

# *The Highwayman*

March(ish) 2014

[hhhnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:hhhnewsletter@gmail.com)

Izzy Coomber & Paul Cousins snaffle XC county golds... **Harriers men take country bronze...** And if you thought one marathon was hard Jack Chivers takes on 12... **Russ Mullen nods off in the Worthing 20...**  
Top coach Martin Delbridge on goal setting... **Mags Lazell's secret session...** Grabble marathon tips:  
Tapering is just slacking... **Josh Pewter: the sports masseur who reaches the parts others can't...**



**Muddied but unbowed:** the Harriers who braved the boggy Bexhill course and took bronze

## **Stand and Deliver**

A lot can happen in two years. Back in March 2012, after years of struggling to get a team together, the Harriers' men's cross country team were delighted to be promoted from the third division of the Sussex league.

Thanks to the enthusiasm and hard running of Barry Tullett, Tom Mullen and many, many others performances improved and a team ethic built last year and at the end of the

2012/13 season the Harriers came second in the second division – winning promotion to division one.

Some in the team were nervous at the prospect of another promotion. “We’re going to get beaten up in the first division and get put back in the second division,” said one member. Even the skipper Tom admitted it would be a real challenge to stay up.

So fast forward to March 1<sup>st</sup> 2014. It’s the final fixture of the season at Bexhill and some of the team still have the jitters that despite the

heroics of Paul Cousins throughout the season the Harriers may struggle to stay up. But in knee-deep mud the Harriers men packed well. Not all were thrilled with their personal performances, but that's not what *really* counts in cross-country. By turning out, in horrendous conditions, and "gutsing it out" they were doing something other clubs weren't.

A nervous look on the face of a coach from one of the league's biggest clubs was the first hint that something special might be a foot. The results were checked and rechecked. Then came the presentation. One of the league's officials said they were "surprised", even cheered, to see that one of the "smaller clubs" had taken third place in the league's overall 2013/14 results. And that "smaller club"? Yes, Haywards Heath Harriers.

The mens' team came back with a clutch of bronze medals – another of those moments when the Highwayman has to say that this is "thought" to be a club best. Bronze medals for the men was a shock, but some how writing that Izzy Coomber and Paul Cousins struck gold again isn't so surprising. In her first season, "Whizzy Zoomer" won the senior women's league and Paul Cousins 50 competition. It was the icing on the cake of wonderful season.

While we're on the subject of how much can be done in two years, have a read of this month's Meet the Club and the extraordinary two years Natalie Chivers has had. Natalie

only took up running in April 2012, but has already racked up a succession of marathons – including four in 2013.

Impressed? Well, maybe that's only halfcore – her husband Jack managed 12. His account of his epic year begins on page 11 of this Highwayman. Even Jack will struggle to compete with Natalie's latest challenge, however. She'll be running the London marathon next weekend while six months' pregnant. Good luck!

Our final thought about what's changed in two years relates to this very publication. It was in a booze-sodden haze in Lindfield's Bent Arms while recovering from the 2012 AGM that plans to resurrect *The Highwayman* first emerged. Even Mark Sykes, now our chairman, seemed sceptical. Others suggested it was a "whim" that could soon whither. It hasn't – well, not yet anyway.

But times do change. After two years it's high time for new voices, features and perhaps a new editor for our club's newsletter. The current editor planned to offer the job up at the recent AGM, but illness nailed him to his bed.

Now, this is not strictly speaking a resignation letter (Ron Jinx would not allow it), but merely an offer to give up this gig if someone else is would like to take it on. So, If you would like to write, edit or just abuse *The Highwayman*, please write to [hnhnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:hnhnewsletter@gmail.com).



## Harriers wins key accreditation

**Linda Tullett writes:** I am pleased to inform all club members that Haywards Heath Harriers has recently been re-accredited with the England Athletics Club Accreditation Award. This signifies the club is committed to being a safe, effective and member-friendly club. In order to gain this award, the club had to put together a very detailed portfolio of procedures and documents which required verification at a site visit and assessed by England Athletics Assessors. Parents and athletes were also questioned on points mentioned in the documentation to confirm its accuracy. I have been advised that we are the first club in the South East to gain re-accreditation twice.

# Meet the Club: The Chivers

Barely a weekend seems to go by without one of this husband and wife duo ticking off another marathon – and often snaffling yet another PB. And rumour has it, there's another on the way...

## Jack

**Began running:** 31<sup>st</sup> May 2010 (first training run having signed up to the Brighton Marathon the day before!)

**Why I started:** I was recovering from a poor period of health and went to watch Natalie do a Race for Life 5k at Fontwell Racecourse. It looked like a great way to make the most of what health I have.

