



Veterans Athletic Club

Newsletter

December 2024



***Congratulations Clare Elms!
British Masters Female Athlete of the Year***

VAC Committee Members: September 2024 – September 2025

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Veterans Athletic Club was established in 1931 and is affiliated to England Athletics, BMAF, England Masters Athletic Association, 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 and 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.

Welcome to your December 2024 Newsletter

A Happy New Year to you all. I hope that 2025 brings you good health and success in your training and competitions.

This is the first VAC newsletter that I have edited. I would like to thank the previous editor Angela Kikugawa for the time and effort she put in as editor for many years. Thank you too to Maggie Statham-Berry for making my job easy by providing all the copy for this edition.

You may know that these newsletters are also available to view on the VAC website. Until recently, there were editions going back to 2014. Now, I'm pleased to say, we have added the newsletters published between 2007 and 2013, edited by the late Jeremy Hemming. A big thanks to Glen Reddington for scanning his own copies and making these available to us.

This time last year we had 659 members and that number has now risen to 719. New members are always welcome. I am sure that by the end of the membership year in March, we will have surpassed the highest ever number of members in our digital records.

In common with all athletics and running clubs affiliated to England Athletics, VAC is putting Club Standards in place for good governance and duty of care. VAC's website shows various policy documents. It will be a new requirement that when you renew you will be asked to confirm that you accept the UKA's Code of Conduct which VAC has adopted. In future, you will see this in the Terms & Conditions on the payment page, with a link to the relevant documents.

The VAC committee remains the same this year. Thank you to everyone who continues to spend time helping with the running of the club. We do have some vacancies, though. We are looking for a Communications Secretary and a female Welfare Officer. Please get in touch if you are interested or would like more details of the roles.

The club has organised many successful events this year with some amazing performances from our members. To help ensure we can continue to run these events, we urgently need more officials to help out. Please see Page 9 for more details.

Stuart Matthews
Editor and Membership Secretary

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Photographs

Many thanks to Cliff Hide who provided most of the photos in this newsletter, including the one on the front cover. 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 Cliff on cliffhide10@aol.com.

Fixtures

Refer to the VAC and BMAF websites for further details, updates and additions.

VAC T&F

Sunday 9 February 2025
VAC & EMAC Indoor T&F Championships
Lee Valley Athletics Centre, Meridian
Way, Edmonton, London N9 0AR
Usual indoor events.
Details and entry on OpenTrack soon.

Wednesday 25 June (tbc)
VAC 5000m Track Championship
Millennium Arena, Battersea Park
Four seeded races, slowest to fastest.
First race 18:30 (tbc). Medals for the
first three in each 5-year age group.

Wednesday 10 September 2025 (tbc)
VAC 10,000m Track Championship
Millennium Arena, Battersea Park
Three seeded races, slowest to fastest
First race 18:00 (tbc). Medals for the
first three in each 5-year age group.

VAC Cross-Country & Road

Surrey League (Men & Women)

- CC Race 3: Saturday 11 January 2025
Oxshott Woods KT22 OTA
- CC Race 4: Saturday 8 February 2025
Lloyd Park. Start near Lloyd Park
tram stop. Coombe Road, Croydon
CR0 5RA

VAC 1st and 2nd claim members are
eligible, subject to conditions. VAC vest
necessary. Turn up on the day. Advance
notice to Paddy Clark (men) / Helen
Davies (women) for declarations.

Saturday 18 January 2025 – 14:00
VAC Open Masters CC Championships
Entries are open on OpenTrack.
Wimbledon Common. Start near West
Place SW19 4UK
Men and women run together.
Individual medals in 5-year groups.
Closing date: 16 January 2025

Saturday 1 March 2025
East Surrey League
CC Match 2 – 5M course
Lloyd Park. Start near Lloyd Park tram
stop. Coombe Road, Croydon CR0 5RA
VAC men's and women's teams. No limit
on numbers. Free entry. Men and
women run together. Enquiries and
advance notice to Maggie Statham-
Berry.

VAC Battersea Park Summer Series

- Race 1: Tuesday 8 April 2025
5K Masters Road/5K Open Race
Walk. Entry closes 6 April.
- Race 2: Tuesday 13 May 2025
5M Masters Road/5M Open Race
Walk **VAC 5M Championships!**
Closes 11 May. Medals for first three
in each 5-year age group.
- Race 3: Tuesday 3 June 2025
5K Masters Road/5K Open Race
Walk **VAC 5K Championships!**
Closes 1 June. Medals for the first
three in each 5-year age group.
- Race 4: Tuesday 8 July 2025
5K Masters Road/5K Open Race
Walk. Battersea Park, London SW11
4NJ Closes 6 July.

Races start at 19:00. Details and entry
on OpenTrack for all races in the series.

Saturday 27 September 2025
Vitality Westminster Mile events
VAC 1M Championships!
The Mall, London SW1A 1AA
Details on the organiser's website.
VAC members should select Adult Wave
One at 9:30 and select VAC or Veterans
AC as the Running Club. Please inform
[Maggie](#) if you have entered. VAC medals
awarded.

National & International

Sunday 16 February 2025

BMAF Inter Area Indoor T&F Challenge
Lee Valley Athletics Centre, Meridian
Way, Edmonton, London N9 0AR
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.
Expressions of interest to Maggie
Statham-Berry by 19 January 2025.

22-23 February 2025

BMAF Indoor T&F Championships
Lee Valley Athletics Centre, Meridian
Way, Edmonton, London N9 0AR
Details and entry on OpenTrack soon.

Sunday 9 March 2025 – 10:00

BMAF Half Marathon Championships
Paddock Wood Half Marathon
Eldon Way, Paddock Wood TN12 6BE
First enter the Paddock Wood Half
Marathon Race on the organiser's
website. Then enter the BMAF
Championships on OpenTrack.

Saturday 15 March 2025

BMAF Open CC Championships
Tollcross Park, Glasgow G32 8TF
Details and entry on OpenTrack soon.

23-30 March 2025

World Masters Indoor Athletics
Championships
Gainesville, Florida, USA
See BMAF's website for details.
Closing date 23 January 2025. All GB&NI
entries must be verified by BMAF's
international entries team by
30 January.

Saturday 3 May 2025

British Masters 10M Road
Championships, 50K/100K Road
Championships and Open Road Relay
Championships
Mallory Park, Church Road, Kirkby
Mallory LE9 7QE
Details and entry on OpenTrack.
Closes 27 April.

12-14 September 2025

BMAF Masters Track & Field
Championships
Moorways Athletics Stadium, Derby
Details and entry on OpenTrack in due
course.

8-19 October 2025

European Masters Track & Field
Championships
Madeira, Portugal
No details yet.

