



Veterans Athletic Club Newsletter January 2026



Lisa Thomas won four medals in the European Masters Athletics Championships in Madeira in October, including three Golds.

(Photo from Jonty Mitchell)

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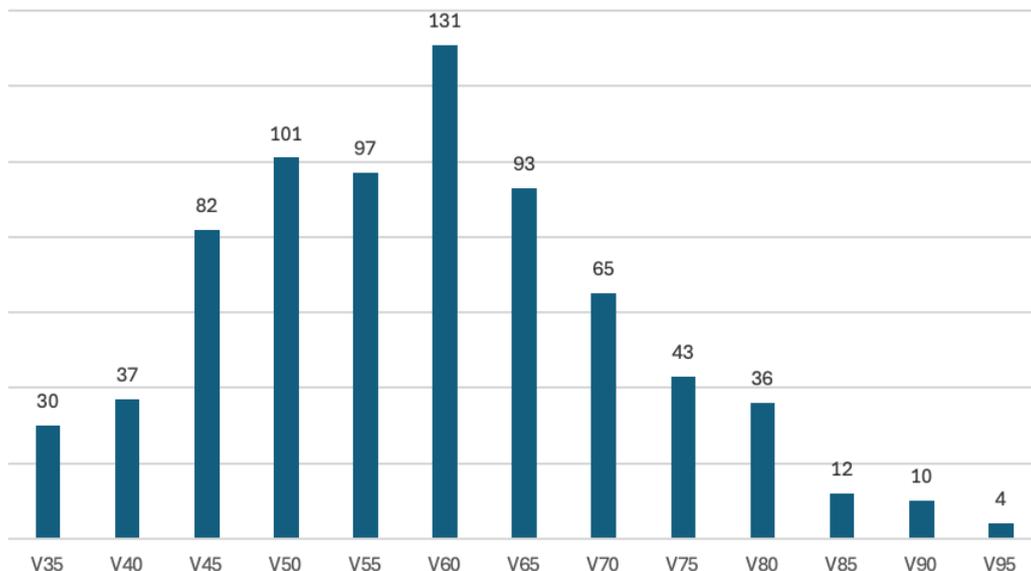
Auditor: Graham Laylee

Veterans Athletic Club was established in 1931 and is affiliated to England Athletics, BMAF, EMAA, South of England AA, Surrey County AA and the Race Walking Association. We offer athletic competition for men and women aged 35 and over. Cross-country, road, track & field and race walking – there is something for everyone. Based in London with members across the South East and beyond, 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.

Welcome to your January 2026 Newsletter

A Happy New Year to all members of VAC. I wish you all great enjoyment and success from your athletics in 2026. It was certainly a successful 2025 for VAC athletes. Congratulations to everyone who competed throughout the year, whether it was representing VAC at a parkrun or taking part in a competition. As you will see from the reports that follow, the medal haul and level of participation from our members in the European Masters Athletics Championships in Madeira in October and the BMAF Track & Field Championships in Derby in September was extremely impressive.

As we go to press, we now have 741 members, 127 of whom are first claim. As you can see from the chart below, we continue to have a varied membership, ranging from V35 to V95 age categories.



Stuart Matthews – Editor and Membership Secretary

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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, look for the links to his Flickr albums on the results pages on VAC's website or contact him at cliffhide10@aol.com.

Fixtures in 2026

Refer to the fixture lists on VAC and BMAF's websites for live links and further details, updates and additions.

Cross Country

Surrey League (Men and Women's teams)

- Race 4: Saturday 7 February Lloyd Park, Croydon CR0 5RA
All VAC men and women (1st and 2nd claim) are eligible, subject to conditions. VAC vest necessary. Enter on the day. Advance notice to paddyclark@hotmail.com (men) / helendavies@blueyonder.co.uk (women).

Saturday 28 February

East Surrey League (Match 2) Lloyd Park, Croydon CR0 5RA

VAC men's and women's teams. No limit on numbers. Free entry.

Men and women run together. Five mile (2 lap) course. Enquiries and advance notice to Entries Secretary. VAC runners declared on the day.

Saturday 21 March

Advance notice: British Masters Cross Country Championships
Faenol Estate, Bangor, LL57 4BP

Road

Sunday 1 February

British Masters 10k Road Championships (part of the Chichester 10k)

Goodwood Motor Circuit, Chichester PO18 0PH

First enter the Chichester 10k on the race website.

Then enter the BMAF championship via the OpenTrack competition page.

Closing date 30 January or earlier if the race is full.

March – September

VAC's Battersea Park Summer Series of road races and race walks (for an update see the News item on Page 6).

Saturday 26 September

Vitality Westminster Mile (VAC 1 Mile Championships)

The Mall, London. Info and entry on the Vitality Masters Mile website.

VAC members should **select Adult Wave One** at 9.30am and **select VAC or Veterans AC** as the Running Club (on drop-down menu). Please inform

Maggie entries@vetsac.org.uk if you have entered. Enter early! Entry closes a week before the event, but the race is usually full a month before.

Track & Field

21-22 February

British Masters Indoor T&F Championships

Lee Valley Athletics Centre, Meridian Way, Edmonton, London N9 0AR

Details and Online entry on BMAF OpenTrack. Events: 60m, 200m, 400m, 800m, 1500m, 60mH, 3000m walk, Triple Jump, High Jump, Long Jump, Pole Vault, Shot.

Saturday 7 March

London Masters International Indoors “The Road to Torun”, Lee Valley Athletics Centre.

New event. TRACK events: 60mH, 60m, 800m, 200m, 3000m, 400m, 1500m. FIELD events: Shot, Triple Jump, Pole Vault, High Jump, Long Jump, Pentathlon.

Details and Online entry on the OpenTrack competition list.

Saturday 14 March

England Masters Indoor Inter Area T&F Challenge, Lee Valley Athletics Centre. Competition for BMAF area clubs. VAC team selected in advance. Age bands 35-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70+. One person per age band. Usual indoor events (but not 3000m races). Event is scheduled for 1pm to 9pm. Expressions of interest to VAC Entries Secretary by end January. Team selections made in advance (mid February).

27 March – 2 April

European Masters Indoor Athletics T&F Championships

Torun Arena, Torun, Poland. Details and entry on OpenTrack. More details on EMA website. Closing date: 8 February, 23.59

Saturday 30 May

British Masters Throws Pentathlon, 10,000m, 1 Mile Track Champs & Open Meeting. Horspath, Oxford. Details and Online entry on OpenTrack in due course.

Wednesday 24 June (TBC)

VAC 5,000m Track Championships. Millennium Arena, Battersea Park, London SW11 4NJ

Details and Online entry on OpenTrack in due course. First race at 6.30pm (tbc). Four seeded races, slowest to fastest.

Sunday 5 July

British Masters Pentathlon, 5000m Track Champs & Open Meeting
Yate Sports Complex, Yate (near Bristol), BS37 7LB
Details and online entry on OpenTrack in due course.

17-19 July

British Masters T&F Championships

Venue to be confirmed.

Details and online entry on OpenTrack in due course.