**Joined the Harriers:** Spring 2013, having been persuaded by the Harrier's very own Tony Stark: 'Ironman' Phil Payne.

**Favourite distance:** 10k, though marathons are the best to finish (it's just a pain getting that far!)

**Favourite event:** Horsham 10k. Not big or glamorous or exotic, but a race I always seem to do well in.

**When not running:** I'm a Business Analyst (aka a 'Spreadsheet Monkey')

**If I wasn't a runner, I would be:** taking part in some other sport. Before taking up running I've played Cricket in the Surrey League, Rugby for Crawley RFC, football for several company teams and so forth. Have always been rubbish though, which helps me appreciate how wonderful it is finding a sport where I'm... slightly less rubbish!

**I bet you didn't know:** I have more letters after my name than there are in it. Prior to getting into sports I did a lot of studying and ended up with three degrees as well as some other qualifications (though the upcoming arrival of our first child has put the Phd on indefinite hold). Sadly my utter lack of knowledge on 95% of what's on TV means I'm still a liability on most Pub Quiz teams!

**Runners High:** Winning a 1 mile race last summer; being cheered over the line was a wonderful, if slightly surreal, experience! That said, any race I can finish healthy and on my feet is something I value.

**Most embarrassing run:** Missing the finish of a re-routed Parkrun route (due to flooding) in January and sprinting 30 yards past; then having to sheepishly jog back to 'officially' finish. Doh!





## Natalie

**Began running:** End of April 2012. Three weeks after starting to run, I ran the East Grinstead 10 miler with Jack. I managed to run the whole thing (at a very slow pace) but was so happy that I cried at the end of it. I think that run kick started my love of mud and hills...

**Why I started:** To help me lose weight. Before I fell pregnant, I'd lost nearly 6 stone with the help of running.

**Joined the Harriers:** In the spring of 2013. I used to go to school with Phil (Payne) and when we all by chance happened to be travelling to Rome for the Marathon, Jack and I met up with him and he suggested us joining.

**Favourite distance:** Marathon: anything less is 'short distance'! :p

**Favourite event:** Rome Marathon: my first one and a life-changing event

**When not running:** I complain about not being able to run. I love taking part in XC events on my horse. The bigger the fences and the faster we go, the better!!

**If I wasn't a runner, I would be:** A runner's WAG.

**I bet you didn't know:** I'm really big into my muddy obstacle running. Anywhere I can skin my elbows and knees whilst army crawling under barbed wire or where I jump into chin deep freezing cold water and swing on a rope and land in a pool of wet, sloppy mud is a good day for me!!

**Runner's High:** Crossing the finish line at Rome. I burst into tears while Jack tried to give me a hug but all I could say was: "Oh my <expletive deleted> God!!". Ten minutes later I was saying how much I was looking forward to the next one!

**Most embarrassing run:** While I was running the Bournemouth Marathon (my 4<sup>th</sup> of 2013) I had a fall at mile 17 and went headfirst into the barriers. I managed to knock over someone watching, as well as two metal barriers, but even with a bruised head (and ego), I still managed a PB.

---

### **ROAD:** Hastings 1/2M, March 24

**Tom Mullen writes:** Nineteen Harriers took on the hilly Hastings half last weekend, with some fantastic results. The race coincided with the Sussex half marathon champs this year for the 30th running of the race.

Other than a bit of breeze, conditions were good and a number of harriers were using the race as a warm up for April Marathons. At the sharp end Russ Mullen was again in great form, finishing 10th in the 3000 strong field and 5th Sussex runner in 1:15:46.

For the team medals, Russ was backed up by brother Tom, 29th in 1:21:07, Paul Cousins (34th in 1:21:49) who was also 2nd v50. Now those positions would have been good enough

for Sussex silver but we are not sure at this stage why but Paul didn't count in the results, neither did Graham Hart in 1:26:03! They counted Mark Davies in 1:27:49 which was still good enough to give the team Sussex bronze, and really shows the strength in depth at the club.

Mark was only just ahead of a rejuvenated Andy Biggs, who despite holding back slightly with his focus on London in April almost PB'd in a fine 1:28:16. There were excellent PBs for Jack Chivers (1:30:29), Ben Adams (1:33:15), Jana Apps (by some 9 minutes!) in 2:03:51 - great runs on what is by no means a PB course.

Also worthy of a mention is Howard Booth (1:44:30) who just missed his PB and Natalie Chivers, five months pregnant and still completing a half!

## ROAD: Worthing 20



**Let's go round again:** Russ at the "Boring 20"

**Russ Mullen pulls no punches:** Awe-inspiring. Captivating. Stunning. Just some of the words one would never associate with the recently run Worthing (that's not actually in Worthing) 20. Such is the reputation of this once in a lifetime event that the stories, myths and legends have spread far and wide.

For those who haven't had the pleasure allow me to explain. Firstly, the Worthing 20 isn't in Worthing. It's in Goring. And while that is geographically almost insignificant it is very important apparently. Imagine telling someone who lives in Hove they're from Brighton and you'll get the gist. The route itself is 20 miles long (I applaud your initiative) and consists of a 5 mile loop, done 4 times. Such is the grandeur of this race, it not only challenges your running prowess, but also your mathematical ability. Our esteemed editor had significant problems with the latter.