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 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

News

Clare Elms, Female Masters Athlete of the Year

Congratulations, Clare! The award is thoroughly deserved. Clare received by far the most votes in her category in 2024's Athletics Weekly Readers' Choice Awards. Her first full year in the W60 age group saw her hit good form for the European Masters indoor Championships at Torun, Poland, at which she won four gold medals in the 800m, 1500m, 3000m and cross country, plus a team gold. During the year she has set a remarkable 15 W60 British records. She has also posted world W60 records over 1500m and the mile both indoors and outdoors. The 1500m world outdoor record was particularly pleasing as it was set at VAC's T&F Championships at Tooting Bec and witnessed by many of us. Clare is a great supporter of VAC's events. During the year she ran in our indoor and outdoor T&F Championships, represented VAC at both the indoor and outdoor Inter Area Challenges, joined VAC's squad in the Westminster Mile, and competed in two



Clare on her way to a W60 1500m world outdoor record

of our Battersea Park road races. The front cover photo, taken by Cliff Hide, shows Clare in Battersea Park in the British Masters 5K Championship on her way to winning the W60 gold medal.

Each year Athletics Weekly draws up a shortlist of athletes who have excelled in that year in various categories. The shortlisted athletes were featured in AW's November magazine and online media. For 2024, three VAC members made the shortlists of six for Male and Female Masters Athletes of the Year categories. This was a fantastic achievement in itself.

As well as Clare, VAC member, **Moira West (W75)** was nominated for her magnificent sprint double at the summer's World Masters Championships, winning gold medals in the 100m and 200m. She set British records at these distances at the British Masters Championships in Derby. She also set a British record in the long jump.

In the men's shortlist, VAC first claim member **Andrew Ridley (M60)** was nominated for his exceptional performances at 800m, 1500m and the mile. He won gold medals for 800m and 1500m at the World Athletics Championships. During the season, he set M60 world records for 800m and the mile, and a European best for 1500m.

Out of interest, the man with the most votes for the Male Masters Athlete of the Year was Dwain Chambers (M45).

England Athletics Volunteer Awards

Three dedicated officials who have served VAC well have won recognition in the England Athletics Regional Volunteer

Awards scheme which provides an opportunity to celebrate the invaluable contribution that athletics volunteers make to our sport.

The **Services to Athletics and Running, Eastern Region** winner was **Peter Cassidy**.



Peter has been a member of VAC for over 30 years and has been the President and Race Walking Secretary. He was a long-serving Secretary of the Race Walking Association, then became its President. Now aged 85, he has been a member of Loughton AC and at the forefront of British race walking for 45+ years as an athlete, coach and official at the highest level. He was Chief Recorder for the walks at the 2002 Commonwealth Games and a Walks Judge at the 2012 Olympics and 2017 World Championships. For VAC, he is one of our first-choice walk judges and rarely misses an event for which we are very grateful. The award is well-deserved.

The **Club Leader of the Year, London Region** winner was **Colin Harris**.

Colin is known to VAC as a regular recorder at our road races in Battersea Park, cross country championships on Wimbledon Common and the 5000m and 10,000m track events. He is always

cheerful and willing, as well as highly effective. He can often be spotted helping at other events, particularly for Surrey County. He is an active member of Wimbledon Windmilers and won the award for leading the club in events and promoting the opportunities for members to gain satisfaction from volunteering. Well done, Colin.



The **Inspiring Official, London Region** winner was **Malcolm French**. Malcolm is VAC's first-choice road race England Athletics Adjudicator for the Battersea Park series at which he is conscientious and supportive whilst offering constructive advice and guidance on the conduct of the licensed races.



Malcolm is a multi-qualified official covering Track, Field and Endurance. He has been a member of Serpentine RC for over 25 years and is perhaps best known as the Race Director of the club's monthly Last Friday 5K in Hyde Park which he has organised since around 2007. His impact as an inspiring official reaches beyond his club as VAC fully appreciates.

Message from Kenneth Mukasa

In the summer, VAC was pleased to welcome Kenneth Mukasa from Uganda. He became a member of VAC whilst visiting the UK for five months to learn about athletics officiating and coaching. He came to VAC's road races at Battersea and helped at some of our track events. Those who met him felt his enthusiasm and were charmed by his joyous temperament. Whilst here, he made an appeal for unwanted athletics clothing and equipment to send back to Uganda to help athletes get started at grass roots level. VAC members responded with many generous donations. Here is a message from Kenneth:

"I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the members of VAC for their generous donation of athletic kits. This incredible support is providing essential resources that will uplift and empower athletes in Uganda, particularly as we prepare for the launch of the Kyetume Athletics Club in Mukono, Uganda."

"VAC members are truly wonderful people, and your kindness and camaraderie inspired me. Your dedication to athletics, as veterans, is a testament to the power of commitment and resilience.

In the Kyetume Athletics Club, we aim to extend this spirit of dedication by focusing on marginalised groups in our communities, especially girl athletes, talented orphans, and the elderly. In Uganda, girl athletes face significant challenges, from limited resources to social stigmas that discourage their participation in sports. Orphans often lack the support system needed to pursue their talents, while the elderly need assistance and a sense of belonging. Your generosity has provided resources that strengthen our mission."



*Kenneth Mukasa at the Battersea Park
5K road race in June*

"I warmly welcome members of VAC to Uganda, through an invitation from the Kyetume Athletics Club. You would witness first-hand the transformative effect of your support and would give you a chance to experience Ugandan culture, run on our soil, and even compete with our athletes! Thank you for being part of this journey with us."

Track and Field

VAC and London Masters Open Championships, Tooting Bec, 31 August 2024

The event took place in cool blustery conditions. For a second year, VAC expanded the club championship to include an open London Masters tournament. The event was successful and attracted 170 entrants, many signing up for multiple events.



Gary Walsh in action at the VAC and London Masters Open Championships



Alexandra Marginean at Tooting Bec in August

There were lots of fine performances from Masters ranging in age from 35 to over 85. Clare Elms potentially set a W60 World Record of 4:57.14 in the 1500m, subject to ratification. Andrew Ridley ran a magnificent 2:07.45 in the 800m to post a world's best for the M60 age group. Unfortunately, his record was not backed up by acceptable photo finish images. Robert McHarg was also within the existing M60 record.

Thanks go to all the officials and helpers who served for many hours to ensure a successful meeting. T&F events such as this need many volunteers. Licensing requirements are strict about the levels of qualification of officials. Each year, we struggle to recruit people in the face of a crowded calendar and officials being too thinly spread. Each year, we seem to be within a whisker of not being able to go ahead. Please consider training to become a qualified official – VAC will pay for the courses. We will also pay a daily rate for your attendance at events as well as travel expenses. If you are there all day as a qualified official and wish to compete in one or two events, you would receive free entries. Finally, if you are a regular Level 2 official, we would be happy to reimburse the cost of decent rain wear. Get in touch with Ros Tabor or Peter Kennedy if you are interested or can help in any way.

