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Blackheath Harriers



1869—1924

WINTER HEADQUARTERS.

The Railway Hotel, West Wickham, Kent.

(Saturdays)

Private Banks' Cricket Ground, Catford Bridge.

(Tuesdays and Thursdays)

SUMMER TRAINING HEADQUARTERS.

Crystal Palace and other Tracks.

Honorary Secretary:

H. J. DYBALL,

"EVERTON,"

SOUTH PARK HILL,

SOUTH CROYDON.

Those responsible for the compilation of this little volume desire to point out that it is not their intention that it should be regarded as other than a very brief sketch of the life and work of the Club. They are only too conscious of its many short-comings, but they trust that these will be generously overlooked by those who happen to derive some degree of pleasure—however small—from the perusal of its pages

Blackheath Harriers



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ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT.

THE Club was founded in 1869 and was originally known as "The Peckham Hare and Hounds." In 1870, however, it became "The Peckham Amateur Athletic Club," while in 1878, when its Headquarters were established at the *Green Man Hotel*, Blackheath, it assumed the title of "The Blackheath Harriers," which it has borne ever since.

The following is an account of the Club's first official run, as reported in "Bell's Life in London" of Wednesday, October 27, 1869:

THE PECKHAM HOUNDS.

"The first meet of this Club took place on Saturday, the 23rd inst., at the *King's Arms*, Peckham Rye, when the following gentlemen were present, viz.: Messrs. C. Black, Cornell, A. Johnson, W. H. Williamson, S. Collins, A. Darnell (Trafalgar C.C.), J. Dryden (Hope R.C.), J. H. Easthie (Argyle C.C.), W. H. Hawke (German G.S.), W. Hensman (Croydon A.C.), and F. H. Reed (Thames R.C.). The hares (Messrs. Black and Easthie) were sent off at four o'clock, and led the 'run' through Goose Green, Denmark Hill, Lordship Lane, Dulwich, Sydenham, Forest Hill, and back to the Rye, making a run of from nine to ten miles. Time of running, 97 minutes."

Thenceforward Club fixtures of a similar description took place from the Peckham Headquarters in winter,

and from the *Robin Hood*, Penge, in summer, and were faithfully recorded at considerable length in the sporting newspapers of the time. Cross-country running, particularly for adults, was an innovation in those far-off days and the participators were for some time the victims of considerable adverse criticism; their consistent perseverance and consequent fitness, however, soon made it obvious that there was some method in their madness, and their numbers steadily increased.

A year or so after the initial fixture the membership had been considerably augmented, such names as W. Morris, A. Oliver, A. H. Peniston, S. A. Bennett, W. Rowland, J. T. Pridmore and J. Metcalf appearing in addition to those already mentioned. The last-mentioned—now a Vice-President—is the present senior member of the Club.

No great attention appears to have been paid to track running until 1873, when two Club meetings were held; the first on Bennett's Field, Peckham, on May 31; and the second, a much more ambitious affair, at Kennington Oval on October 11. In spite of unfavourable weather, *The Sportsman* records that the latter meeting "was a great success, there being a fair attendance and a large number of entries." The report continues: "Sport throughout the day was very good, the 'Strangers' mustering strongly, and some good finishes occurred during the afternoon, the proceedings being further enlivened by the band of the 10th Surrey Volunteers." The programme included open handicaps at 100 yards, 220 yards, Half Mile, One Mile and Two Miles, in addition to a 440 yards Challenge Cup Race.

In the ninth year of its existence the Club moved to Blackheath—as has already been stated—and was re-christened. The *Green Man* Hotel, already famous in English history as a rendezvous of kings and other great personages, then became the home of an athletic club

which was destined to make history to an extent which its founders could scarcely have contemplated in their most optimistic moments. It was from here that representatives of the Club trained for forty-four years, during which long period the well-known badge (the entwined squares in blue and white) was carried to the fore at all the principal meetings of the day.