Indeed, despite being called the Worthing 20, Mr Watts actually took part in the Worthing 20.5. It's happened to the best of us but The

Packhorse expressed masterful ineptness by not only getting lost, but by managing to do so on the last of the 4 laps. This alone is a profound testament to the races ability to keep ones wits and mind focussed and alert along the journey.

Our quest began along a frightfully flat and pleasant road that led to the Seafront before bearing left onto the first of the 4 loops. A rather quaint seaside scene was made with a gentle sea breeze under the basking sun. This was glorious. After about 2 miles we turned away from the sea and onto the architectural metropolis that is George V Ave.

Houses, bollards, bus stops, and even street lights were just some of the delights on show. Before we knew it, we were flying along the A259 which was host to some more of man's greatest creations. 'Grooms' hair salon, Tesco Express, a Harvest Petrol station and some of the finest roundabouts you could ever hope to run on. Bliss.

In a flash we had turned left again and headed back towards the sea. So much was there to marvel at that we went round again. And again. And again. Any keen observers would have noticed that the price of unleaded actually dropped 0.2 pence during the race.

On an almost serious note, the race isn't meant to be one for the ages. It's meant to do a job of giving the runner a timed, flat, 20 mile route in preparation for a spring marathon. It does those things very well. With every 5 miles being marked it is a great way to judge pace as well. I'd only decided to run three days before the race with the hope of getting a solid effort in at marathon pace and it met all my needs.

Other Harriers also enjoyed the cultural carnival and despite getting lost The Packhorse trotted round for 12th place in 2:08:38. Mark Davies (the Harriers resident driving instructor and satnav) was metronomic in his 2:19:54. Andy Biggs and Jack Chivers had a great battle with huge PB's for both guys in 2:25:11 (Jack) and 2:25:19 (Andy). Howard Booth (3:02:14), Susan Robinson (3:09:45) and Peter Cobbett (3:32:38) completed the line up admirably.

## XC: Bexhill, March 1



**Pure gold:** Izzy and Paul with their medals

**Tom Mullen writes:** Harriers in Cross country has been a revelation this season, 3 men's teams in every race, two ladies teams in every race and juniors to boot, all in pretty horrific conditions given how much rain we had this winter!

The final league race was at Bexhill and with the team places all but decided (the men needed to pull back 162 points on Phoenix which wasn't likely) the focus before the race was on whether Paul Cousins could win the v50 individual league, and if Izzy Comber could steal a medal in her first XC season for the club.

The course at Bexhill was worse than it was in January with mud a foot deep in places! The juniors led the way with Jasmine Mamoamy having another strong run for 20th and leading the U13 girls team to 9th place for the season. The U13 boys team of Dan Blain (26th), Jake Ridley (31st) and Oli Bliss Tomlinson (32nd) recorded their best team position to date, coming 10th of 14 teams. These conditions were exceptionally difficult for the youngsters and everyone who has raced this year has done extremely well.

Next up were the ladies where Izzy was looking likely to get a silver or bronze going into the last race. With a number of vet and U17/20 titles on the line, a strong field started the 5K mud-bath. It was clear the Sussex senior champion decided not to race so Izzy knew a good run could get her a gold or silver and she went off really hard, getting involved with the lead group on lap one. Despite the sapping conditions Izzy had another

brilliant run, coming 7th overall and 2nd senior which was enough to secure her the senior women's league gold - a Harriers first and a fantastic achievement in her first season.

Finally it was the men's turn over 8k, and all eyes were on harriers xc specialist Paul Cousins. He was tied first in the v50s after 3 races, he had a first, and two seconds (5 pts), one of his rivals was also on 5 (1st, 3rd, 1st) and the other was on 7 (2nd, 2nd, 3rd), all 3 were there at Bexhill so it was a straight shoot out for the title.

Paul was in the zone and was already first harrier on the course halfway round lap one. Despite two slips, Paul continued to push on, putting some serious time into his v50 rivals (and most of the field!) coming a fantastic 16th overall and winning Harriers second individual league gold - another first for the club getting two golds in a season!

The men's team have been 4th all season, a great achievement in their first time in the top division and the team performed amazingly again... Rob Watts moved through really well after a steady start to finish 19th. Paul Tomlinson had a superb XC debut, packing well with Tom and Russ Mullen all race, before catching and outkicking Tom for 27th. Tom was 28th, Russ 32nd and Phil Payne 46th. Our six were in and looking around only two Phoenix were in.... could we be in with a shout of the bronze, surely not

First up the B team had another stormer with Tim Hicks 71st, Jon Kennedy 78th, Barry Tullett 83rd and Richie Amer 87th, sealing 4th place in Division 3 which was a superb achievement. Phoenix runners filtered in and the calculators were out as it was close... 6 scorers in each of the 4 races, and it was decided by 10 points... 874 to 884, the Men had sneaked the bronze!!! The Sussex officials were so surprised they hadn't looked at who our medalists from the season would be... another club first and medals for Paul, Rob, Tom, Russ, Paul T, Phil and also Phil Hardaway, Rich Sutor and Josh Pewter who had scored earlier in the season. A great achievement by all, but I don't think we'll get away with the bigger clubs writing us off next season!