England Masters Inter-Area Challenge, Corby, 7 September 2024

37 members made the trip to the Rockingham Triangle Stadium on a damp, misty, day to represent VAC in this prestigious contest between nine of the UK's Masters area clubs. Every place counted for a point in the day's 102 track and field events. In the combined men's and women's scores, VAC finished a worthy fourth behind the winners EMAC, second placed NMAC and third placed MMAC. In the men's competition, VAC's team was fourth, but it was close. Another five points would have put VAC in third, and another 17 points into second. The women's team was sixth but only 11 points off fifth.

VAC had top-three placings in 42 events, recording 12 first places (five for the men and seven for the women), 12 second places and 18 third places. Of note were the double firsts by Sarah Loades (W50 400m and 300m Hurdles) and Moira West (W70 100m and Long Jump). Other splendid top scores of 9 points were achieved by Stuart Bennett (M60 down-aged to M50 2K Walk), Rachel Berry (W50 3000m), Mark Cursons (M60 1500m), David Hinds (M70 400m), Trevor Jones (M60 down-aged to M35 2K Walk), Samantha Lamb (W50 1500m), Emily Murray (W35 Triple Jump) and Gavin Stephens (M35 400m).



Moira West in the W70 Long Jump at the English Masters Inter Area Challenge

The most prolific VAC athlete was Mark Andrews, a multi-eventer, who did nine events (all the M35 field events and the hurdles). In the M50 team, Mark McAllister did six individual events, both track and field, and then ran a relay leg in the second-placed M35 team. Natalie Mann posted good marks in four W35 field events, including three third places. Many others did more than one event and everyone's contribution was valued.

Indoor Inter-Area Challenge, Lee Valley, 16 February 2025

VAC will enter 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 bands (35-49, 50-59, 60-69 and 70+). We can only select one person per event per age band. 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 19 January if you are interested in being selected for VAC's team, and which event(s) you favour.

VAC 5,000m and 10,000m Championships, 26 June and 11 September 2024

The 5000m Championship returned to the Millennium Arena, Battersea Park. The hot weather did not deter the 69 finishers, spread over four seeded races.

Peter Hall (M65) won the first race, comfortably ahead of Ian Kitching (M70). Ella Waddingham (W40) was third, and the first woman. Gold medals for age-group firsts were won by Anna Garnier (W65), Mike Mann (M75) and Michael Johnson (M80). The second race was won by James Adams (M40) in 18:40.70. Lucy Hancock of Clapham Chasers was the first woman, winning W40 gold. Helen Pool was VAC's fastest woman in the four races and won the Women's Champion's trophy as well as W50 gold in a time of 20:52.45. Lucy Woolhouse was the first W60 in a time of 21:06.94

Mark Cursons won the third race and M60 gold in 17:32.43 with Rich Berry (M45) just one second behind. Hannah Pullen (W35) from Aldershot, Farnham & District was a fine fourth and the fastest woman of the four races. The final race was seeded with the fastest runners and highly competitive. Chris Loudon (M35) was a convincing winner, claiming the trophy for VAC's Men's Champion and M35 gold. His time was 15:42.52. Other gold medals settled in this race went to John Hutchins (M40), Ben Millar (M45), Ben Paviour (M50) and Adrian Haines (M55).



The start of the first 5,000m race with the winner, Peter Hall (31), on the far right

The 10,000m Championship was also held at the Millennium Arena. The three seeded races took place in pleasantly warm weather, sunny for the first race and floodlit for the last.

Roman Baniias (M35) won VAC's men's 10,000m champion's title. He was second in the last (fastest) race with a time of 33:33.92, just two seconds behind the winner, Matt Cooper (M40) of St Albans Striders. The fastest woman was Emily Proto (W35) of SCVAC in a time of 39:07.55. Caroline Helder was VAC's first woman and was a worthy winner of the Champion's trophy. Jacob Armstrong-Plieth (M50) was dominant in the first race and won in a time of 39:55.01, Jeremy Garner (M50) won the second race in 38:31.52.



The start of Race 2 at the VAC 10,000m Championships, featuring race winner, Jeremy Garner (25) and the fastest woman, Emily Proto (45)

Two Championship Best Performances were set in the races. The first was Maggie Statham-Berry's time of 49:44.38 which considerably improved the previous W70 record of 51:59.4 set by Pam Jones in 2008. The second CBP was by Ben Reynolds who held his own in the fast race to record a time of 35:27.79, a new M60 record, bettering the previous best of 35:54.1 set by Dave Cox in 2014.

World Masters Athletics Championships, Gothenburg, Sweden 13-25 August 2024

By Andy Murray

The last WMA Track and Field Championships were held in Tampere, Finland in 2022. It was relatively soon after the end of Covid restrictions and the number of athletes was modest. This year there were a phenomenal 8,000 athletes competing in 16,000 events. Great Britain and Northern Ireland had the fourth largest number of athletes of whom about 100 were VAC members.

The large number of track and field events meant that three different stadia were used: Ullevi (where Jonathan Edwards set the world triple jump record in 1995) in the centre of town; Slottsskogsvallen in a country park within the town; and Bjorlanda about 10 kilometres away. All three stadia hosted a range of events. Transport between venues was made easy by shuttle buses and multiple trams and buses.

Non-stadia events were held in Slottsskogen City Park where the organisers managed to stage an undulating cross country course with three or four 2K laps, flat 10K and 20K race walks, and very hilly road 10K and half marathon courses. There were also two parkruns on the outskirts of the city where the usual low numbers were swelled by Masters athletes!

Ros Tabor and I were part of the BMAF delegation to the General Assembly meeting where policy and future venues

etc. are discussed. At that meeting we were very pleased to meet two of Kenneth Mukasa's fellow athletes who comprised Uganda's first ever world masters' team. Kenneth is a VAC member who has been in the UK learning about officiating and photo-finish. He has been present at several of our Battersea events this summer.

Medals tally

The United States topped the medals table with 246 medals (110 gold, 73 silver and 63 bronze) with Germany's 203 (79, 66, 58) and Great Britain's 187 (70, 60, 57) completing the top three ahead of hosts Sweden with 174 (60, 46, 68). VAC members made good contributions to GB's medals. Our individual medallists are shown in the table below.

There were many fine performances. Here are some highlights: Peter Giles won a magnificent five gold medals and one silver. His account of his experiences in Gothenburg follows later. Andrew Ridley (M60) won golds in the 800m and 1500m against top class opposition. He also won a team silver in the 4x100m relay. Moira West won the W75 sprint double of 100m and 200m plus a bronze in the 4x100m relay. Ian Richards won two golds in the 5000m track walk and the 10k road walk.