Some twenty-five years ago *THE BLACKHEATH HARRIERS' GAZETTE* was instituted and it has ever since been issued monthly to every member—and there are 'Heathens in all parts of the world. This publication invariably contains—in addition to other items of current interest—records of the achievements and distinctions gained by members, not only in running but in almost every other form of sport. In 1914, when war broke out, the great majority of the members—some 250—"joined up." Of these no fewer than 44, including some of the finest athletes, were killed in action. During the whole of the war period a trail was laid each Saturday during the winters by four veteran members (Tom Crafter, T. K. Grant, A. E. Culver and T. M. Gale) for the benefit of the serving members, and week after week at least one member in uniform turned up at Headquarters. The *GAZETTE* was sent to each man at the Front, month by month, and members were thus kept in touch with the old Club, whose life and energy were preserved—although necessarily in a restricted degree—during those anxious years, by those older members who were obliged to remain at home. With the advent of Peace and the subsequent period of reconstruction it became apparent before long that another problem had to be solved. No longer was the way clear from Blackheath into open country. An unkind fate and the operations of builders barred the way, and so, with the greatest reluctance, the old associations were at length severed and the Winter Season of 1921 saw the removal of the Headquarters to West Wickham,

where summer runs and other fixtures had been held from time to time during the preceding twenty-five years or so. The Club has now become firmly re-established and is rapidly recovering its former glory. The membership as well as the athletic achievements—particularly during the Summer Seasons—have recently broken all past records, and members have every reason to feel proud of their association with so historic and distinguished a Club,

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES.

Ever since its foundation one of the principal aims of the Club has been something far beyond a mere participation in athletics, and the result is that the Blackheath Harriers is a *Club* in the fullest sense of the word. Its members are not primarily anxious about their ability to carry off prizes by reason of their athletic prowess but they *are* anxious that each newcomer should feel that he has joined a Band of Brothers who are determined to preserve the traditions of comradeship and devotion to the cause of "sport for sport's sake" which have been bequeathed to them. This sentiment has been largely responsible for the sustained vitality and ever increasing membership of the Club, whose numbers are now upwards of 550. Many of these are 'Heathens of from 30 to 50 years standing, who are still regular supporters of the various functions and who are as intimately known to the younger generation as to their own contemporaries in athletic activity. They preserve the spirit of youth in a remarkable manner and there is little doubt that this circumstance is attributable in no small degree to their continued and enthusiastic interest in the welfare of the Club they love so well.

During the winter months smoking concerts frequently take place at the West Wickham Headquarters, and on these occasions enjoyable programmes of excellent

standard are the rule. Whist and Bridge matches with kindred clubs are also held at the Catford Bridge Headquarters—and many keen and exciting tussles have been witnessed with such friendly opponents as the Private Banks Cricket Club, the Bellingham Golf Club, the Lewisham Swimming Club, the Curlew Rowing Club, etc. Other pleasant functions are the Sunday strolls which are organised about once a month and which result in delightful walks over the glorious fields and footpaths of Kent. The principal social events, however, are the Dinner, the Town Dance, the Bohemian Concert and the Fancy Dress Carnival, and of these the Dinner is perhaps the most important; it has been held—with the exception of the break caused by the Great War—since the birth of the Club, and it affords the opportunity for an annual reunion of those who for various reasons are unable to attend other functions with any regularity. It is no unusual thing for a member to undertake a lengthy journey by sea and land in order to arrive in London for the sole purpose of sitting among his old friends on this occasion.

The Town Dance, arranged principally for the benefit of lady friends, is renowned for its delightful all-round excellence, and the Entertainments Committee invariably have considerable difficulty in meeting the demand for tickets with the accommodation at their disposal on these occasions. In recent years a highly successful innovation has been the Fancy Dress Carnival at the Blackheath Concert Hall, where over 400 members with their ladies and other friends have met annually at a function which has always been characterised by the utmost conviviality and good fellowship. The Bohemian Concert also attracts an equally large number of supporters and is generally recognised as one of the best and most enjoyable events of the year; it is scarcely necessary to say that the programme is always of the very highest class.

It is worthy of remark that the social fixtures are, without exception, brilliant successes. They are supported by huge attendances, those at the Fancy Dress Carnivals and the Bohemian Concerts generally exceeding by significant numbers those at functions of a similar nature promoted by other clubs, while they all provide occasions which are eagerly anticipated by the many friends of the club who have had experience of Blackheathen hospitality.

ATHLETIC ACTIVITIES.