So cross country closes for another year as we head to the roads and track... bring on 14/15!!

# “My favourite session”: Mags Lazell

How has Mags managed to wipe two and a half minutes off her Clair Park parkrun time in just five months? She points the finger at one of her regular rep sessions...

**Where is it:** Copyhold Lane, between Haywards Heath and Cuckfield

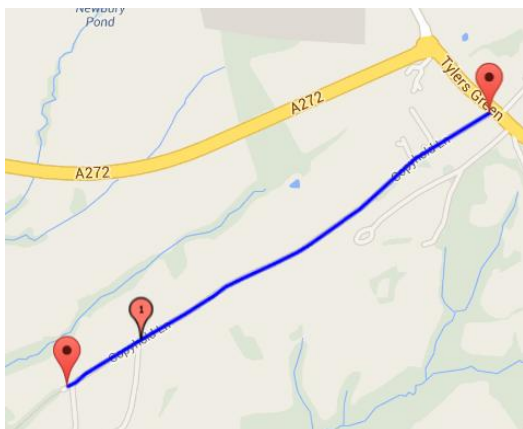
**Distance:** 7.5 miles for the session including warm-up and warm-down.

**Session:** 4 x 1,200 efforts, first and third up the hill, second and fourth downhill, going every seven minutes.

**Surface:** Pavement for warm-up and warm-down, quiet lane for the session.

**Pros:** “The downhill efforts feel really fast, great for working on stride length and cadence. And only two uphill efforts, so half-way comes round quickly.”

**Cons:** “The uphill effort feels a long, long way, and is, quite frankly, lung-busting agony.”



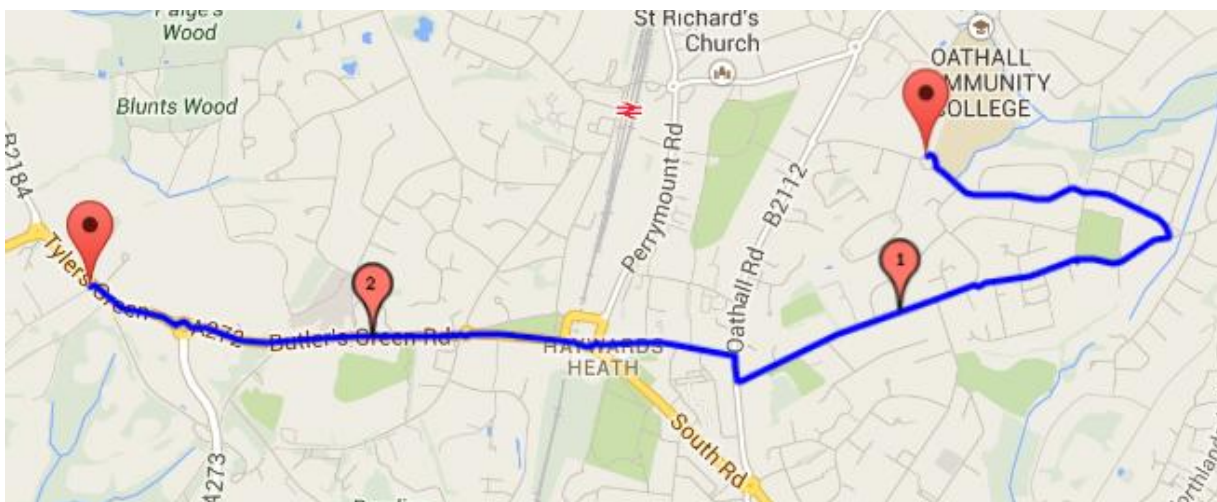
Directions: “Setting out from the bottom of Oathall Ave, run along Washington Road, Hanbury Lane and then turn right and go all the way up New England Lane/America Lane. Then over the main road and down Church Road, and along the A272 past Beechurst all the way to the top of Copyhold Lane.

“The session starts from the ‘20’ painted on the road and goes all the way to the bottom. The hill is steepest at the far end, and if you remember to look through the trees on your left you can glimpse the Downs. Then make the most of the recovery before the return effort, and be grateful that there is a sign post you can use to hold yourself up when you finish.

The once more each way before wobbling home via the A272, the Broadway, Heath Road, Oathall Road and Oathall Ave.

“There are those in our household (eg the Editor) who think six reps is better than four. I think they have been spending too much time listening to Walter Grabble.”