Sunday 2 August

Advance notice: England Masters Outdoor Inter Area Challenge, Yate Sports Complex, Yate (Near Bristol), BS37 7LB. VAC team selected in advance.

22 August – 3 September

World Masters Athletics Stadia (T&F) Championships

Daegu, South Korea

Details and registration on Event Website [2026 Daegu World Masters Athletics WMAC](#)

Parkrun

Saturday 7 March

Lordship Recreation Ground, Lordship Lane, London N17 6BQ.

The start is near the Lordship Hub in the recreation ground.

VAC gathering. Come and meet VAC members! Look out for VAC vests.

Starts 9.00am. Enter on the day (but you need a parkrun barcode).

Trail

Sunday 28 June

British Masters 30k Multi-Terrain Championships (part of the North Downs 30k Trail Race), Cyclopark, The Tollgate, Watling Street, Gravesend, Kent DA11 7NP. Details and Online entry on OpenTrack in due course.

News

Battersea Park 2026 Summer Series – Unwelcome News

VAC has been holding 5-mile road races and race walks in Battersea Park since 1990, if not before. The 5km races were a later addition in 2002. There used to be five races in the summer series but since the pandemic in 2020, there have been four. Each autumn, VAC negotiates the dates for the following year with Enable Leisure, the agency which manages the park for Wandsworth Council.

This year, there was a delay in the release of next year's dates for events. Finally, at the end of November, VAC received the news that we would be offered just **two event dates for our races between April and August**.

In justification, Enable stated that Battersea Park is a very popular venue for a wide range of charities and corporate events. They are "working carefully to accommodate as many requests as possible while ensuring fair use of the park and maintaining a balance between events and general park visitors". To achieve this, VAC's events will be cut to two between April and August 2026. Enable claim that this approach is based on feedback from park users and stakeholders on the use of Battersea Park whilst also ensuring that all of the hirers have an opportunity to host their events within the park.

VAC appealed against the decision but it's clear that the ruling is final and non-negotiable. We have been told that other race hirers such as Sri Chinmoy, Run Through and Friday Night Under The Lights have been handed cuts on the same scale to their events between April and August.

VAC has decided to hold 5k races on 31 March and 8 September to supplement the two allowed between April and August. We hope VAC members will support these dates and enter the races. The summer dates are likely to be 5 May (the 5 mile championship) and 2 June (the 5k championship).

Athletics Weekly Readers' Choice Awards 2025

Each year the widely read Athletics Weekly magazine creates a shortlist of athletes who have excelled in various categories. Two such categories are British Masters Male and Female Athletes of the Year. For 2025, two VAC members made the shortlists of six in the female Masters' category. This is a fantastic achievement in itself.

In the women's shortlist, **Karima Harris** was recognised for setting a W55 marathon British best of 2:45:45 in Copenhagen as well as British bests at 10 Miles (59:49) and Half Marathon (77:50). It's remarkable that these times were also her lifetime PBs.

Also on the women's shortlist was last year's winner **Clare Elms**, who had set world W60 records at 1500m (indoors and out), the Mile, 4x800m and indoor 3000m. She also set a European record at VAC's 10,000m championships as well as UK records at 3000m and 5000m. She won six Golds at the World

Masters indoors and three at the European Masters in Madeira. On the road, in the 5km, she ran the world's fastest ever gun and chip times for the W60 category.

After AW readers had "voted in their thousands", the results were announced in December's edition of AW. It is not surprising that Sarah Roberts from Southern Counties was voted the Female Masters Athlete of the Year. Sarah has been in the news all year for the number of world records she has set indoors and outdoors in the W75 category. Distances ranged from 800m to 10,000m. At the recent European Masters championships in Madeira, she won eight Gold medals. In the space of five years, Sarah had gone from doing parkruns to becoming a world champion.

Clare Elms was second in the voting. This is a great result and well deserved. Ellie Stevens (W40), a middle distance and road specialist from Midland Masters, was third.

Out of interest, in the Men's category, the man with the most votes was newcomer Colin Spivey, a 91 year old from Northern Masters who was a sensation at the European championships, winning Golds and setting British records in the 500m, 600m and 1500m. Second was Mark Symes (M55) who had won titles and set records at 800m and 1500m as well as setting a British M55 mile record at the Westminster Mile. Third was John Wright (M65) who was unbeatable in the sprints all year.

VAC's Track and Field Championships

Regretfully, VAC has not been able to stage an indoor championship in the 2025-2026 season. VAC's usual partner, Eastern Masters, opted to join forces with SCVAC (Southern Counties). It was not possible to find a suitable date for VAC to go it alone at Lee Valley as the venue was fully booked very quickly. In any case, VAC does not have a Track & Field Secretary to lead the organisation of the event. This is also likely to impact the organisation of an outdoor championship this summer. Unless someone comes forward to fill the post or take on key tasks, an outdoor championship may not be possible. Please get in touch with Ros Tabor, VAC's Officials Secretary, if you can help.

Update: Jungfrau Mountain Marathon 2025

In the last newsletter, **Catkin Shelley** (below) described her experience of 2024's beautiful but gruelling Jungfrau marathon in Switzerland and looked forward to competing in the 2025 event in September.

After reading the last newsletter, VAC member, **Felix Allen**, got in touch to reveal that he had also tackled the 2025 Jungfrau.



Catkin reports: “After heavy rain, we were blessed with perfect running conditions; clear blue sky and sunshine, but not too hot, and no wind. There was fresh snow on the high Alps and the mountains looked beautiful.

I set off at a good pace and completed the first half in 1hr 55, on target and in line with last year. I kept to my plan, running steadily and reminding myself of all my hill training. Thankfully I avoided last year’s cramp, possibly due to taking on bouillon and salty gels at the food stations and stretching out my calves as I walked up steep sections.

I was delighted to finish in 5 hours 9 mins; a 9-minute improvement on my previous best. Enjoying my recovery beer, I was surprised to discover I was first W60 out of 43 starters, over half of whom were Swiss with presumably something more challenging on their doorstep for training than Primrose Hill! I look forward to being on the start line again in September 2026!”

Felix shared his story: “In September, I found myself on the start line of the 32nd Jungfrau Marathon. Although 26 miles is a long way, the destination was already in sight. That end being the snowcapped peaks of Eigerletscher, 1800 metres above me and the 4999 other marathoners way down in base camp on Interlaken High Street. Those snowy rocks would keep appearing and disappearing over the next 5 hours as I covered almost 2100 metres of elevation gain.

I went out slow and steady with 80s electronic music on my headphones as I passed through Alpine villages and along mountain trails and endless switchbacks. But the soundtrack of the day came from the huge local turnout who brought along Alpenhorns, drums, accordions and cow bells. Lots of cow bells! The temperature was well into the 20s, except when it wasn't. The mountains offered sunless zones complete with chilly breeze from the glacier above. Nothing extreme and surprisingly I managed to survive the brutal climb (the first 39 kilometres of it anyway!)

The route featured a hideously steep last 3 kilometres. Elite racer or plodder, your legs were going to be filled with lactic. I could barely look sideways without getting a dizzy vertigo feeling. That said, it was a bit less hazardous by being steep enough to use my hands. The harsh gradient continued to the final step ensuring nobody's finish photo looked pretty!"