Since October, 1869, cross-country runs have been held regularly throughout each Winter Season, while the Summer Season is devoted principally to track events, in which so many 'Heathens have excelled and brought fame to the historic badge. The primary object of the Club is the encouragement and promotion of cross-country and track athletics, but in addition it is frequently represented in swimming, walking, rowing, cricket and other branches of sport in competition with contemporary clubs.

From October to March inclusive, training takes place on the Private Banks Ground at Catford Bridge every Tuesday and Thursday from 5.30 to 8 p.m. when the trainer is in attendance. These Headquarters afford luxurious facilities which cannot be excelled in London, and which include a plunge bath, hot and cold showers, etc. Cross-country fixtures, among which are matches with Oxford and Cambridge Universities, the South London Harriers, the Ranelagh Harriers, the Orion Harriers and several of the Public Schools, in addition to various Cup and Championship events, take place on Saturdays during the winter months, while there are also several handicaps for which prizes are awarded and in which competition is particularly keen, especially for the Pelters which are frequently given to the first novice to finish. Other important fixtures in which the Club engages are the

Kent County Cross-country Championship and the Southern Counties Cross-country Championship, and it is the object of all active and enthusiastic members to train regularly and conscientiously in order to fit themselves for selection for the Blackheath Harriers' teams in these events. On these Saturdays when ordinary runs are held over the beautiful country in the vicinity of West Wickham, different packs are formed and the individual member joins that to which his speed and experience are suited. Each pack is under the control and guidance of a runner who is fully qualified to take charge and whose duty it is to see that no one proceeds at a greater pace than is consistent with his apparent capabilities. In this way the young members are encouraged to train assiduously and to improve by a gradual and thorough process, and they are not expected to take part in races until it is clear to the Executive that they are in such condition as will enable them to cover the required distance without risk of harm to themselves. The advantages derivable from this systematic exercise are obvious and the Club can point with pride and satisfaction to many veterans who regularly take part in the weekly runs and who have done so for 20 or even 30 years with constant enjoyment and evident benefit to themselves.

Training takes place at the Crystal Palace and other tracks from April to September inclusive, during which period Club representatives are to be found competing at most of the principal meetings held in London and the provinces, and each season invariably sees a large number of members carrying the Club colours to the fore in different parts of the country. In the early part of the summer an important event is the annual match with the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, while other prominent fixtures are the Kent County Championships, the Inter-Club Contest at Woolwich—with which is associated the competition for the North-Kent Cup—and most important of

all, the Amateur Athletic Association Championships, in which the greatest athletes from all parts of the world meet.

The names of many famous Blackheath Harriers are written in the pages of athletic history as A.A.A. Champions and winners of open level races and handicaps from "the post of honour," but as space is limited, reference to a few outstanding performances only can be made. It is fitting that first of all mention should be made of the President for 1924-25, Dr. H. A. Munro. Many altogether exceptional performances—both on the track and across country—were accomplished by this very distinguished runner. It would be impossible for anyone who beheld his victory in the Four Miles Championship in 1895 ever to forget the last mile and particularly the last lap of that race! They aroused indescribable enthusiasm at the time and their memory does so still! The time, 19 min. 49 $\frac{3}{4}$ sec., was remarkable enough, but the manner of its achievement was simply enthralling! Earlier in the same year, Munro had won the London Athletic Club's One Mile Challenge Cup in the very fast time of 4 min. 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ sec., a wonderful accomplishment, as he ran the latter half of the distance alone, the other starters having retired from the race. Another famous athlete—Vice-President J. H. A. Reay—won the 120 yards Hurdles Championship in 1877, and nearly half a century afterwards he is still the life and soul of most of the Club's gatherings. A little later the renowned East Anglian, C. G. Wood, appearing in the Club colours, won the Quarter-Mile Championship in 1886, in 49 $\frac{3}{4}$ sec., and again in the following year, in 51 sec. An interesting reference to the former of these victories is to be found in Sir Montague Shearman's account of the 1886 Championship Meeting in the Badminton Library Book on Athletics, which should be read by every member. In later years magnificent performances were accomplished in the Quarter-Mile