**Stop press:** Mags has since clocked 19:52 at the Hove Park parkrun... and 20:31 at Clair Park



A two-and-a-half mile warm-up ensures Mags is ready for all Copyhold Lane can throw at her



# Whistle & Wisdom



If you've been running for a week or decades, goal setting can be enormously valuable for running. Coach **Martin Delbridge** explains how...

## **Why are you a Harrier?**

When I first started to ask new members what they wanted from joining Harriers, I think a lot of people felt that they should answer this by talking about target times for distances. Perhaps I put words into their heads by asking the question "What would you like to improve about your running?" Interesting how a specific question can encourage a specific point, but with experience, I now try and ask the question more generally. I noticed that some talk about the social aspect of having some company, being part of a club atmosphere, feeling good about yourself through being fitter .... or having reduced fees for races. And some say they don't really know. All of this is fine, but after a while you might want to ask yourself why you did join in the first place, what you were expecting from coming along to Oathall and hanging around dimly lit corners of the playground or other parts of our town and villages with a bunch of others whose name you sometimes struggle to remember? And if you've been a member for a while, what specifically was it that encouraged you to pay your subs this year?

## **Goals - powerful motivators....**

I first remember hearing about the power and use of goals by listening to Steve Backley talk about how he used his goal of "winning Olympic gold" - which was some two years away for him at the time - into something

meaningful that he could do something about. Firstly, it's about knowing what performance you need to achieve, knowing in his case how far he would have to throw the javelin to win. Secondly what's the performance gap from his current ability. Then thirdly and crucially breaking this down into the details of what this means to technique, strength, speed, endurance, food, rest, recovery and mental strength. Which then leads to an overall plan of training and monitoring of expected and actual performance. Another example is Seb Coe who had 6 months to prepare for winning the Olympic 1500m gold in LA in 1984, and the way he analysed his goal down into detailed components of training was quite amazing. The YouTube clip of this race is a fantastic motivator, it's all good final bend stuff when he looked like he just strode away from Crammy.

## **What can stop you?**

Having a goal that stretches and inspires you is important. But it's also got to be in some way realistic and achievable which means being able to see that you can make progress towards it. Margo Jennings, coach to many athletes most famously Maria Mutola and our Kelly, suggests that you have 3 columns - goals, obstacles, and how to overcome them. This is a great way of breaking things down and taking away the general worry that you might not be able to achieve the goals you set



yourself. I enjoy seeing athletes reaching their potential, whatever that may mean, and I like to see people who can perform as closely as possible to their potential on competition day. Tim Galway (The inner game of tennis, which he wrote in 1977) believed that your potential is limitless, but you need to identify the "interference" of what gets in the way of you achieving it. Normally the interference is made up of things within your control, and there isn't anything you can't practice or train for to reach your potential. And if it's not within your control then why worry about it?

I think you also have to look at what sacrifices you are prepared to make to achieve your goals. For example if you want to win a county 100m, how many times a week should you be training? If you can't make that commitment with other things you want to do in your life it's less likely you'll succeed and your goal will become demotivating.

#### **Feeling nervous?**

I've seen some athletes get scared of their goals as competition day for example gets closer. I think this does link to confidence, some call it mental toughness which I think is different. You have to you're your confidence about achieving your goals on something real – so it's important to reflect on your training plan and the times or distances you're achieving so that you can see how you're improving and whether your goal is still the right one. Remind yourself how well you are doing.

So why might you feel nervous before The Big Race? Chemically, this is linked to our primitive fight / flight response, when in times of stress or fear your body produces adrenalin which raises your blood sugar levels, raises your heart rate to pump more blood to the muscles, and widens the small breathing tubes in your lungs. This is all good stuff to help you run faster. But the snag is that the adrenal gland also produces more cortisol which many of you will know as the "stress hormone". Being exposed to higher levels of cortisol for an extended period is bad for you as it can cause muscle weakness and mental confusion. Some of the more informed commentators and coaches think this is what might have happened to Paula before running in Athens, and the fact that she just stopped in

the race and looked confused are some symptoms of this. What you can do in your training to combat this is to learn to relax with your running, reflect on the good parts of your training, practice visualising the start, work out how and when you'll arrive at the start and most importantly practice your competition warm up routine.

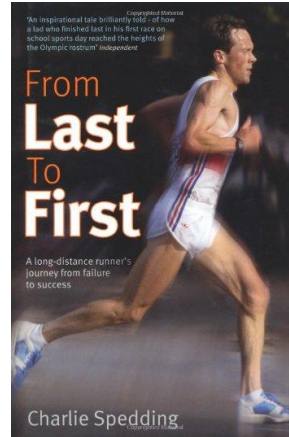
Another demotivator is if you expect to get a pb in every competitive situation. Top performance isn't always achieved every time you put on a race number, the best way to achieve a target race time is to target a race, identify your performance gap and then work out the training plan and work towards that. I've seen many runners achieve say a sub 40 min 10k and then set another goal once they've done that.