Many members put themselves forward for the track relays and made great contributions in medal-winning teams.

VAC Individual Medallists at the WMA T&F Championships, Gothenburg

The table does not include team medallists in the cross country and half marathon races. It also does not include medallists in the 4x100m and 4x400m relays.

Name	Age Group	Event	Medal
Lesley Bowcott	W80	6K cross country	bronze
John Burnett	M45	5000m	silver
Peter Giles	M80	5000m	gold
		1500m	silver
		6K cross country	gold
		10K road	gold
Yvette Henry	W50	100m	silver
Michael Johnson	M80	6K cross country	bronze
Allan Long	M80	100m	silver
		200m	silver
Emily McMahon	W70	80m hurdles	bronze
Maureen Noel	W60	20K walk	silver
Ben Reynolds	M55	5000m	bronze
		8K cross country	bronze
Ian Richards	M75	5000m walk	gold
		10K road walk	gold
Andrew Ridley	M60	800m	gold
		1500m	gold
Gavin Stevens	M45	400m	silver
Ros Tabor	W75	800m	bronze
		1500m	bronze
Moira West	W70	100m	gold
		200m	gold
Louise Wood	W55	Triple jump	silver

A Patient Man

By Peter Giles

Here is an account by Peter Giles of his running career and his experience at the World Masters Championships in Gothenburg where he won five M80 golds and one silver. The photo on the back page shows him on his way to winning the Cross Country gold.

I attended Bournemouth Grammar School where a little education was painfully beaten into me. In the annual inter-house cross country races, I used to finish 1st or 2nd out of 150 boys. Strange as it may seem, it did not occur to me to train for these events, nor was there sports coaching of any kind at school. Thereafter,

I played football, cricket and tennis, and would sometimes run to keep fit. By the time I left school, aged 16, I had already played nearly 30 gigs in a rock band with my brother Michael. My career in music took me to 1988 when I was resident bandleader at The Royal Garden Hotel roof restaurant in Kensington. It was there that I met my wife Yasmine and had

the urge to find out what standard I could attain as a competitive runner. I was then 44 years old.

I competed 'unattached' at local races for 14 years until I joined Hercules Wimbledon AC in 2002. Two years later I was selected to run for the English Masters M60 team in the Five Nations International Cross Country held that year at Lloyd Park, Croydon. Since then, I have competed successfully at BMAF Championships and have been selected to run for England eleven times.

In 2015, I entered my first World Masters Championships in Lyon, France. I won a silver medal for the 1500m and bronze for the half marathon races in the M70 age group.

However, it was not until this year (2024) in Gothenburg that I achieved my ambition of becoming a World Champion. Better late than never. This is how my goal was achieved.

Thursday 15 August – 5000m

The venue was the impressive Ullevi Stadium which is also the home of the Swedish national football team. I tucked in behind the Frenchman, Jean-Louis Esnault, followed him for twelve laps, then managed to outsprint him in the home straight. Gold number one.

Saturday 17 August – 4x100m Relay

I was asked to join the M80 4x100m relay team comprising three sprinters, and me with no sprinting pedigree whatsoever. The venue was the Slottsskogsvallen Stadium. Before the race we had a short practice in passing and receiving the baton. The whole race went well. We won and managed to set a new M80 British

Masters 4x100m record with a time of 64.98, three seconds faster than the old record. We were well chuffed! Gold number two.

Sunday 18 August – 10K Road Race

This was for all age groups (men and women). It was two laps of a hilly 5K circuit in the stunning Slottsskogen City Park. It was a tough course, but I managed to win my age group with three minutes to spare. Gold number three.

Tuesday 20 August – 6K Cross Country

This was my fourth race in six days, and I was feeling tired. Then I developed flu-like symptoms. The race was at 9am in the Slottsskogen City Park. I was certain that I would not be able to run, but I had to turn up because Michael Johnson and Barry Roberts were relying on me to complete the GB M80 Team. As luck would have it, we were the only complete M80 team in the race, and therefore only had to finish to get the team gold medals.

Not wanting to squander valuable energy, I did not bother with a warm-up, even though I was shivering. When the gun went off, I ambled away but, to my surprise, after 50 metres or so, I found that I was actually running. My rival from the 5000m, Jean-Louis Esnault, was a short distance ahead leading the M80s. The old competitive instinct (or some other self-destructive impulse) kicked in, and I tucked in behind him. The aches and pains seemed to fade away. Jean-Louis was running surprisingly slowly but I expected him to put his foot down and disappear into the distance. But he didn't.

I stayed close behind for two of the 2K laps. Then part way into the third and final lap, Jean-Louis gave a loud groan,

clutched his stomach and waved me on, past him. So that was it! I felt that I was in an extraordinary surreal dream. I was certain that I would only be able to trot gently or walk the 6K, but here I was in the lead with 1.5K to go and the next two M80s thirty or forty metres behind. I hauled myself up the last hill and headed for the finish with renewed energy to win by about fifty metres. Michael Johnson claimed third place and individual bronze. Poor Jean-Louis came fourth. Barry Roberts finished, eventually securing our M80 team gold medals. Gold numbers four and five.

Sunday 25 August – 1500m Track

My favourite event. I'd had five free days to recover and prepare for it. Easier said than done. I spent three days in bed and could eat no meals for that period. I lost about ten pounds in weight.

This was my first race at the Björlanda Athletics Centre with its brand-new track. From the start the Finn Markku Juopperi shot into the lead, and I moved into second place behind him. After a lap or so he slowed noticeably so the Swede Paul Simonsson quickly took the lead. Again, I slotted in behind. Jean-Louis was just behind us. Four of us hit the home straight together and I took off first. Unluckily my left calf was becoming painful, and it was no surprise when Jean-Louis dashed past me to win by a second. Markku finished third. Silver for me.

What a memorable championships! Five golds, one silver and a British Relay record. I had come from schoolboy cross country winner to World Masters Champion in only 69 years.

Who can say that I am not a patient man?



Peter (far left) on the podium with his 1500m silver medal

Cross Country

VAC's campaign opened as usual with an East Surrey League fixture in Lloyd Park. The September date felt early but some members had already competed in the postponed 2024 National Championships in Telford two weeks before. In a crowded calendar, the Surrey League began in October, followed by a match in November. Many VAC members also took part in the Surrey Masters championships at Nonsuch Park, the Priory Relays at Reigate and the South of the Thames team race at West Horsley Place. Others participated in regional leagues and championships in and around London. Further afield, VAC members who had been selected to run for their countries performed well in the Masters International in Belfast. There is more to come with county, regional and national championships plus VAC's own championship on Wimbledon Common on 18 January and the British Masters event at Tollcross Park, Glasgow, in March. A joy for cross country runners despite (because of?) mud, rain and frost!

