**The Chingford League – a brief history, on the 40th Anniversary of the foundation of the League in 1996” by Les Golding OBE**

The Chingford League was founded in the winter season of 1955/56. It was the brainchild of Sam Waller, Hon. Secretary of Wadham Harriers, who presented the magnificent (Forest) shield which is our senior (men’s) trophy today.

Ernie Baines, of Hornsey St Mary, was our first Hon. Secretary, and we had no problems with officials, for with timekeepers Lister Hey, Charlie Welch, Len Huggett, Arthur Wooten, Les Overall, along with judges Alex McDonald, George Cooper, Ken Arbury, Dicky Dove, Alf Pearson, Horace Denton and Les Golding, together with starters G Hemsworth and Herbie Stean, we were ensured of a well organised event on each occasion.

We had four races in our first year, with eight clubs competing. Such was the success and enthusiasm that the number increased and is epitomised by a paragraph which appeared in the Chinwag, the then monthly magazine of Eton Manor clubs. It read:

“The league venture has proved to be quite a success and has given plenty of fun and competition of a not too serious nature, but like all other events of this kind, success lies in the numbers who will have a go rather than the selected few.”

The ensuing years saw a number of changes, but with the same old faces, improvement was maintained. We lost Grafton, Crown and Manor, London Fire Brigade and North London Harriers, a link with the latter is still maintained as John Mercer, a leading Field Judge, occasionally turns out in the colours of Enfield.

Ponders End AC and Enfield amalgamated to become Enfield, from which club Roy and Beryl Stratton cover the finish of all races and provide the results. Chingford and Wadham amalgamated to become Walthamstow AC from which Brian Hart, who finished 11th in our very first race, now assists in time keeping and finalising the results.

Hornsey St Mary’s amalgamated with Wigmore Harriers to become Camden and subsequently changed their name to North London AC, from which we secured our extremely hard-working League Hon. Secretary, Ivor Wiggett.

Southgate Harriers left their home in Broomfield Park for Whitehart Lane and changed their name to Haringey AC. From our old supports, Graham Prenguer still travels from Sevenoaks in Kent to help out at weekend races, whilst their team manager Jack Martin is always around to help, although sometimes overwhelmed with the work of his own club.

Hampstead Harriers and New Barnet amalgamated to become Barnet AC. John Atkins is a great support, whilst wife Brenda is our No 1 disc distributor.

Loughton AC have been with us from the very early days and have increased in support since we included girls’ races in our programme. George Richardson, now our Chief Timekeeper, took over the mantle of Les Overall and ensures that each and every finisher has his/her time recorded.

Victoria Park Harriers are always happy to host our five-mile road race from their headquarters, and thus ensures a very large field. Ron Irons, the oldest of their trustees, finished third, running for Crown and Manor, in our very first race, and is always at hand to assist.

Eton Manor have been members from the start and have given yeoman service to the league. Unhappily in 1967, the trustees of the Manor Clubs decided to close the grounds at Leyton, and also endeavoured to close all the clubs under its umbrella. Fortunately, the cricket, rugby, football and athletics (sections) fought off this move and are functioning today, although not in the same strength as in the past.

George Smith, who was second home in our first ever race, and now well into his 60’s, is either competing or officiating today. Tom Everitt, who joined the club in the late sixties now does a magnificent job for the League, ensuring that clubs receive printed copies of results for each race.

Les Golding, now residing in the wilds of Kent, with spells of nostalgia, recalls his and his pals’ efforts in the early races, when, on occasions, (their) services were required to amass the required six. In spite of his advancing years, Les still manages to attend most races.

These eight clubs have been the main stay of the League. In its heyday, we had inter-league matches with the Chiltern League. An event which unhappily was dropped due to the difficulty of finding a free Saturday. With increased heavy traffic and constant road changes, we were forced to discontinue our evening road races from various clubs’ headquarters and moved our operations to the Temple Mills cycle track, which, although a little short in distance, has proved an unqualified success, especially with races for the young athletes and the women now included in the programme.

Following the jogging phase\*, clubs were looking for more serious competition, and we were joined by Orion Harriers and Muswell Hill\*\*. Later, with the outlet of competition for youngsters, we were joined by Woodford Green AC, and Essex Ladies (3), in need of road and cross country competition joined us in the last year, whilst Epping Runners have yet to make their presence felt.

We have had, as already emphasised, 40 really enjoyable years. We hope those who have joined us in the latter part will be with us for the next 40 years, playing their part in the success of this venture.

Article by Les Golding

**Notes:**

\*”the jogging phase” (!) i.e. the 80s running boom associated with the inauguration of the London and other marathons

\*\* Trent Park RC also joined the league in the late 80s, known initially as Trent Park Trotters

**Other leavers, joiners and mergers since 1996:**

1999 Enfield and Harringey merged, leaving the league in 2015

2000 Muswell Hill Runners and North London AC merged to form London Heathside, leaving in 2005

2008 Walthamstow AC were absorbed by Orion Harriers

2010 East London Runners and Dagenham 88 joined

2016 Barking Road Runners and East End Road Runners joined

2017 East London Triathletes and Harold Wood RC joined

2018 London City AC, Edmonton RC and Mornington Chasers joined

(With 16 clubs the senior A teams were divided into two divisions)

2019 Ilford AC joined

2020 The Covid season: The programme was reduced to 4 races for seniors only

2021 London Heathside re-joined

**AW article from 2014 by Roy Stratton of Enfield and Harringay and Tom Everitt of Eton Manor:**