#### **What do I want? Why do I want it? How much do I want it?**

Goals have to be something you really want. I went to a conference a while ago to listen to the motivation of some African athletes, it was truly inspiring to listen to them as their motivation to escape poverty is so compelling for them. At the top level, true desire to win is what makes one athlete get over the line in front of another.

Closer to home (!), a few years ago I ran the Downland 30, never having run more than 21 miles. I knew inside me that I could make it but wanted to finish injury free and feeling good. I did achieve that, but there's an interesting twist as to whether I was being ambitious enough as I had a secret desire to get a good time as well but felt embarrassed to tell anyone in case I didn't make it. With 2 miles to go I had a realistic chance of finishing in about 4hours 55 mins but I missed that by just shy of 10 minutes, despite trying hard and it being a massive net downhill from the Beacon. And I think I know why - it wasn't a goal I had lived with during my training, and so when the opportunity came I didn't really want it that badly. On the other hand, when I did run under 40 mins for 10k when that was my target and I really really wanted it, I ran even harder when our then coach Dave yelled at me with 600m to go "Give it everything you've got Martin!" I guess none of you have ever heard me say that before.

Charlie Spedding was the last GB athlete to win an Olympic medal in marathon, in LA in 1984. His book "From last to first" is a great example of how to use goals as a motivator. I have a couple of copies if any of you would like to read it. He's a gently spoken and reflective person and he's got massive ability to focus on putting one foot in front of the other faster than everyone else when it really matters. I recently exchanged emails with him about using this quote from his book and he's so non assuming and pleased that people might find this motivating:



*"What do I want? Why do I want it? How much do I want it? ... The desire to achieve something has to be born inside you, grow inside you and blossom and flourish inside you, until you know what you want, why you want it, and how much it means. A goal formed in that way is an incredibly powerful motivator, but a goal someone else chooses for you, becomes a burden and then a shackle."*

Your coaching team welcomes any type of goal you might have. We're a club who encourages you to enjoy your running and I am especially keen that we support you with what you want from your running and that you stay as free as possible from injury.

Tell people about your goals. Use your goals positively. If it works and motivates you, feel proud of what you can achieve.



## **Highwayman Caption Competition**

You were invited to offer a 'just about clean' caption for this image of Phil Payne relaxing with enthusiastic masseur and housewives' favourite Josh Pewter.

As many of you will know Josh is the sports masseur who reaches the parts others cannot reach. That's because his treatment is so inexpensive many people who can't normally afford such treatment are able to afford Josh's

competitive rates. Anyway, the Highwayman judging panel had little trouble awarding the £25 prize to Barry Tullett for the following submissions:

Josh: "Tell me when you can 'Phil the Payne'."

Phil: "Do you GUARANTEE I will definitely beat Izzy after this?"

# Jack Chivers Runs the World: 12 marathons in 12 months



**Another weekend, another marathon:** Jack at last summer's South Downs marathon

Hello there.

It's been suggested to me that, rather than waiting to enter the inevitable "pick the worst grimace at the end of a race" competition, a way I could contribute to the Highwayman's literary fartlek through Sussex would be to write up an article about a series of marathons I ran last year.

Rather than opting for a detailed account of each race based on my Garmin's data ("at mile 17 the gradient increased to 1.4%, thus raising my heart rate by 2% and necessitating a pace adjustment of negative 0.04 miles an hour for the next 300 yards") I've opted for a general comment on the main memories I have from each race; starting from a desert city in the east and finishing on a Caribbean beach in the west.

Therefore relax - unless you're reading this on a treadmill - and read on to discover my musings on such issues as what is the collective noun for a group of nuns, the passive-aggressive nature of royal deer and bread smuggling in the West Indies.

## The Introduction

I'm still not sure I really like marathons. Sure, they're satisfying afterwards and they've been a part of my running since I started in 2010 - the first race I signed up to was the Brighton Marathon. But the pain and commitment required (both before the race and during recovery), along with the fact that if they do go wrong they can go *really* wrong (yes, Brighton, that means you...) means that at best it's a love-hate relationship.

That said; they do have a mystique. Offhand I don't know how many 10 milers or half-marathons I've done, but my marathons completed total is one of those running figures I'll always be aware of. It was this aura, especially for non-runners, which led me to set myself a target last year of running a marathon every month.

A couple of years ago my father passed away and, having taken part in a fund-raising running challenge for my employer's charity in 2012, I wanted to do something in 2013 to raise money in his memory. I chose Crohn's and Colitis UK as the charity (as he had the latter condition) and initially set out to run five marathons in five different countries. This became seven and from there it pretty much became a case of filling in the gaps, as well as dropping the 'different countries' part due to constraints on finance and annual leave.