Championship by C. N. Seedhouse, who won the event in 1912 in 49 $\frac{3}{4}$ sec. and again in 1914, in 50 sec., both against the keenest competition from all countries. It is a noteworthy circumstance that in 1914 the Quarter-Mile Championships of England, Scotland and Ireland were all won by Blackheath Harriers, viz., C. N. Seedhouse, R. A. Lindsay and M. C. C. Harrison. In 1921 R. A. Lindsay added to his fame by winning the Quarter-Mile Championship (of England), in 50 $\frac{3}{4}$ sec. In 1883 W. Birkett was the winner of the Half-Mile Championship in 1 min. 58 sec., and 20 years later this event was again won by a Blackheathen, B. J. Blunden, in 1 min. 58 $\frac{3}{4}$ sec., while, after a further interval of 21 years came the magnificent performance over the same distance by H. B. Stallard, whose victory was accomplished in the phenomenal time of 1 min. 54 $\frac{3}{4}$ sec. In the One Mile, which is perhaps the event at the Championship Meeting, H. B. Stallard recorded another notable success in 1923, when he was the winner in 4 min. 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ sec. Let it never be forgotten, too, that the first One Mile Relay Championship in 1911 was won in 3 min. 33 $\frac{3}{4}$ sec. by the Club—represented by F. T. Browne, W. D. Lancefield, C. N. Seedhouse and J. T. Soutter.

Perhaps the most remarkable of all long-distance feats is T. E. Hammond's wonderful walk from London to Brighton *and back* on June 21st and 22nd, 1907, when he completed the distance (104 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles) in 18 hours 13 min. 37 sec. The qualities which go to make up a performance of this kind, lasting not for 18 seconds or 18 minutes, but 18 hours, are almost beyond conception! H. B. S. Rhodes is another famous walker who, in addition to other great performances, has won the Stock Exchange Walking Race from London to Brighton in three successive years. In long-distance running Vice-President J. E. Fowler-Dixon, who has given so much encouragement to the younger generation, must also be mentioned in connection with his record feats over 50 miles and other distances.

The foregoing are only a few of the many events in which Blackheath Harriers have achieved distinction, but a glance through the list of Challenge Cup Holders will reveal the names of many sportsmen who have carried the Club colours to the front and who have worthily upheld what the late Vice-President C. Val Hunter always referred to as the "purity of sport."

In the Cross-country Championships the Club's performances have been consistent rather than notable and neither the "Southern" nor "National" has yet been won. There was, however, a good deal in the remark of an unknown spectator who, as the tail of the Club's team closed in one year in the Southern Championship, was heard to say: "They may be a long way behind, but they *are* sportsmen."

All down the years the Club has engaged in a long series of sporting events and social functions which have been productive of much good fellowship and real enjoyment amongst those who have taken part in them. Its members can, without immodesty, say that they are proud of the past and full of hope for the future, for it is beyond question that the position occupied by the Club—in both the Social and Sporting spheres—will be maintained as long as its members continue to devote their energies to the promotion and encouragement of that fraternal feeling which originated with its inception and which has ever since been a feature of its existence.

CHALLENGE CUPS OF THE BLACKHEATH HARRIERS.

FLAT.

Rampley	...	...	...	...	...	100	Yards
Wood	...	...	...	...	...	220	"
Reay	...	...	...	...	...	440	"
Barclay-Esson	...	...	...	...	...	880	"
Howard (for members under 19 years of age)	...	...	...	...	...	880	"
Pash (for first-claim members only)	...	...	...	...	...	1	Mile
Walter	...	...	...	...	...	1	Mile Steeplechase

CROSS-COUNTRY.

Club	...	...	...	...	...	5	Miles
Davis	...	...	...	...	...	7½	"
Rowland	...	...	...	...	...	10	"
Rapley (held by the first man to finish for the Club in the S.C.C.C.A. Championship)	10	"

WALKING.

Johnson	7½	Miles
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SWIMMING.

Maryon-Wilson	120	Yards
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FOR COMPETITIONS WITH OTHER CLUBS.

Nicholls	...	v.	South London Harriers,	7½	Miles Cross-country.
Pelling-Ratcliff	...	v.	Ranelagh Harriers,	7½	Miles Cross-country.
Matthews	...	v.	South London Harriers,	Rowing.	