

HISTORY OF DORCHESTER ATHLETIC CLUB

1977

The year began with Dorchester AC's first Annual General Meeting and Awards evening. Press reports of that meeting indicated that 1976 had been the first in the club's existence, although some sources have claimed that the fledgling club had started in 1975. Club Secretary, Lieut.-Cmdr Garth Ridgers told the meeting that, from an initial membership of five female and four male members in 1976, the club was entering 1977 with 27 female and eleven male members.

The two award winners at the meeting were Elaine Tizzard (aged 13) and Mark Kelly (aged 14) who gained the most points in league meetings in female and male events respectively. Club President, Christopher Pope presented the trophies.

The Dorset County AAA Track and Field Championships were held in Weymouth this year. Three new Dorchester names were added to the list of gold medallists and there was also a good haul of silvers and bronzes to celebrate. The three county champions were Ian Mongini in the Colts (Under-13 Boys) 100m (2min 33.6sec), Geoff Brown in the Youths Triple Jump 12.20m) and Jane Maddison in the Intermediate Girl's 80m hurdles (13.1sec). Silver medals went to Geoff Brown (Youths long jump), Rodney Fox (Boy's 100m), Sandra Caulfield (Women's discus) and Karen Brown (Junior Girls 100m – but still under 13). The roll of bronze medallists was Mark Kelly (Youths 400m), Carol White (Women's 100m hurdles), Jane Ridgers (Intermediate Girl's 100m), J White (Intermediate Girl's 200m) and Karen Brown (Junior Girl's long jump).

The year marked a new venture for the club, and our first entry into the big time, with entry into the Southern Women's League. They started their campaign at Portsmouth with the formidable sounding Division IV opposition of Aldershot, Farnham & District, Belgrave Harriers, Winchester, Hercules Wimbledon and Portsmouth. History, and the Dorset Echo, record seven firsts by our Junior Girls but not our finishing position.

Rather better documented was our first Avalon League match of the season in which the final result was 1. Yeovil; 2. Trowbridge; 3. Taunton; 4 Dorchester; 5. Mendip and 6. Weymouth. The undoubtedly biased newspaper correspondent, reporting from the Dorchester side of the Ridgeway, made a particular point of noting that, whilst Dorchester scored 177, Weymouth only scored 77. Of such things are local rivalries made. Pride of place on the day went to the Dorchester AC Youths team who finished second behind Yeovil.

The South and West Dorset Schools Athletics Championships again proved to be an excellent showcase for Dorchester club athletes. Running for their schools, eleven of them were winners. The victorious athletes were Ian MacFadyen, twice (Senior Boys), Mark Kelly (Intermediate Boys), Rodney Fox (Junior Boys), Jane Maddison, Jane Ridgers, Gillian Perry and K (Karen?) Flippance (Intermediate Girls), Karen Aslin (Junior Girls) and Karen Brown, R (Rachel?) Aird and H Manning (First Year Girls). Headlines of the day were made by Jane Ridgers, whose winning 100m time, of 12.6sec, was three-tenths of a second inside the English Schools National qualifying time.

It was tougher for Jane when she returned to the Marsh, Weymouth for the full county schools championships. Starting as favourite, she was obliged to share the 100m title with Dawn Mills (Poole Schools) in a disappointing 13.1 sec. Standing alone on the rostrum, as county champions, were Ian Mongini (Boys' 800m) and Karen Brown (First Year Girls' 100m). Also winning that day, in a new First Year Girl' 200m record time (29.1 sec) was Colfox Schoolgirl Anna Gurd. It was not many years before Anna would become Dorchester AC's first international athlete. Other Dorchester club athletes to pick up second and third place medals for the school area were (Rachel?) Aird, Rachel Lawrence, Gillian Perry, Mark Kelly, Geoff Brown and Ian MacFadyen. A feature of these championships, and soon to be dropped, was the participation of the Channel Islands Schools.

In between the schools events came the second Southern Women's League match of the season. Competing against the same opposition, Dorchester's women and girls picked up seven first places. Returning to action, after a long lay off with a throat injury was last year's champion girl, Elaine Tizzard.

The club's next team team action was in the oddly name annual triangular match with HMS Osprey and Weymouth St Paul's Harriers. Oddly named because when had two year old Dorchester AC ever previously competed in this "annual" match. Dorchester's strength in the female events saw the final result ending in their favour (Dorchester 58pts, Weymouth 56 and Osprey 53). This close result was not repeated in the men's match where Osprey (94pts) edged out Weymouth (85), with Dorchester trailing. Among the match stars were Jane Ridgers, whose 12.6sec run was a women's 100m meeting record. Other Dorchester women winners were Jane Maddison and Sandra Caulfield. Geoff Brown was a men's winner as were the apparently Christian-name-less men known as Barrett and Caddy.

The growing reputation of the club's athletes was recognized when the results of the Dorchester and District Sports Advisory Council's Sports Personality of the Year were announced. Club athletes took three of the four awards with the Senior Women's winner being Sandra Caulfield and the Junior Boys' and Girls' winners being Ian MacFadyen and Jane Ridgers respectively.