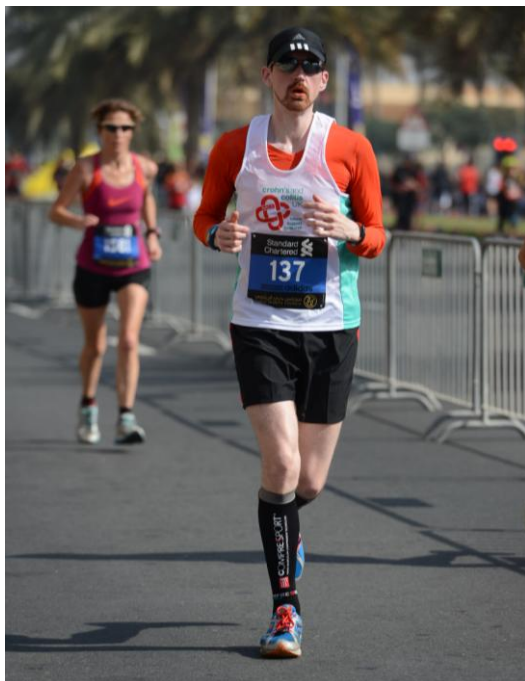
Anyway, that's the warm up done. Now on with the events.

### The Races

*January: the Dubai Marathon.*

In summary: It's flat, it's fast, it's foggy.

Recommended training song: 29 Palms by Robert Plant



The race starts and finishes at the base of the Burj Khalifa, which is both the world's tallest building and a severe test for my spell-checker. It starts before dawn and, after the coastal fog eventually lifts, ends in increasingly warm sunshine.

It's fair to say the city hasn't taken the marathon completely to heart: the circa 1,500 runners may have outnumbered the spectators (though to be fair those that were there were very supportive).

However if you want to set a PB this is a great course to do it, and Dubai is an interesting place. Though I didn't feel their famous shopping malls were that much better than our one in Crawley. They may have an indoor ski slope, but we have a newly opened Primark: nuff said.

*February: the Heartbreaker Marathon (New Forest)*

In summary: Off the road, in the cold.

Recommended training song: A Forest by The Cure

My first trail marathon. Sub-zero temperatures, ice, snow and quite a lot of wind (from the weather, not my carb-loading). The course is basically a couple of miles out to a ridge and the back and forth along it three times.

Nice scenery and zero spectators make for a good race to find inner peace and learn more about yourself. In my case that consisted of learning that although gravity might allow me to run fast down a steep hill on tired legs, my hamstrings won't. That and just how unwelcome cramp is over the last 10km of a race.

An enjoyable race: the sort that generates camaraderie between the runners (based on a "we're all mad enough to be doing this rather than staying in bed!" kind of feeling).

*March: the Rome Marathon*

In summary: Cobble-pounding, sightseeing, nun-dodging.

Recommended training song: Living on a Prayer by Bon Jovi (see below)



A great route for seeing Rome's landmarks. It starts and finishes at the Coliseum and passes the Circus Maximus, Trevi Fountain, Spanish Steps and St Peter's Basilica. Expect that this year it had to re-route away from the latter due to the papal election going on (I don't know if the organisers asked for the election to be rescheduled to make way for the marathon instead, but felt it might be impolite to ask...)

It's a mainly flat route with a couple of slight dangers to negotiate. One is that, like Bon Jovi in the 80s, cobblestones are Slippery When Wet. The other hazard is the danger of running into a nun if a group of them suddenly crosses the road. I'm not kidding here - this does happen and unless your Italian/Latin is good enough for you to call out "Excuse me holy sister, runner coming through!", then shouting "woaah" and taking evasive action is your best bet. Unless the cobblestones are wet; in which case just try not to take them with you on the way down.



#### *April: the Paris Marathon*

In summary: Le Grande Stag

Recommended training song: White Wedding by Billy Idol

On occasion I've been asked by other married men what I did for my stag-do. When I tell them I ran the Paris marathon they always seem surprised. This always leads me to ask them "Why - which one did you run?"

Despite toying with the idea of running the Brighton marathon the day after our wedding, I opted for a race the weekend before (the chance of sustaining an injury during the

evening's first dance was too great a risk). So it was off to Paris with my best man Bob (himself a London Marathon finisher in years past prior to an injury-forced retirement), who undertook the heroic task of travelling to various points on the route to take pictures of me staggering past.

The route is mostly flat, largely alongside the Seine and does a good job of handling the number of runners (despite not being a "marathon major", Paris is one of the biggest in the world). It also has the most impressive start of any race I've done: along the Champs Elysees. If anyone wants an alternative to London/Brighton then it's well worth a look, especially if you book early as both race entry (no ballets!) and travel are pretty cheap if done in advance. Just don't mention Agincourt.

#### *May: the Edinburgh Marathon*

In summary: North of the border, south of the river.

Recommended training song: Heart of Lothian by Marillion

My first marathon as a married man thankfully resulted in a (then) personal best, thus sparing me from having to explain to the wife that although I loved her dearly, this marriage thing seemed to be affecting my running times and so would have to be reconsidered. More importantly, she also got a personal best and so didn't need to have the same conversation with me. I'm not certain but assume this is how all marriages work...