These accounts confirm that the event is extra special. Maybe other VAC members will be tempted?

European Masters Athletics Championships

Report and results from Steve Smythe. Photos from Jonty Mitchell.

97 VAC members took part in the championships in Madeira in October, contributing 65 event medals to Britain's record haul of 311 medals. Overall, Britain won 132 golds, 102 silvers and 77 bronze and easily headed Europe's other big hitters Germany (110, 98, 82), France (65, 59, 65) and Spain (58, 63, 65).

The event had some organisational issues with multiple venues spread over the island, transport problems (shuttle buses were often unreliable or full), scheduling (older athletes often had distance races at the hottest times of the day while younger ones got the cooler times), throws' measuring and timetabling. The results were often unreliable and delayed. The medal ceremonies were sometimes badly scheduled.

The main stadium in Ribiera Brava was in a magnificent setting surrounded by hills but as often happens, the distance runners, throwers and some of the jumpers only needed to go there to pick up their numbers and attend the medal ceremonies. The other venues were lacking refreshments,

commentators, medical help, photographers, medal podiums and largely atmosphere (other than the 1500m races).

Nevertheless, it was a great high-quality championship with British achievements making up for the organisational shortcomings. VAC's medallists are mentioned individually but there were many fine performances from the other members, some reaching finals and others just missing out on podium positions. The event wasn't just about medals but was an opportunity to represent GB and mix with fellow athletes.

Women's Medallists

VAC's women outperformed the men. Clare Elms and Anna Garnier each won five medals. Sarah Loades, Emily McMahon, Virginia Mitchel and Lisa Thomas won four and Fiona Bishop, Maureen Noel and Kat Sutton won three.



Kat Sutton and Craig Cox on their way to Gold in the X35 4x400m Relay

Clare Elms

Whilst in Madeira, Clare picked up an award as the European Athlete of the Year in middle distances. Although she won medals she wasn't at her best, not helped by a virus. After setting a European W60 record in VAC's 10,000m she was expecting a good result. But, 30 seconds clear at 8000m, the high temperatures and lack of shade got to her. She staggered the last few laps with heat exhaustion and was caught by an Austrian rival 600m out and lost by 40 seconds. The cross-country was at 4,000 feet altitude (the only place with sufficient grass for a course). Clare was clear at one point but suffered with her breathing and slowed to third.

A few days later, running very cautiously she easily beat her conqueror from Austria with a 3:35 last kilometre in the W60 5000m. She also beat her rival in the 10K road race by 40 seconds and scored in the winning W45 team to win her third Gold and fifth medal.

Anna Garnier

Anna also won five medals. She started with a strong win in a tactical W70 1500m and then frustratingly lost the 5000m by just four thousandths of a second to Alison Bourgeois, a former Brit now in Switzerland colours. She got her revenge with a more decisive win in the 800m and won further gold medals in the 4x100 and 4x400m relays. [Anna has written her own impressions of Madeira in an account later in the newsletter].

Virginia Mitchell

Virginia won four medals. She retained her W60 400m title in 65.04 and then ran a British record at 800m of 2:27.21, finishing second to Ireland's Anne Gilshinan's European record. She also won two golds in the 4x400m relays. The 4:04.77 in the V60 mixed relay was almost certainly an inaugural world mark. There was no doubt about the W60 4x400m relay as their 4:30.03 gave them a 28 second victory and took 11 seconds off USA's 2025 world mark.



Virginia Mitchell (2715) and Lisa Thomas (2857) celebrate Gold in the W60 4x400m Relay

Lisa Thomas also medalled four times and won golds alongside Virginia in the W60 and mixed 4x400m relays and followed her home in the 400m to win silver in 65.75. Remarkably, earlier in the day of the 400m final, Lisa had won her specialist event, the 2000m steeplechase, in 8:46.69 which must have affected her in the 400m.

Emily McMahon was another 4-times medallist. She lost the W75 80m hurdles by just 0.04 of a second to a GB competitor but was a class apart in the 200m which she won by eight seconds, and she also got a silver in the long jump plus a gold in the 4x100 relay.

Sarah Loades won 4 medals as well. She took gold in the W50 300m hurdles, two silvers in the W50 4x100 and mixed 4x400 relays, plus a bronze in the 4x400m relay.

Kat Sutton was involved in such a close finish in the W35 1500m that the judges were unable to separate her and a Spanish competitor with their 5:04.072 times identical down to the thousandth and they shared bronze. It was also close at 800m as, in the battle for second, she defeated a French competitor by two thousandths of a second! She completed the medal set with a gold medal by anchoring the mixed 4x400 as her team ran 3:36.07 which could be ratified as an inaugural world record as they won by over three seconds.

Fiona Bishop (W65) won three team medals: a team gold at 10km, a silver in the 20km walk and bronze in the half-marathon. **Maureen Noel** won three walking medals, gaining W60 bronzes in the 10km and 20km events and a silver team medal alongside Fiona in the latter.

Liz Amos picked up a clear silver behind Ireland's Annette Quaid in the W45 400m. **Nikki Sturzaker**, who won the W50 800m two years ago, this time moved up to 5000m after a long lay-off after injuries sustained in the 2024 European Masters Indoors. Here she finished a clear third in 18:54.70. **Louise Wood** won silver in the W55 triple jump. **Lucinda Cash-Gibson** finished third in the W40 400m hurdles and picked up a silver in the 4x100 relay. Double W35 sprint finalist **Katy Lord** was part of Britain's gold medal winning 4x100 team. **Eni Font Freida** was part of the silver medal W60 4x100 team.

Anne Nelson (W70) received an award in Madeira from European Masters Athletics for being part of the GB's world record breaking W70 4x200m team which won the Women's Best Relay Team award for 2024. This time she won gold as part of the winning 4x100m team alongside Anna Garnier.

Men's Medallists

Andrew Ridley won a gold in the M60 1500m ahead of fellow-Brit Robert McHarg. Andrew then gained a silver in the M60 800m, just failing to beat Robert again by only a second.

Gavin Stephens (M45) who had been second in the event at 400m in 2023 and in the 2024 World Championships, here enjoyed a clear win in 50.89. He also

won the 200m in style in 23.06 into a strong headwind having run his fastest time of 22.77 in better conditions in the semis which is his fastest M45 time since medalling in the 2022 Worlds in Tampere.

Ian Richards (M75), the 1980 Olympic 50km walker, won gold in the 10km walk in 62:54, defeating team-mate Peter Boszko who had earlier reversed that form in the 5000m walk where Richards was second. However, he was disqualified in the 20km walk.



Pat Logan celebrates one of two medals he won in Madeira

Pat Logan finished second in both M65 sprints behind world record-holder John Wright. He was then part of the winning British team alongside Wright that took almost a second off the world record, clocking 49.22.

Chris Loudon (M40), who won world indoor medals in March at 800m and 3000m, this time focused on 1500m and with a last 200m kick, he won by two seconds in a fast 4:01.67.

Neil McLellan was the only person to throw over 60 metres in the M45 javelin on his way to the gold medal.