East Surrey League Cross Country, Lloyd Park, 28 September

Sunshine and firm ground were appreciated by VAC's team of 14. There were 98 finishers with men and women running together on the two-lap, 7.5K course, without its customary mud and puddles. Five newcomers were warmly welcomed and made great contributions to VAC's overall fourth place in the team results.



*Most of VAC's team. Nicky, Sally, Susan, David W, David O.
Standing: John, Vikki, Andrea, Rebecca, Margaret, Glen*

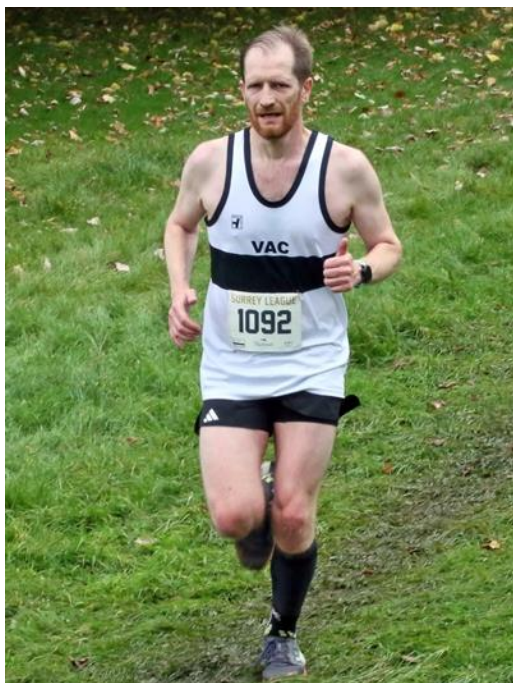
Jani Kraner (M40) led VAC home with a splendid tenth place finish. David Williams (M60) and John Foley (M55) were next, both in the top twenty and first in their age groups. David Moore (M55) completed the scoring team. VAC's first woman was Vikki Filsell (W55) in ninth

place followed by Rebecca Pickard (W45) in tenth. Newcomers, Andrea Stehlikova (W40) (13th) and Susan Dixon (W55) (15th) completed the scoring team which placed a strong third in the women's results.

Surrey Cross Country League, Men's and Women's matches Priory Park, 12 October

23 men and 13 women represented VAC at Reigate in mild, overcast, conditions. Luckily the rain held off for the races but poured down within an hour of finishing. The men's 8K, two-lap, course was testing with a steep ascent from the playing fields and a long tricky descent from the high point. The women did one lap of this course and a shorter lap which still included the climb. The ground was a mixture of firm grassland and dirt tracks, but stones and roots contributed to a number of tumbles.

The men's combined Division 3 and 4 race was first. Simon Moore (M55) led the team, finishing in 16th position in Division 4. He was followed within a minute by Jim Carrington (M45) and Malcolm Davies (M55). Next were Peter Lee, Duncan Haughey and Pete O'Connell, all well under 40 minutes. The scoring "A" team was completed by Ebe Prill, Ben Revill, Ian Butler and John Foss, all in the top 100. Newcomers William Brook, Ian Butler, Gareth George, Duncan Haughey, Simon Lawrence, Pete O'Connell and Tom Poynton were warmly welcomed. They made great contributions. The "A" team were an excellent third in the Division 4 match. The full "B" team fought for every place and were rewarded by coming first in their competition.



Jim Carrington on his way to finishing as second-placed VAC man



Denise Barnett (left) and Sue Dixon (right) helped the women's "A" team to ninth place

As is often the case, the women's race for Divisions 2 and 3 was the last of the day. Andrea Stehlikova (W40) was VAC's first finisher in 33rd position in Division 2. Lucy Woolhouse (W60) was three seconds behind in 34th with Rebecca Pickard (W45) in 37th, also inside 30 minutes. Denise Barnett (W50) and Sue Dixon (W55) completed the scoring "A" team which finished a commendable 9th out of 15 "A" teams. Lucy was the fastest in the W60-69 age band in the combined race. A warm welcome was given to new team members, Andrea, Rebecca, Denise, Sue, Ramona Thevenet and Sally Carr.

Hurst Green, 9 November

On a cool overcast damp day, Holland Sports AC again hosted the season's second fixture at Hurst Green, near Oxted. Improvements had been made to the start section to add another 500m in length to avoid last year's bottleneck on the two bridges and narrow path leading to the network of farm fields beyond. The course was also in much better condition, soft but firm, with only small patches of mud, as there hadn't been much rain for several weeks. The men did 8K with two full laps of the fields. The women did 6K with one full lap and a shorter lap.



Simon Moore leading the men's team home

19 men and 12 women represented VAC. For the men, Simon Moore (M55) again was first finisher for VAC in 17th position in Division 4. He was followed by John Foley (M55) in 20th and Malcolm Davies (M55) in 33rd. Next were Peter Lee (M55), Duncan Haughey (M60), Charles Hampden-Smith (M60) and Vic Maughn (M60), separated by less than a minute. Ebe Prill, Bruce McLaren and Tom Poynton completed VAC's scoring "A" team which was a commendable fourth in the Division 4 match. VAC's "B" team placed second in their competition. Overall, after two fixtures, the "A" team is third behind dominant Elmbridge and Lingfield Running Club.



*Lucy Woolhouse, first in the W55-64 age band
in the combined race*

VAC's women's team of 12 competed strongly in the combined race for Divisions 2 and 3. Their match was again the last of the day but benefited from great support from the men who had already raced and were taking advantage of the hospitality of the Holland Sports clubhouse less than 100 metres from the finish line. Lucy Woolhouse (W60) was VAC's first finisher in 42nd position in Division 2 and first in the W55-64 age band in the combined race. Next was Sue Dixon (W55), 18 seconds behind in 48th. Andrea Stehlikova (W40), Anna Garnier (W70) and Pippa Major (W55) completed VAC's scoring "A" team which was a creditable 10th out of the 15 teams in Division 2. Overall, after two fixtures, VAC's "A" team is ninth in Division 2.

Surrey League Matches 3 and 4 in 2025

VAC's men and women are at the same venues: Oxshott Woods on 11 January and Lloyd Park, Croydon, on 8 February. With mutual support, there is great team spirit. 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 2024-25 season.** Members from outside Surrey are very welcome, although the Surrey fixtures often clash with those of other county leagues.

10 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. The more team members we have, the bigger the impact. 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.

