

HISTORY OF DORCHESTER ATHLETIC CLUB

1976

The club's first competitive track and field meeting was the Bournemouth Spring Open in early April 1976. Nine athletes took part and winners included Mark Kelly (60m), Jane Ridgers (150m) and Geoffrey Hunter (1500m). Geoffrey Hunter had previously competed for Dorset in the English Schools Cross-country Championships. Also successful in earlier cross-country races were Alan Trent (still a member in 2001) who was the Somerset and South West Counties Boys' Brigade Champion and Andrew Caddy was the Dorset Army Cadet Force Champion.

In May Dorchester AC were represented in the Dorset AAA County Championships for the first time. Competing at Kings Park, Bournemouth. Winners at that first event was L White who won the Senior Women's 100m hurdles in 16.0 secs and long jump with 5.39m and Jane Ridgers who won the Intermediate (U-17) Girls 100m in 13.1 secs. Other medallists were: A Parsons (silver – junior girls (=U-15) long jump), Carol White (silver – intermediate girls (=U-17) 80m hurdles), Al Trent (bronze – Youths (=U-17) 1500m. Dorchester AC also won bronze in the Youths 4x100m relay, an event no longer part of the championships.

Shortly afterwards Jane won the Intermediate Girls 200m at the South Dorset Schools Championships (28.4 secs) and Carol won the Junior Girls 80m hurdles in 14.3 secs. Other medallists at medallists at the same championships, and shortly to become Dorchester AC members were Elaine Tizzard who won the First Year Girls 200m and J (Jane?) Wotton who took runner-up slot in the Junior Girls High Jump. A sign of the times was that amongst the competing Schools at Weymouth were Dorchester Secondary School and Dorchester Grammar School.

The club's first Track and Field League match was in the now defunct Avalon League. It is recorded that a team of nine girls and seven boys took part in that history-making event in Yeovil in late May or early June. Four winners of A or B string races were Geoffrey Hunter (Boys (U-15) 800m), Mark Kelly (Boys 400m), Paul Fox (Boys B-400m) and Richard Marchant (Youths 800m). The Boys team also won the 4x100m relay.

The Dorset Schools Championships were also held at Weymouth and there was more success for club runners. Jane Ridgers continued her winning ways in the Intermediate Girls 100m (13.4 secs) and G Marchant won the Boys 100m in 14.4 secs. Other medallists were Carol White (3rd – Intermediate Girls 80m hurdles) and Mark Kelly (2nd – Boys 100m).

The only other Avalon League match at which Dorchester were recorded as competing was again at Yeovil. This was in August or September and the club gained eight victories, including triumphs for the Parsons twin sisters in the A and B Junior Girls shot.

Chairman and founder of the club at that time was Septuagenarian Ralph Thompson, whose name is remembered by the eponymous annual club trophy for athlete of the year. Secretary was Lieut-Comdr Garth Ridgers. The Lieutenant-Commander pulled off a major coup for the club by enlisting his friend and future round-the-world sailor, Robin Knox-Johnson to take the post of honorary vice-president.

After the initial venture on the track, thoughts again turned to cross-country. Amongst the Dorchester club athletes competing in December's Dorset County Women's AAA cross-country championships (unusually held at Andover!) were Karen Brown, Emma Flippance, Julie Waite, Rachel Lawrence, Donna Hannigan, and Claire Stringer. Most successful club athlete was coach Sandra Caulfield who competed in, and won, the Senior Women's championship.

Newcomer Karen Brown's father Rob quickly took up coaching and continued to coach at the club until 2004.

Further cross-country honours followed when seven Dorchester AC members represented Dorset in the Southern Counties Women's Cross-Country Championships at Camberley. The successful seven were Karen Brown, Julie Waite, Emma Flippance, Tracey Taylor, Rachel Lawrence, Katherine Early and Sandra Caulfield.

15th May 2006