Swedish-based **Damian Nevins** finished second in the M45 5000m, three seconds down on the winner but 21 seconds clear of third. He was just a few seconds down on a medal when he finished fourth in the steeplechase.

Steve Winder ran a PB in the steeplechase but had an even better result in the M50 half-marathon where he was a close second in 78:53 and also won a team gold alongside Ilija Loubenski as Britain won by ten minutes.

There were silver medals for **John Browne** (M70 100m) and **James Lindsay** (M75 100m) and bronze medals for **Allan Long** (M80 100m) and **Bilen Ahmet**

(M40 pole vault) who also placed a commendable sixth in the Decathlon. **Brian Wilder** ran just the 10K road race, but he gained a M50 bronze and led the British team to second.

Wally Franklin won gold as part of the M70 4x100m relay team. **Kevin McAleer** was part of the winning M65 half-marathon team. **Paul Howard** and **Stuart McNally** were part of the M45 4x400m team that won bronze. **Craig Cox** accompanied Kat Sutton in the gold-winning mixed V35 4x400 team and he also won silver in the M35 4x400 alongside **Jonathan Hiorns**.

My Impressions of Madeira – by Anna Garnier

Madeira is a small mountainous island about 450 miles off Morocco. The Canary Archipelago is almost 500 miles further north. You might think that twisty roads and mountains are not the best for a large international athletics event, but Madeira proudly hosted the European Masters T&F Championships in October.

My previous visit

I went to Madeira 37 years ago with our two children (then) instead of going skiing. We arrived in sunshine, but the weather changed typically to conditions akin to a ski resort with a big drop in temperature and flurries of snow. Back then, Funchal was a small, relatively quiet capital with a wonderful fish market with stunning tiles. Madeira wine was popular, and we took our reluctant children to see its production in a rather smart wine house. We went up to the Monte and were pushed down over the cobbles in a big wooden toboggan by men in white uniforms and straw boaters. Luckily the children loved that!

This time

I couldn't believe the change. Little houses covered every hill, slope and terrace. Banana plantations were squeezed onto terraces above and below. A brand new hospital straddled the hillside, a stunning architectural feat. Tourism is now the biggest money earner and employer. There are dual carriageways and over 100 tunnels, mostly built with European grants. Nevertheless, Funchal is still delightful with restaurants serving delicious food, tiny shops, a wonderful cathedral and galleries on cobbled streets.

My surroundings

This was the first time I had stayed for ten days at an overseas meeting having entered three competitions and making myself available for two relays. I soon

realised that you first must focus on eating, resting and sleeping, then on exercises, training and competing. There was no time for tourism. Buying food was solved by Continente, a supermarket up at Ribeiro Brava. There was also an excellent café where we congregated to chat in the queue for Espressos and delicious hot cheese pastries.

The shuttle bus passed close to my apartment. However, whispers were abounding about its unreliability. Registration was at Ribeira Brava in a stunning stadium set in a valley amongst high mountains. To get there, I waited for the bus for 45 minutes in hot sun. I am not a good traveller and after four stops along the twisty route, I started to feel coach sick. I was pea green when I arrived and it took about an hour to feel human again. Fortunately, registration went smoothly with no queues. I had to make the return trip by bus because I hadn't yet thought about taxis.

Mountainous terrain meant there was nowhere to train. I went for a run in Funchal. The map showed green for a park, but it was a cobbly hilly run to get there and then all tarmac paths. I ran along the promenade with lovely views of the marina, but the surface was an attractive terrazzo and rock hard. As I usually train on grass, my body's response was an aching creaky knee. The lesson learned was NOT to do something you never do at home! No damage done and I religiously did my knee exercises every day from then on.

My first event

How to get rid of my nerves! I knew I'd put in the work, but I still couldn't find any confidence. My main Swiss opponent played plenty of gamesmanship! She looked superbly fit despite saying she'd done barely any training. I won the W70 1500m Gold but it was the weirdest race I'd ever run. I set off slowly thinking the oppo would come with me. She kept talking to me, but I couldn't hear what she was saying. She didn't overtake me and at the bell I felt fresh and came off the bend with a big sprint finish leaving the others behind. My time was a PW but championship racing is all about Gold medals for one's country and not times. I was happy and I tried Bolt taxis for the first time and got back to Funchal in comfort and at speed. Bliss.

The 5000m

Next day, the 5000m at Cabara de Lobos was preceded by the 1500m medal ceremony at Ribero Brava. Sadly, the Swiss silver medallist didn't turn up. She told me later that she couldn't be bothered to make the journey before she

raced the 5000m. At 3pm in 31 degrees of blazing heat we both set off on our 12.5 laps. Yet again, I expected the Swiss oppo to come with me. When she didn't, I braved it from the front. She beat me by 4/100th of a second! What a huge learning curve.

A perfect race

The thing about Masters athletics is that at home we find ourselves running against lots of people who are going off flat out, especially children. We are not used to waiting for people to go ahead! I put this into practice in the 800m, perfectly placed on the stagger in a middle lane with the best oppo on the outside. At the break I sat behind them and stayed there conserving strength. This continued past the bell and into the back straight. A friend shouted from the stand "Anna you've got this". Sprint unleashed off the bend. I'd run my perfect race! W70 800m Gold. (See photo on back page)

Unexpected call-up

The wrongs of the 5000m had been put to rights in the 800m. Afterwards, I took off my numbers in beautiful warm sunshine in the stands and was enjoying the 400m semi-finals until a 70-year-old sprinter approached me to say "Anna, you're in the relay". I replied that I was just a sub! I hadn't been at all upset at not being selected because I'm not a sprinter. However, she insisted, and an hour later I had been taught how to receive (without looking) and pass the baton well enough to be part of the W70 team that won Gold in the 4x100m relay.

The final day

Things were beginning to unravel. A 10-day meeting requires mental and physical strength. I had glimpsed what it is like to be an Olympian when it is so full-on. If you haven't prepared properly and learned to stick to a schedule, things do not work. I had a sore throat and a cough coming. Yet again, an early morning taxi to the stadium for the 4x400m relay. The team was consistent and solid. No standout 400m stars but we all ran our best and I was honoured to be on the anchor leg. The four of us were absolutely delighted to win Gold medals for our combined efforts.

Reflections and thanks

Wow, what a lot I learned through day 1 to day 10. I have to thank my coach and my family for putting up with endless schedules and training. Those weekend Slow Long Runs when I needed to be pushed out of the door. To my

friend Avril Riddell (also VAC) who I would meet at Primrose Hill to do my training up the hill and on the track next to the zoo.

Without lots of British officials and volunteers this big meeting would have struggled. They were fantastic, friendly and helpful. The team managers were always there to answer questions and give advice. The physios worked hard to prepare us for our events. I cannot thank them all enough.

I am now looking forward to going to Torun, a wonderful medieval city in Poland, where the European Masters Indoor championships take place from 27th March until 2nd April 2026.

Outdoor Track & Field

VAC 5000m Championships, 25 June

VAC's 5000m Championships returned to the Tooting Bec track. Extremely hot weather did not deter the 56 finishers, spread over four races, although the heat slowed down most people.