British and Irish Masters Cross Country International, Belfast, 16 November

It was Northern Ireland's turn to host the 35th five-nation competition, and they did an excellent job to stage five races on a challenging course in the Billy Neill Country Park to the west of Belfast. Athletes who were selected for England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Northern Ireland competed in five-year age groups for individual and team medals. The weather was cool and windy with some hazy sunshine. The course was mostly firm grassland on a series of levels with a lake at the bottom, a wild area at the top and two levels of football pitches in between. Multiple laps meant that the climbs in each and the long, fast, descents presented good opportunities for overtaking, as well as being great for supporters.

There were four age group races and an open race. Adding together the scores in the age group teams, Ireland repeated their success in 2022 by claiming the overall champion's trophy. They won both the men's and women's competitions.

17 VAC members were spread throughout the highly competitive races. A stand-out performance came from Clare Elms who was awarded two gold medals for her individual W60 win and her contribution to England's W60 team win. Another star performer was Chris Blackburn who was second in the M50-64 race and won the M50 silver and the team silver. Ros Tabor won W75 silver, Jack Ramm won M35 bronze, Ben Reynolds won M60 bronze, and Michael Johnson won M80 bronze. Ed Chuck (M35) and Maggie Statham-Berry (W70) narrowly missed a medal by finishing fourth in their age groups but both had the consolation of England team golds.



Chris Blackburn took home the M50 silver and team silver

Each VAC member selected is worthy of commendation. The others in England's team were Andy Bond (M50), Ben Paviour (M50), Terry Booth (M55), Mark Cursons (M60), David Ogden (M65), Martyn Underdown (M65) and Mike Mann (M75). In addition, Chris Loudon (M35) represented Scotland and David Williams (M60) represented Wales. Jess Franklin (W45) and Steve Smythe (M65) ran in the Open race.

The 2025 match will be hosted by England in Leeds in November. There will be a selection race for England's team in September or October. It is planned that the selection race will also be the Inter Area Cross Country challenge so lots of support from VAC members would be great.

VAC Cross Country Championships, 18 January 2025

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. The distance is 4.8 miles, comprising two laps, starting and finishing 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 track to test your finishing speed second time round. It's a challenging, fast, course.

Please support Vets AC and come along on the 18th. The event is friendly and supportive. Join us socially afterwards at the 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).

Road Running

Battersea Park Summer Series

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

5K Championship Road Race, 4 June

The race was held in cool conditions. 102 finishers were led home by Tom Hollis (M35) of Lonely Goat AC in a time of 16:26, well clear of second and third placers, Ben Millar (M45) (HHH) and Jamie Philip (M45) (Sevenoaks AC) in 16:42 and 16:44. Joseph Gonzalez-Armas was VAC's Men's champion in 7th overall and first M55 in 17:18. Karima Harris (W50) was the women's winner in 18:06 and added the VAC Women's 5K champion's title to her 5M title won in May. Maria Heslop was the second woman. Her time of 18:19 improved her own Allcomers' W55 course record of 18:22 set last year.



Joseph Gonzalez-Armas – 1st VAC

5K Road Race, 16 July

Fixture clashes resulted in a smaller than usual field, but the 52 finishers produced a fine competition, including two course records. Chris Blackburn of Holland Sports AC won the race in a splendid time of 16:11 which is a M50 record for the course. He was pressed all the way by Tatsuya Okamoto (M40) and Barnaby Day (M40) who finished in 16:18 and 16:20 respectively. Karima Harris of Highgate Harriers was again the women's winner in a high-ranking time of 17:57, a PB for her and a new VAC W50 course record, slicing seven seconds off the previous record of 18:04 set in 2023.

The race was notable for a contest between three octogenarians. John Carter (M80) was first in 28:39 with Mike Leigh (M80) and Joe Aspinall (M85) following.



Octogenarians Mike Leigh, Joe Aspinall and John Carter

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 trophy which dates to 1950. 16 VAC members qualified for the 2024 Grand Prix. To be eligible, members needed to register times in at least three of the four road races.

Congratulations to Karima Harris (W50), the worthy winner of the 2024 competition with an outstanding average age grading of 95.34%. She was the women's winner in each of her three races, and set new W50 5K and 5M course records.

Richard Tomlinson (M55) was second in the Grand Prix with an average of 88.35%, going one better than last year's third place. Richard has been competing in the series since 2007 and has held long-standing M45 and M50 course records which have only been bettered in

recent years. Ged Ruffle (M70) was third in the series with an average of 88.16%, closely followed by Mike Forder (M70), Caroline Helder (W60) and Martin Daoud (M60).

Thanks go to all the VAC members and Open runners who competed in the races over the summer. **The series resumes on 8 April 2025 with a 5K race followed by VAC's 5M championships on 13 May. Other races will be the 5K championships on 3 June and a further 5K race on 8 July.**



Karima Harris, Grand Prix winner

VAC One Mile Championships, 21 September

30 VAC members enjoyed the Vitality Westminster Mile's traffic-free course in warm sunshine. Adult Wave 1 was VAC's designated race, the first of 25 waves, attracting over 4,000 milers on the day. The races started on the Mall and the course made a circuit of St James's Park, past Horse Guards parade ground and back along Birdcage Walk to the iconic finish outside Buckingham Palace. The presentation of VAC's medals took place in Green Park afterwards.

VAC members set three official British bests for a road mile. Clare Elms took 12 seconds off her own W60 record with an outstanding time of 5:21. This is also an unofficial world best.

Doug Milsom achieved a convincing M85 best. His time of 9:18 was well inside the previous M85 record of 9:29 set by Eric Shirley at the Westminster Mile in 2016. Richard Pitcairn-Knowles walked the course in 22:18, which set an inaugural M90 British Best.

Jani Kraner was VAC's first finisher, and second M40 in the adult races in a time of 4:54. Rich Berry was VAC's second finisher, joining Jani in a sub-5 time of 4:57, earning him first place in the race's M50 listing. Clare Elms was VAC's first woman in 5:21 followed by Anna Critchlow in 5:48, placing first in the race's W55 category.

This event has a tremendous atmosphere, and a fast mile is exhilarating. Please consider joining in next year on 27 September. Entries are already open on the event's website for early birds.



Some of VAC's finishers in front of Buckingham Palace

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 2025 TCS London Marathon on 27 April, 21 members expressed interest, and the lucky winner was Ben Reville of Hercules Wimbledon. Good luck Ben! 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.

Race Walking

Battersea Park Series, 4 June and 16 July

The third race of the series in June was the 5K championship. It had 11 finishers who luckily avoided the expected rain. VAC was pleased to welcome back Stefano Zennaro and Artur Olszewski after absences. Stefano (M50), from London Frontrunners, won the men's and overall race in 28:44. The runner-up was Stuart Bennett (Brentwood Beagles) about two minutes behind. The ladies' race was won by Chik Ha Kwok (W45, Metros) in 30:43, with ever-present Maureen Noel (Belgrave) in second place.