As a footnote to the presentation ceremony it was recorded that the Council were campaigning for the old Herringston Road Hospital to be converted into a sports and recreation ground. Whatever happened to that?

But back to the action! Next in sequence was the third and final Southern Women's League match of the season and more heroic action by the team. Jane Maddison, Gillian Perry and Jane Ridgers each competed in seven events (how could they do that?) and gained eight firsts, five seconds and two thirds in individual events. Joining forces with 14-year old Julie Waite, the foursome then won the 4 x 100m relay. Earlier Julie had been a winner in the Girls' age group, as had the two Karens, Aslin and Brown. The Karens, with Sally Drake and Yolanda Adams also won the Girls' sprint relay. When the final league table was published point Dorchester were in an excellent third place.

The Table in full was:

1	Portsmouth	647.5pts
2	Aldershot, Farnham & District	546
3	Dorchester	340
4	Belgrave Harriers	330.5
5	Winchester	324.5
6	Hercules Wimbledon	301.5

Off the track and onto the water went one of Dorchester's distinctive green training tops. Its function at sea was to protect its wearer and club Vice-President Robin Knox-Johnson as he sailed around the world in his yacht Condor. No Dorchester top ever traveled a longer lap.

Dorchester AC's success was being increasingly noted at County level, and it was no surprise that seven Dorchester girls were selected to represent their county at the Southern Counties AAA Inter-Counties Championships at Oxford. The seven competing athletes were Karen Brown (Junior 100m and relay), Anna Gurd, now a club member, (Junior relay), Barbara Cooke (Junior High Jump), Karen Aslin (Junior Long Jump), Jane Maddison (Intermediate hurdles), Gillian Perry (Senior 100m, 200m, sprint hurdles and relay) and Jane Ridgers (Senior 100m and relay) and they were supported by reserves Julie Waite, N Cook and Liz Bradley.

Karen Aslin, now Karen Roberts, was to return to the club in 1998 with her daughter Lauren, possibly the club's first second generation athlete. For a while Karen acted as a coach for the junior training squad, before returning to her current love of netball. Ironically, another challenger for the honour of being the first second generation member was Karen Brown's son Marc Rose.

Returning to 1977, for Dorchester, the track and field league season came to a successful end with the fourth and final Avalon League season of the year (Note we only have press reports for three of these). A measure of that success was the 17 victories achieved during the match by the Dorchester team. These victories contributed to another end of season third place overall. The final table, based on match points read like this:

1	Yeovil	24
2	Trowbridge	20
3	Dorchester	14
4	Taunton	11
5	Weymouth	10
6	Mendip	5

In the individual age groups the best placings were those of the Youths, Intermediate Ladies and Minor Girls (= Under-13) who were all second and Junior Ladies (= Under-15) who were third.

In these early days club records fell with regularity and one of the club's 17 victories in the last Avalon match was Ian McFadyen's 200m hurdles record of 28.9 sec. However, not all records were recorded in detail and, at some time in 1977 Karen Brown set three Under-13 Girls club records that still stand today (2001). These were the 75m (10.2 sec), 100m (13.0 sec) and 200m (27.0 sec). These are the longest standing club records and the 100m and 200m performances are also Dorset County Records to this day.

It is not known whether these times would have placed Karen in the UK top 30 for her events. Were Under-13 Girls rankings even collated in these years? What is known however, is that, in 1977, 15 year-old Jane Maddison was the first Dorchester AC athlete to appear in a UK top 30 listing. The performance that earned Jane her 22nd position ranking was set in the Intermediate Ladies 100m hurdles. Her time does not appear in the press article about her achievement but a little more research and watch this spot.

As so often in Dorchester's history, it was the female athletes who shone brightest in 1977 and this trait continued into the cross-country season. The only cross-country event in the club archives for 1977 was the Dorset Women's AAA Cross-Country Championships at Kemp Welch School. Showing her versatility, Karen Brown, in the Under-13 race, was one of two Dorchester athletes to collect a silver medal. The other to emulate this feat was Rachel Lawrence who was also second in the Under-15 event. Other recorded Dorchester performances were in the same Under-15 race where Gillian Tovey was seventh and Jackie Hugo was 14th. For several years through the late seventies and the following decade, Jackie's dad, Barry Hugo, became one of the most influential figures in the history of Dorchester AC.

As a result of their good runs, Karen, Rachel and Gillian were all selected for the Dorset team to compete in the Southern Inter-Counties championships. We do not know how they fared in the even, which was held somewhere in Sussex, but, as in so many cases, for so many athletes in 1977, we are sure they represented their club with determination and pride.

Looking back on these early years, and despite all the individual successes, former club Secretary, Lieut-Comdr Ridgers, recalls that "one of the outstanding features of this period was the consistent success of the relay teams, particularly the Juniors". In his view "this highlights the true club spirit and the real value of sport in developing co-operation and friendship". To this day, it is these ideals to which the club still aspires.

15th May 2006