In the first race. Anna Garnier ran 23:26.56, a new W70 Championship Best Performance, beating Pauline Rich's previous mark of 25:17.24. However, Pauline had the consolation of setting an inaugural W80 CBP of 32:25.23. Mark Tennyson won the third race, and M60 Gold, chased hard by Muhamud Haile (M55) and Steve Corfield (M60) only five seconds behind.



Nikki Sturzaker and Chris Loudon, VAC Champions

Nikki Sturzaker was the fastest woman of the four races and winner of VAC's women's champion's trophy. Her time of 18:40.34 took six seconds of the previous W50 CBP of 18:46.40 set by Jane Davies way back in August 1999.

The final race was seeded with the fastest runners and highly competitive. Chris Loudon was a convincing winner, again claiming the trophy for VAC's Men's Champion and M40 Gold. His time of 15:40.31 was not far off Richard McDowell's M40 CBP of 15:35.46 set in 2021.

EMAA Outdoor Inter-Area Challenge, 17 August

VAC's team of thirty-three covered most of the 104 track and field events in the annual competition between nine area Masters clubs in England, Scotland and Wales. The event went North this time, to the University of York athletics stadium. The weather was comfortably warm.

In the combined men's and women's scores, VAC finished a worthy fourth with 471 points, just 16 points behind Eastern Masters and four ahead of North Eastern Masters. The winners were the hosts, Northern Masters, with 713 points, for once beating Midland Masters on 688. VAC recorded 13 first place finishes (nine by the women, four by the men) and were in the top three in 32 events but every place scored a point, and everyone's contribution was equally valued.

Excellent women's performance

VAC's women's team finished third with 250 points, holding off Southern Counties by four points. Lisa Thomas achieved splendid first places in the W60 200m, 400m and 800m races, and a third in the 1500m, gaining 34 points for the team. Clare Elms (W60) down-aged to W50 and bagged two first places in the 1500m and 3000m, winning the latter mixed age-group race outright. Rosalind Zeffertt (W60) also down-aged to W50 and won the Pole Vault outright. She showed her versatility by scoring well in four other events (HJ, LJ, TJ and Javelin). Anna Garnier won the W70 800m and was second in the 200m as well as doing the 100m and Shot events. Eni Font-Freide won the W60 100m. Eni joined Lisa, Rosalind and Anna in the W60 4x100m relay team which stormed to a fine win against strong opposition. Many did two or more events with Natalie Mann scoring well in the four W35 throws, Sarah Westrap-Boon covering the W50 sprints, hurdles and relay, Emily Murray covering two



Natalie Mann scored well in the W35 Hammer

W35 jumps and making her debut at the 100m, and Stacey Gonzalez picking up good points in the W50 Shot, Discus and Hammer.

Men's successes

VAC's men's team had gaps due to unlucky injuries and finished sixth amidst a cluster of four clubs separated by just 19 points. There were four individual wins. In the Long Jump, Richard Weekes and Tim Carter won the M60 and M70 events. Robert Datnow won the M50 800m and Pat Logan won the M60 100m. In a thrilling race, the M60 relay team stormed round to finish second behind the dominant Northern Masters team which was anchored by Dr Steve Peters, the well-known sports psychiatrist, who had set a new British record in the 100m earlier in the meeting. Most prolific was Bilen Ahmet, a multi-eventer, who did nine events (all the M35 field events and the hurdles), boosting VAC's score by a massive 49 points. For the M50s, Mark McAllister did seven individual events including track sprints, pole vault, shot, discus and javelin.

Next Inter Area Challenge

The indoor Inter Area event is scheduled for Saturday 14 March at Lee Valley. The programme will start at around 1pm and go through to 9pm. The organisers have done this to make it easier for teams to travel from afar on the Saturday and stay overnight.

There will be the usual indoor track and field events (sprints, middle distance (but not 3000m), short hurdles, 2km walk, vertical and horizontal jumps and shot) for four age bands (V35-49, V50-V59, V60-69 and V70+). VAC is invited to select one person per event per age band, although the older age bands don't do some of the events.

If you would like to apply for selection for VAC's team, send an email to Maggie Statham-Berry and/or Mike Mann (the team managers) by the end of January. Tell us which events you are interested in. Popular events may be oversubscribed. Reserves are needed, and there are always gaps to be filled.

VAC 10,000m Championships, 10 September

There were 48 finishers in VAC's three races in Battersea Park's Millennium Arena. A cool, damp, evening with a light wind presented good racing conditions.

In the first race, Frank Brennan's fine 47:46.3 won M75 Gold. Maggie Statham Berry's 49:39.2 knocked five seconds of the W70 Championship Best Performance set by herself in last year's championship. The second race was won convincingly by Jani Kraner in 35:12.2, a time which gave him the M40 Gold medal and would have placed him fourth in the last, fast, race.



Clare Elms and Terry Booth, VAC's Champions

Clare Elms was the fastest woman in 38:46.9, a time which, if ratified, would be a new UK and possibly world W60 record. Clare won the trophy for VAC's first woman. Her time also set a new W60 Championship Best Performance, improving the previous mark of 43:47.5 by five minutes.

Her W60 CBP is also a lot faster than the W55 and W50 CBPs.

In the third race, Terry Booth (M55) won VAC's men's champion's trophy. He was second with a splendid time of 34:20.4, six seconds behind the much younger winner, Julien Tadeusz of Clapham Chasers who won M35 Gold.

BMAF Track & Field Championships, 12-14 September

The BMAF staged its annual outdoor championships at Moorways Athletics Stadium, Derby. The event featured 172 competitions, 877 athletes and nearly 1700 recorded results, making it one of the largest BMAF outdoor championships to date. Many used the event as part of their final preparations for the following month's European Athletics Championships in Madeira. 66 athletes from VAC took part. Multi-eventer Bilen Ahmet completed five events, winning Gold in the M40 Pole Vault and Bronze in the High Jump. Gaye Clarke also did five events, showing her prowess in the W65 throws and jumps by claiming four medals (a Silver in the HJ and Bronzes in the Shot, Hammer and Weight throw). Sharon Dooley, Natalie Mann, Glen Reddington and Ash Spencer successfully completed four events. Sharon and Natalie each won three medals. A total of 67 medals were won by VAC members, 33 of which were Gold.

The following took home two Gold medals each: Wesley Clarke, Anna Garnier, Peter Giles, Allan Long, Cara Maker, Gavin Stephens, Nikki Sturzaker, Kat Sutton and Moira West. In addition to her Golds in the W70 800m and 1500m, Anna Garnier was part of the W65 4x800m relay team which successfully broke the World record at the meeting. Virginia Mitchell's excellent times in the W60 800m and 400m gained her 5th and 8th places in the top ten best age-graded performances during the event.

Congratulations to all participants for making Derby 2025 a resounding success!

VAC vests

A good stock of men's and women's club vests is 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 remainder of the men's and women's old stock is being sold off at a discounted price of £15 including postage. All vests are official club vests and can be purchased 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.