Chik Ha Kwok on her way to victory



Stuart Bennett, July race, VAC winner

The final race in July was the 5K distance on a warm and sultry evening. There were eight finishers. The men's and overall race was won by Trejan Checheku-Boamah (Under 15, Blackheath & Bromley Harriers), coached by VAC's Shaun Lightman. Trejan gained a new PB of 30:06. For the ladies, in second place overall, Chik Ha Kwok won for the second consecutive month, setting a PB of 30:15. VAC's men's winner was Stuart Bennett who continues to drive the sport in the Essex area.

VAC and Counties 10K Track Championships, Norman Park, 19 October

The annual VAC and Sussex, Surrey, Middlesex and Hertfordshire County championships took place in good racing conditions on a warm sunny afternoon. There were seven finishers in the County race. There was also a 2000m race for Juniors featuring two Blackheath & Bromley walkers, coached by VAC's Shaun Lightman.

The ladies' race was won by Grazia Manzotti in a time just inside the hour, with Chik Ha Kwok (Billie) from VAC the runner-up. Flying the flag for Sussex, Trevor Jones (Steyning AC)

won the men's race and took the County honours with two Sussex awards, presented by Ron Penfold. There were two new Middlesex County medallists, Billie, as mentioned above, and her husband Man Biu Lam also from VAC.



Some of the competitors who took part at Norman Park

Jack Fitzgerald Memorial Walks, Crawley, 29 September

VAC hosted the ninth 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 mediaeval hammer pond. The race was held to raise funds for the RAF Benevolent Fund, as a tribute to RAF fighter pilot Jack Fitzgerald. A minute's silence was observed to reflect the passing of Micky Harran of Surrey Walking Club and VAC. The weather was dry and cool. In the headline race over 9.52K, Trevor Jones (M65) from Steyning AC achieved his third win at the event in a time of 1:02:46. Ian Richards (M75) was close behind in 1:03:58. For the 5.9K distance, the ladies' winner was Jo Hesketh (W55) from Steyning AC in a time of 38:43.

Parkrun

Kingston, 20 July

Parkrun meet-ups in West London have been the most popular with VAC members and 19 completed this Parkrun. It features a flat one-lap course mostly along the Thames towpath at Ham but with short off-road loops at the start and halfway. Conditions were good, thankfully cooler than the 30 degrees plus of the previous day. VAC runners were the first in several age groups: M55 John Foley, M60 Richard Evans, M75 Mike Mann, M80 John Carter, M85 Joe Aspinall, W65 Anna Garnier and W70 Maggie Statham-Berry. Anna was also top of the age gradings with 90.62%.



15 VAC members at Kingston (left to right): Maggie, Jim, Chiara, Patricia, John C, Richard, Joe, Andy Murray, Anna, Mike, Clive, Ros, John F, Tom, Andy Mitchelson

Bromley, 19 October

Bromley parkrun has two versions. The summer one is partly on grass and quite twisty, but in the winter months, starting in October, a different route is used which is all on concrete paths and pretty flat. This course is fast and therefore popular. Eight VAC members were amongst the 575 finishers. The start was slightly congested but after a few hundred metres it was possible to run freely. The weather conditions were perfect – the rain had stopped, and the air was cool and still. James de Vivenot



VAC members at Bromley parkrun (left to right): Margaret, Ros, Gary, Fiona, James

was the fastest for VAC, whilst Ros Tabor achieved the highest age grading with her time of 26:17 as a W75 scoring 92.26%.

Octogenarian and Nonagenarian parkrun, Bushy Park, 6 July

VAC members were prominent at the seventh annual gathering of the over 80s at the Bushy parkrun. 71 octo- and nonagenarians came together amongst the 1190 finishers at the 992nd parkrun at Bushy Park, the home of parkrun. Dark skies and rain did not deter them from celebrating their ages and showing that they can complete the distance joyously and with pride. VAC member Richard Pitcairn-Knowles (M90) is one of the founders of the annual meeting which includes prosecco and cupcakes as rewards. There were 55 finishers in the 80-84 age group, 13 in the 85-89 age group and three over nineties.

SCVAC's David Moorekite was the fastest M80 in 25:45. VAC's Michael Johnson was the second fastest with an equally impressive time of 26:10 and an age-grading of 84.65%. VAC's Joe Aspinall clocked a time of 37:28 which was third fastest of the M85 competitors. Other VAC members present were John Carter (M80), a good seventh in the M80s in 31:24, and race-walker, Shaun Lightman (M80) in 38:02.

Next year's gathering at the Bushy parkrun will take place on 5 July 2025.



Some of the over 80s at Bushy parkrun, featuring Joe Aspinall in the VAC vest

Trail

British Masters Multi-Terrain Championships, North Downs Run, 30 June Account by Catkin Shelley

This was the 40th North Downs Run hosted by Istead and Ifield Harriers. The race is billed as “a challenging multi-terrain event of approximately 30K using undulating paths and established tracks threading through woodlands, fields and parkland across the beautiful North Downs”. The event has been used for the BMAF championships since 2016 and has become popular with Masters runners. 15 VAC members took part. There were 62 BMAF athletes (up to V75) amongst the 537 finishers.

The race started at the Gravesend Cyclopark, an unlikely spot adjacent to the busy A2 and the high-speed train line, but we were soon out in the countryside on the promised trails. It was a beautiful run, undulating rather than steep hills, passing through fields of wheat, barley, peas and wildflowers, apple orchards, vineyards and villages with gorgeous old cottages; there was even an oast house – definitely Kent! The weather was perfect, being cool with some cloud cover.

I would highly recommend the race to anyone who enjoys getting off the road. It was very well organised by runners with lots of friendly and encouraging marshals and supporters handing out jellybeans and wine gums. There were five water stops and at 17K they offered beer or prosecco; I politely declined. Finishers are rewarded with an amazing array of homemade cakes provided by the local Brownies.

The winning male completed in 1 hour 55 and the winning female finished in just over 2 hours. VAC member Nick Impey came second overall. Five VAC members won BMAF gold medals: Nick Impey (M40, 1:56:43), Steve Winder (M50, 2:01:59), Muhamud Haile (M55, 2:16:26), Catkin Shelley (W60, 2:59:27) and Avril Riddell (W70, 3:27:35).



Catkin Shelley (66) on the trail

Members: Joe Aspinall

Joe joined VAC in 1987 and at 85 is one of our oldest long-standing members. He still competes regularly and is a fine example of dogged determination to continue even though he has had illnesses and tumbles which could have made him give up.



