete the course. There were 64 finishers in the 80-84 age group and 17 in the 85-89 age group.

VAC's Michael Johnson was the fastest of all the over 80s with an impressive time of 25:54 and an age-grading of 83.20%. The fastest of the women was VAC's Penny Elliott who achieved the best age grading of the entire field with a magnificent 89.88%. Her time of 29:39 was only nine seconds short of the all-time best for the W80 age group at Bushy Park. VAC's Joe Aspinall clocked a time of 34:17 which was convincingly the fastest of the M85 competitors.

Next year's gathering at the Bushy parkrun will take place on 6 July 2024 with the aim of 100 over 80s taking part.

### **And finally....**

Members may be interested in a new book on athletic history. *Alec Nelson and British Athletics prior to World War II: A Professional amongst Gentlemen*, is about an amateur and professional runner around 1900, who subsequently became Britain's best athletics coach.

The book is by Ian Stone and you can view it by browsing [\*\*Alec Nelson and British Athletics prior to World War II: A Professional amongst Gentlemen - Cambridge Scholars Publishing\*\*](#)



**Allan Long M80 winning Gold in the 100m at the European Masters Championships in Pescara in September. He also won Gold for the 200m with a new British record. Allan was shortlisted for Athletics Weekly's Male Masters Athlete of 2023 in recognition of a great year which also included World M80 titles indoors at 60m and 200m and indoor British records for 60m, 200m and Triple Jump.**