Cross Country

East Surrey League Cross Country, Lloyd Park, 4 October

A team of 13 turned out for VAC's season's opener in the first match of the East Surrey League. The first named storm of the season (Amy) sent ferocious gusts of wind across the open terrain of Lloyd Park but the temperature was pleasantly mild and the course was dry. There were 82 finishers with men and women running together on the two-lap, 5 mile course.

Mark Tennyson led VAC home in eighth place and placed first in the M60 age group. Terry Booth was close behind in ninth, and first M55. David Moore (M55) and Duncan Haughey (M60) completed the scoring team which finished fifth overall. Tom Cheetham, Peter Wootton, Mike Mann, Mark Stevens and Dan Maskell provided good back-up. For Mike and Mark S, it was their second representative match for VAC that day, both of them having taken part in the morning's parkrun gathering of VAC members at Beckenham Place Park.

VAC's women's team of four excelled and achieved a magnificent first place in the team results. Nicola Richmond was VAC's first woman in seventh place on

the women's list. She was also the first W55. Andrea Stehlikova, Ola Balme and Vera Blei completed the scoring team.

After the race, awards were made to last season's winning teams and individuals. VAC's Duncan Haughey was the M60 Champion and received a trophy in recognition of his placings in the season's three matches.

Surrey Cross Country League, Men's and Women's matches Richmond Park, 11 October

VAC's men's and women's teams both competed at Richmond Park on an unseasonably warm day. The start was near the Sheen crossroads. The ground was very dry, with dust kicked up along the sandy trails.



Some of VAC's Men's team after the race

Twenty men ran for VAC in the combined Divisions 3 and 4 match. The 8km, two-lap, course was testing with its long gradual climbs up Sawyers Hill then down past the Pen Ponds and up to the Royal Ballet school. Newcomers Tom Cheetham, Mike Cummings, Jani Kraner, Thomas Martini, Richard Stansfield and Norman Urquia were warmly welcomed.

Jani Kraner (M40) was VAC's first man and also a magnificent first in Division Four and sixth in the combined Div 3/4 race. He was closely followed by Mike Cummings, four seconds behind, in second place in Division Four. John Foley also achieved a top ten finish. Norman Urquia, Peter Lee, Duncan Haughey, Tom Cheetham, Stewart Bond, Thomas Martini and Tom Poynton, all in the top 100, completed the scoring "A" team which was an excellent third in the Division 4 match. The full "B" team were rewarded by coming first in their competition.

In the women's match, a record twenty women, including eight newcomers, competed for VAC in the combined race for Divisions 2 and 3 which was the last race of the day. The two-lap course, at 6.4km, was a bit shorter than the men's but followed the same route of grassland and hard, dusty and undulating dirt tracks.

Clare Norris (W45) was VAC's first finisher in 11th position in Division 2. Nicola Richmond (W55) followed in 15th. Vikki Filsell (W55), Lucy Woolhouse (W60) and Denise Barnett (W50) completed the scoring "A" team, all finishing in under 30 minutes. The next five finishers, Ola Balme, Sally Carr, Helen Davies, Sue McDonald and Rhiannon Needham scored for the "B" team. Unluckily, Sarah Allen tripped on the second lap, fell heavily on her arm and couldn't continue. The "A" team were highly placed at 4th out of 15 teams. The "B" team demonstrated their strength and finished 2nd in their listing.

Hurst Green, 15 November – Account by Malcolm Davies

The second Surrey league cross country fixture took place at the now familiar venue of Holland Sports club at Hurst Green. The normally benign course conditions were scuppered by the arrival of Storm Claudia the previous day leading to slippery and muddy conditions, and that was just where our ground sheet was, let alone the course!

"Storming" women

By the morning, however, 'Claudia' had passed over and instead it was left to VAC's women to storm Hurst Green with a whirlwind performance. They had already got off to a great start at Richmond Park with a 4th place finish, but with 17 toeing the start line at Hurst Green, hopes were equally high, and they didn't disappoint.

In the Division Two results, Clare Norris, Vikki Filsell, Nicola Richmond, Rebecca Pickard and Lucy Woolhouse made up the A team with scoring positions of 7th, 14th, 20th, 26th and 27th. This strong result won the Division 2 race by 28 points from Epsom & Ewell in second and Reigate Priory third. A



Ola Balme (793) and Denise Barnett

tremendous effort. It also propelled VAC to the top of the team listings after two matches.

Remarkably, the Vets B team repeated the trick with an incredible 114-point lead over the next chasing B team which was Reigate Priory. The B team scorers were Andrea Stehlikova, Susan McDonald, Ola Balme, Denise Barnett and Helen Davies, all battling it out for a fine result.

One of the best parts of the day was being able to welcome two women, Judith Cardner and Sally Bamford, making their debut for Vets in the Surrey League cross countries. The camaraderie and efforts of the team as a whole did Vets proud.

The Men's turn

Having nicely churned up the course on the 6km route, it was the turn of the men on the two large loop 8km course. Like the women, the men had got off to a strong start at Richmond with a 3rd place finish and the question was could they do it again?

Whilst one or two scorers from the first fixture were missing, others were able to join the team this time round and, having safely navigated a rather narrow pathway encountered after 1km, the race opened up with familiar names from the first fixture working their way towards the front of the field with the rest of the Vets men in pursuit

With everyone back in (the bar) the results were quickly out, and the Vets men had repeated a third-place finish which after two matches places them third overall behind Tadworth AC and Sutton Striders. Jani Kraner and Mike Cummings were second and third in Division 4 with Norman Urquia in 17th. After that, the scoring 10 was made up of Malcolm Davies and Peter Lee battling it out to be fourth and fifth scorer followed by Duncan Haughey, Bruce McLaren, Gareth George, Ben Revill and Andy Michelson.

The B team managed a second-place finish to Tadworth, another pleasing outcome, reflecting the strength in depth of the Vets team who were able to field 18 runners on the day. A special shout out to Simon Lawrence who made his Surrey League debut for VAC and added to the brilliant team spirit on the day.

Surrey League Matches

1st Claim VAC members are eligible to compete for VAC. Also, 2nd Claim members are allowed to run for VAC if they have not competed for their 1st Claim club in any of the previous matches in any of the Divisions in the 2025-26 season. If you are 2nd Claim VAC, please consider whether your 1st Claim club needs you as a scorer in their A or B teams before committing to run for VAC.

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 women's team, but there is no limit on the VAC turn-out. Every VAC runner is welcomed and appreciated. Please let team managers Paddy Clark and Helen Davies know if you wish to join the teams. Their details are at the front of the newsletter.

George Richardson Loughton Inter-Club Vets, 8 November

Every year, VAC is invited to send a team to this traditional inter-club Masters fixture which was instigated in its current form over forty years ago by George Richardson of Loughton AC, now aged 90, and an Honorary member of VAC.

With George's leadership and inspiration, VAC used to field a team of around 20, maybe more, who made the trip to the end of the Central Line to run on Loughton AC's 8km cross country course in the Roding Valley against clubs such as Ilford AC, Orion Harriers and Eton Manor AC.

Sadly, over the years, fixture clashes with the Surrey League and a declining appetite to venture far afield for a



Martin Allchin (left) and Bill Arbury

small race, has resulted in meagre VAC attendances which are usually not enough to form men's or women's teams of four to score.