Joe at the VAC 5K in June 2023

As a first claim member, Joe is most often seen in his VAC vest in Battersea Park at VAC's and Sri Chinmoy's road events and at Hyde Park for Serpentine's Last Friday 5K races. These days, he wisely sticks to level ground and short distances, so no cross countries, although he will still turn out on Wimbledon Common for marshalling duties. Parkruns have been ideal. He has an impressive tally of over 130 at nearly 40 London venues with over 50 at Southwark, his local parkrun. He has held age group bests at many of them. Joe is passionate about VAC and veterans' athletics. He attends every VAC AGM and over the years deserves much credit for helping to transform VAC's events and attract more people.

Recently, Joe featured in a profile in his local Bermondsey and Rotherhithe newspaper. It revealed a back-story to his life that Joe is willing to share with us.

Joe was born in 1938 in Ashford, Middlesex. In 1942 he was evacuated to a Catholic convent in Aldershot where he stayed until the age of 15. "My mother was all religion, religion, religion", he says. He knew nothing of his father but discovered that he was a "skilled fitter". Joe surmises that he was called up for the Second World War. At school, Joe enjoyed geography and history and was a good cricketer. He remembers that on Sundays the children were allowed to make their own way back from mass in a church two miles away: "I was always the first one back for bread and jam and a cup of tea, so I became a decent runner, too."

At 15, Joe was sent back to his mother, but he says they were "complete strangers" with "no emotional connection". Adoption was considered, but didn't happen, so the social services placed him in a Working Men's Hostel in Cambridge until he was 18. He returned to London in 1956 as an adult with few skills. He did menial jobs, including one as a page boy in the Mayfair Hotel in Piccadilly, recalling the American guests being good tippers. Rather than wait for his call-up for National Service, he decided to join the Armed Forces and signed on for nine years with the RAF. He did a full tour of duty in Cyprus and was awarded the General Service Medal. He then spent time in English barracks until the RAF proposed to post him to Malaya (now Malaysia). "I'm very thrifty and it's easy to save in the services; I didn't fancy two years 'jungle bashing' so I bought myself out for two hundred quid".



Senior Aircraftman Aspinall

At the age of 22, after five years in the RAF, Joe recalls his feelings. “I walked out of the gates and was lost. I knew nobody and felt helpless. I’d been institutionalised from the age of five to 22, with three meals a day provided, so I wasn’t suited for civilian life”. He moved to London near

his mother but says that there was nothing between them. Soon after, she tragically died. Joe says that “from then on I was determined to stick to myself; I became a loner and did not want to mix with others”. Without any real skills, Joe got work as a cellarman and during the 1960s and 1970s drifted from job to job. In his 40s, for his own satisfaction, he completed a modular degree course at the City of London Polytechnic. “I passed with a 2:2” he is proud to reveal.

In the 1980s, Joe entered a running race with VAC, a decision that has turned into a lifelong passion for athletics although he has lots of other interests. He has a huge collection of books and memorabilia. He also took up long-distance walking, mainly in Scotland, and explains, “I liked the outdoors and loved the wildness of the Highlands, happy in my own company”.

Joe finishes by saying: “I am fit and healthy and have enough to live on, so must not complain; thank you for showing interest in me”.

Obituaries

Peter Yates (1930-2023)

Peter Yates died last year on 5 March 2023, aged 92. He joined VAC in 1988 and moved to Devon in 1999 but continued to be a member until 2015. VAC is very grateful to receive a financial legacy from Peter. His Will made the gift “to the Veterans Athletic Club in appreciation of its promotion of veteran athletics”.

Peter joined Kent AC in 1949 and stayed with the club for the rest of his life, latterly as an honorary member. He made a massive contribution as General Secretary and then President and is credited, along with Ron Hale, for resurrecting Kent AC from near collapse in the late 1970s and being instrumental in transforming the club to one of the top clubs in the country.

Peter first competed as a sprinter but showed his versatility by embracing cross country and road running in the 1980s, completing the first three London marathons. For VAC, he made many appearances as a sprinter at the Battersea Park and Kingsmeadow track meetings in the 1990s in the M60 and M65 age groups. He was a regular points scorer in the Gibson Cup sprints handicap competition administered by the late Jeremy Hemming.

It is pleasing that Peter must have enjoyed his time with VAC and appreciated the work done by the club to perpetuate and grow Masters athletics.

Tom Richards (1939-2024)

Tom Richards passed away on 24 July 2024, aged 85. Tom was a first claim member of VAC and will be remembered by many as a dependable, diligent and careful recorder at VAC’s road and cross country events in Battersea Park and on Wimbledon Common. Tom was also a valued officer of Southern Counties Veterans AC, serving as Vice-Chairman and Treasurer. He was appreciated as a highly qualified field judge at many track and field meetings and was also the referee of the Sri Chinmoy 24-hour track race in 2021.

Tom was an Honorary Member and Vice President of South London Harriers, a club which he joined in 1956. Tom was known there as Tom Richards Junior, as he followed his



famous father into the club. Tom Richards Senior, a Welshman, had a magnificent record of athletics achievements, with the pinnacle of representing Great Britain and winning the silver medal for the Marathon at the 1948 Olympic Games in London. Tom inherited his father's medal and was immensely proud of him.

Tom was an unassuming man, instantly likeable, always helpful, and he will be missed.

Michael Harran (1938-2024)

Mick ("Micky") Harran passed away on 9 September 2024, aged 86. He joined VAC and Surrey Walking Club as a race walker nearly twenty years ago following a running career with Herne Hill Harriers. He was well known on the southern race-walking circuit and a regular competitor in VAC's Battersea Park walks and the Enfield Race Walking League.



*Micky at the Counties/VAC 10K track walk champs,
Battersea Park, April 2019*

In the 1950s Mick was posted to Cyprus with the army for his National Service. He was a boxer and a footballer at that time. In his working life, he became a teacher, starting as a football instructor and going on to teach all sports, including cricket, gym and athletics. He achieved success as an inspirational coach of school running and football teams. He continued to teach until he was 75, long past pension age.

Mick competed on the road and track at all race-walk distances. One of his best performances on the track was in 2010 in the M70 age group in a 3000m race at Oxford's Iffley Road track in which he achieved 15:58.9. On the road, he relished the long walks such as the RWA and BMAF 20K and 30K championships.

Away from athletics, Mick was an avid follower of horse racing, even to the extent of missing one of his favourite races to go to the Derby. He is survived by his son, Tony, who is a highly regarded runner for Herne Hill Harriers and VAC.



Peter Giles winning M80 gold in the 6K Cross Country at the 2024 World Masters Championships in Gothenburg. He took home a grand total of five golds and one silver. His fine form continued in December in Battersea Park when he set a new British M80 best of 22:28 for a road 5K, breaking a record set by VAC's Steve Charlton which had stood since 2007.