VAC's representation at the 2025 event was in the form of Martin Allchin and Bill Arbury. Thanks go to both for flying the VAC flag there. They did well. There were 76 finishers, men and women. Bill was in 42nd place and 5th M60. Martin was 58th and 9th M60.

Those VAC members who have made the trip always report back that they were warmly welcomed and enjoyed the event. Maybe we should target the race in 2026?

British and Irish Masters Cross Country International, Leeds, 15 November

England hosted the 36th five-nation competition between England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Athletes who were selected for their countries competed in five-year age groups for individual and team medals. The venue was Roundhay Park in Leeds on a tough course used many times in the past for the English National cross country championships. There had been heavy rain the day before from Storm Claudia, and the rain continued on the day. The storm had caused disruptions to the air travel of members of the Irish teams from Dublin and Belfast and the times of the races were put back so that they could catch the first flights to Leeds/Bradford airport on Saturday morning.

The course was a 2km circuit laid out on hilly grassland which was saturated with water and in parts had become slippery with greasy mud. One of the hills was the renowned Hill 60, a long hill which gets steeper as it nears the bottom. The hill was named to honour local soldiers lost in World War I in battles around Hill 60, a strategic observation post near Ypres in Belgium. In the race, it was the scene of many skids and tumbles on the descent, and two marshals had been strategically placed to catch runners who had over-cooked it and in danger of crashing into a tree on the left-hand bend at the bottom. The uphill was a killer especially on the third or fourth time.

There were four age group races and an open race. The first was for all the over 65s, men and women, running together over 6km (three laps). The younger women (also 6km) were next, followed by the M50-64 and M35-49 men, each doing 8km (four laps). The Open race was last, giving the reserves the opportunity to experience the course which by then was in its worst condition.

Overall, England made home advantage count and won the match by coming first in 13 of the 17 age group contests. Ireland were second and Scotland third. England also won both the men's and women's competitions.

14 VAC members were spread throughout the races. Five ran in the first race including three in the M80+ category, headed by Peter Giles who won the individual Gold medal. Richard Bloom was third M80, backed up by Paul Newby in fourth. There are no team awards for the M80s as the other nations claim that they are unable to field teams to make a viable competition. Hopefully, team awards will come as more M80s put themselves forward. Maggie Statham-Berry was fifth W70 and part of the scoring England team which won the W70 Gold medal. Linda Tyler competed in the Welsh W65 team.



*Clare Elms (60012) descending Hill 60 on the way to her W60 age group victory at Roundhay Park
(Photo from Dave Woodhead)*

In the second race, a stand-out performance came from Clare Elms who achieved a magnificent individual W60 win and picked up a Silver team medal. Rose Baker was also part of the medal-winning W60 team. VAC members made a

great contribution in the W50 category. Mary James won Silver and Nikki Sturzaker was fourth, scoring well to earn the team Gold medal.

Chris Blackburn was fifth overall and fifth M50 in the third race. Ben Paviour was eighteenth and he and Chris were part of the England team which won M50 Gold. David Williams competed in the M60 Welsh team. He was fourth and won a team Bronze. Maybe for the first time, there were no VAC members in the M35-49 race. Ben Reynolds and Steve Smythe ran valiantly in the Open race.

2026's match will be hosted by Ireland at Santry near Dublin in November. There will be a trial race for England's team, probably again within a match of

the North Staffordshire cross country league at Betley near Crewe in September. It is important to compete there to give yourself the best chance of selection.

Road Running

The Westminster Mile, 27 September

Bright sunshine welcomed at least 44 VAC runners to St James Park for the Vitality Westminster Mile. The race is a legacy event from the 2012 London Olympics with many different waves enjoying a wide traffic-free route round St James Park past Horse Guards parade ground and back along Birdcage Walk to the iconic finish outside Buckingham Palace.

For the last four years, VAC has used the early adult waves to host the club's 1 Mile championships and this year the number of members taking part was the highest they have ever been (25 men and 19 women). As well as the thrill of the race, there was a lively gathering of members afterwards in Green Park to award medals and engage in lots of friendly social chatter.

Amazing times and a British record

Cool and still conditions were favourable for fast runs. Four VAC members achieved sub 5-minute chip times. Jani Kraner (M40) was the quickest with 4:45, then Jonathon Hiorns (M35) with 4:48 followed by Rich Berry and Nick Arnott both with 4:58. Once again Clare Elms excelled, achieving 5:24, only 2 seconds slower than her British W60 age group best set last year. Similarly outstanding, Peter Giles set an M80 British age group best. His gun time of 6:45 was convincingly ahead of the previous mark of 7:05 set by VAC's Harry Tempan in 2007. Doug Milsom equalled his M85 British age group best of 9:18 set last year.

Altogether 11 members were the fastest in their age groups: Jonathan Hiorns (M35), Mike Forder (M70), Peter Giles (M80), Doug Milsom (M85), Lin Skinner (W45), Nikki Sturzaker (W50), Anna Critchlow (W55), Clare Elms (W60), Anna Garnier (W70), Ros Tabor (W75) and Lesley Bowcott (W80).

This event has a tremendous atmosphere, and a mile race is thrilling. Please consider joining in next year on 26 September. Entries are already open on the event's website for early birds.

London Marathon draw

VAC is allocated one club place which is awarded to the first interested member whose name is drawn out of a hat at the November Committee meeting. For the 2026 TCS London Marathon on 26 April, 31 members expressed interest, and the lucky winner was David Pitt of Serpentine RC. Good luck David!

VAC usually has at least 40 members taking part in the London Marathon each year. Everyone has a story to tell about their training, preparation and performance. The editor would love to receive personal accounts which bring the event to life for the newsletter.

British Masters 5k Championships, 30 November

For the fourth year, VAC hosted this prestigious national event on our flat, fast 5km course in Battersea Park. In previous years the event had been full with over 300 entries two months before race day so this time, we had two races on offer to allow more entries. All 520 places had been snapped up by the end of August proving just how attractive Battersea Park is as a venue for fast, highly competitive, road racing, with the Friday Night Under the Lights series of elite 5k races setting a fine example.

The event took place on a pleasant Sunday morning which attracted lots of park users, causing some congestion to the course. The day was cold especially at the start but warmer in the later sunshine. The first race at 10.45 was for men aged 35 to 64. The second at 11.35 was for all the women and the men aged 65 and older. There were 360 finishers (177 in Race 1 and 183 in Race 2). A highlight of the event was the British Best of 19:53 set by Monica Williamson from Midland Masters in the W65 age group.

88 VAC members took part, winning 17 individual medals, including five Golds. Others won medals in the team competition. In the first race, VAC's Thomas Almond, making his Masters debut just four days after his 35th birthday, placed second and claimed W35 Gold with a time of 15:08, four seconds behind the winner, James Copeland of Southern Counties. VAC's Chris Blackburn, in 12th place, was third M50. In a very competitive field, fourth places in their age groups were achieved by Duncan Woolmer (M45), Terry Booth (M55) and Andrew Ridley (M60).

Most of VAC members' medals came in the second race. For the women, Clare Elms (W60) and Anna Garnier (W70) were convincing Gold medal winners in excellent times of 18:39 and 22:50. Nikki Sturzaker (W50), Anna Critchlow (W55), Pam Whitter (W65) and Pauline Rich (W80) won Silver medals, whilst Elinor Skinner (W50), Lucy Woolhouse (W60) and Heather Allen (W75) won Bronze.



In the men's section of the second race, Frank Brennan was a clear Gold medal winner in the M75 age group in a fine time of 22:57. Chas Taylor and Mike Bruce were fourth and fifth M75s. For the M80s, Peter Giles was dominant and won Gold, with Eddie Thorpe taking Bronze and Bill O'Connor in fourth place. Within the highly competitive M65s, David Ogden won Silver in a time of 18:30 just three seconds behind the age group's winner. Alan Nesbit

and Pete O'Connell were fourth and fifth M65s. In the M85 age group, Doug Milsom won Silver. For the M70s, Ged Ruffle won Bronze with Mike Forder in fourth place.

Race Walking

Battersea Park Series

The news (see page 6) about the reduction from four to two of VAC's road events in Battersea Park between April and August is disappointing. VAC has always championed race walking and although numbers have dwindled at the Battersea races, it's important to stage these events so that they are there for newcomers and continue to provide competitive opportunities for the race-walking community. On a positive note, VAC now has permission to stage 5k races on 31 March and 8 September. The other races are likely to be 5 miles on 5 May and another 5k on 2 June.

VAC and Counties 10k track championships, Norman Park, 4 October

The annual VAC and Sussex, Surrey, Middlesex and Hertfordshire County championships took place in good racing conditions in fair weather, with a certain amount of wind from a storm which had passed through earlier.

Numbers were up on the previous year with 12 finishers in the Category A race. There was also a 2000m race for the Juniors which was won by Florence Watson (Under 13G) of Blackheath & Bromley Harriers.

The ladies' race had a new winner, Susan Payne (W65) from Aldershot, Farnham & District in a time just outside the hour, with runner up Chik Ha Kwok from VAC in second place overall and Maureen Noel third. The men's race was won convincingly by Wai Tak Cheung (M45) from Stubbington Green Runners, who had won in 2022. VAC was pleased to welcome back to the start line Dave Annetts (M60) from Cambridge & Coleridge. He finished in second place in a good time under the hour. In fifth place, Matt Ellerton (M50) took over three minutes off his personal best for this distance on the track.

Trevor Jones (Steyning AC) took the Sussex County honours followed by Peter Gregoire, also from Steyning, in second place, The Sussex County awards were presented by Ron Penfold. For Hertfordshire, Dave Annetts took gold, with John Borgars (Herts Phoenix) earning silver. Surrey had one medallist, the prolific competitor Fiona Bishop.

There were four Middlesex County medallists, presented by John Hall, Billie as mentioned above and her husband Man Biu Lam also from VAC each with gold, and the ever-present Maureen Noel (Belgrave Harriers) and Mark Culshaw (Central Park Athletics) taking silver medals.

Jack Fitzgerald Memorial Walks, Crawley, 11 October

VAC hosted the tenth running of the event in Tilgate Park on a course around popular beauty spot, Campbell's Lake, once used as the test bed for Britain's water speed record, and formerly a medieval hammer pond. The race raised funds for the RAF Benevolent Fund, as a tribute to RAF fighter pilot Jack Fitzgerald who was a long-standing VAC member.

The weather was dry and mild, with cloud cover almost throughout. There were eight finishers, four in the short race, and four in the long. Five were from Steyning AC.

It was good to see Anne Jones (W70) back in the results as leader of the pack in the 4.9km race in a time of 46:27. She was followed by Judith Carder (W65) from Portslade Hedgehoppers in 49:38, then Carol and John Killick equal third in 50:30.

Trevor Jones (M65) was the winner of the 10.325km race in a time of 1:02:37 followed by Peter Gregoire (M50) in 1:03:41. Both posted times only about two minutes slower than the previous week's 10,000m track race, a good result given that the Tilgate course was 325 metres longer and in shared space with other park users. Michael George (M55) and Graeme Heaton (M65) were third and fourth.

European Masters Athletics Championships, Madeira

Congratulations to the three VAC members who competed and won medals in the Walks events in Madeira in October.

Ian Richards won M75 Gold in the 10k Walk in a time of 1:02:54. He was ahead of his British rival, Peter Boszko from Midland Masters, who took Silver in 1:03:40. The positions were reversed in the 5000m Walk when Peter won Gold with 31:09.28 and Ian took Silver with 31:40.76. Peter also won Gold in the 20k Walk which Ian took part in but was disqualified.

Maureen Noel won Bronze medals in both the W60 10k and 20k Walks with times of 1:06:06 and 2:17:18. She faced strong opposition from a German and a Spanish woman who took the Gold and Silver medals each time but Maureen was not far behind and had strong fields pressing behind her.



*Ian Richards (2784) and Peter Boszko
(Photo from Steve Smythe)*

Fiona Bishop probably covered the most distance of any GB competitor. She completed five distance events and was part of the GB teams which won the W65 Gold and W65 Bronze medals in the 10k and the Half Marathon respectively. She was seventh in the 8km cross country. She also competed in both Road Walks. She did 1:19:02 In the 10k Walk and 2:49:05 in the 20k Walk.

Also in Madeira was Battersea Park regular, Melanie Peddle, from Eastern Masters. Melanie won two Bronze medals in the W55 5000m Walk and the 10k Walk.

Parkrun

Our next excursion is on 7 March to Lordship Recreation Ground parkrun, Lordship Lane, N17 6BQ. This parkrun started in 2022 and usually attracts around 200 to 250 participants on its firm paths. A feature of Lordship Rec is the Model Traffic System built in 1938 and recently restored. It's a real-life network of miniature roads, roundabouts, etc. laid out to allow children to practise riding bikes and scooters and to use the roads safely.

Join us at Lordship if it's local for you or want to tick it off your lists. These gatherings are a great way to meet fellow members and feel part of the club. Look out for VAC vests.

Beckenham Place, 4 October

On a day when Storm Amy had led to the cancellations of many parkruns, 13 VAC members met in bright sunshine outside the mansion in Beckenham Place Park. It was very windy. Luckily about half the course was sheltered as it headed uphill through woods. Over the years there have been several parkrun courses here. Now that major works to create a wetlands area have largely been completed, the course has reverted to one lap. The first half is quite challenging before a flat loop through a grassy area leading to a short uphill finish. In places the paths are quite narrow, but it was easy enough to get space to run.



*VAC's parkrunners at Beckenham Place Park
(Photo from Jerry Lockspeiser)*

VAC members were spread throughout the field. Roger Beardsworth (M60) was our first finisher, in tenth overall. As usual, VAC featured well in the parkrun's age-graded list with seven in the top ten. Lucy Woolhouse (W60) was top of the list. Her time of 22:57 achieved an 87% age grading.



*Anna Garnier winning the W70 800 metres
in Madeira – her “perfect race”*

(Photo from Jonty Mitchell)