The ideal route would of course end with a leg-killing, soul-destroying climb (we all love those, right?) up the Royal Mile to finish in the grounds of Edinburgh Castle.

Sadly the real route leaves the city early on, runs alongside the Firth of Forth (on the south side) and finishes in the town of Musselburgh (a significant bus ride from the city).

That said the support is actually better there and this does permit the luxury of a post-race shower (which really is just as well for the bus-ride back: a group of sweaty runners is not a scent that seems likely to catch on as the next Lynx fragrance).

A fast route and, unlike certain local marathons, an event that doesn't insist on charging an extra £5 if you sign up online (rant over); it's a nice race that makes a good weekend-break/race combination. Just don't mention Culloden. Or the rugby.



#### *June: the South Downs Marathon*

In summary: Hills. Many, many hills  
Recommended training song: Up and Down by the Pet Shop Boys

Another trail marathon, mostly along the South Downs Way. The weather was lovely and the support mostly consisted of being applauded by hikers met on route. The course is never extreme but, with a lot of gradients and a significant (aka: evil) hill in each 10km, it was the sort of race to take satisfaction in being able to run the whole thing rather than worrying so much about time. Or to put that another way: keep putting one foot in front of the other, enjoy the views and forget the PB.

Despite having been lucky enough to run in several major races in big cities and exotic locations, this is actually my favourite marathon (so far). The views at the top of the hills were wonderful (a clear sunny day no doubt helped) and it remains the only time I've finished and been really happy with my time. It's not that it was fast, just a lot less slow than I expected.

#### *July: the Bath Marathon*

In summary: The Wild West (country).  
Recommended training song: Solsbury Hill by Peter Gabriel

A new race in 2013. Like South Downs this was a trail marathon. Like South Downs this had hills. Unlike South Downs this one required me to grab hold of tree roots to pull myself up some of those hills.

Now despite the occasional (i.e. constant) complaints, I like hills. They're satisfying, lead to good views and usually are accompanied by some fast downhill bits. Bath had quite a bit of flat running alongside canals and rivers but when it did throw in a hill (one of the milder ones being Solsbury Hill) it didn't mess about. Several gradients exceeded 50% which is hard enough going up but also can make you fear for your life going down, especially for those of use bringing an exciting combination of very tired legs and habitual vertigo to the race's later stages.

If anyone has done one of the Trionium running events near Box Hill in Surrey, this was pretty similar, i.e. pretty flipping extreme in places. Any runner who finds some of this terrain still too mild may as well go and sign up to one of those extreme obstacle races to find new ways on injuring parts of your body you never even knew existed. (Tip: if anyone is interested in trying out obstacle racing I can recommend my wife as a source of advice, she loves them. Mad, of course, but then she wouldn't be my wife otherwise...)

#### *August: the Thames Meander Marathon*

In summary: The 'other' London marathon  
Recommended training song: She's a River by Simple Minds

I have a theory that all runners have certain roads or trails that they seem to be destined to run many times. For several Harriers I'd guess this could include chunks of the South Downs Way. For myself I'd include Brighton seafront in this but more-so the Thames river towpath. Speaking as someone who finds driving up to London for my daily commute to be more sapping than a series of mile reps, it seems strange that I've done so many of my races along different parts of the towpath (Kingston, Twickenham, Windsor, etc). It's not as though I can swim well enough to cope with any wrong turns...

Anyhow. The race started and finished in Richmond Park and ran alongside the river for the other twenty miles. Apart from the park (mostly downhill on the way out and uphill on the way back) it was flat, fast and pleasant enough. The halfway point involved crossing Putney Bridge which required runners to weave through a bus queue (of people, not buses) on an already crowded pavement. Surely this is something we should be looking to replicate during track training sessions as a way of improving reaction times?

My final abiding memory of the race was running back through Richmond Park and coming across some deer on the path ahead of me. Now I don't know about you but I have this image of deer as elusive creatures who may watch you from afar but will flee if approached (whether their mistrust of humans is a result of watching Bambi or Jeremy Kyle is a moot point).

These deer made it perfectly clear that they owned this park and were unimpressed with me running through it. Whilst I couldn't say the stag who blocked the path and forced me to circle round him was actively aggressive, he was obviously unsympathetic to my desire to take the shortest route round that particular bend irrespective of my having ran twenty-five miles to get that far.

The moral here: Richmond deer reside in a *royal* park, and they don't let you forget it.

#### *September: the Bacchus Marathon*

In summary: 26(.2) green bottles hanging on a wall

Recommended training song: Red Red Wine by Neil Diamond

This is the UK version of the famous Marathon Du Merdoc, a race though the wine-making region near Bordeaux where the drink stops serve wine and fancy dress is actively encouraged. Bacchus (the Roman god of wine, along with agriculture) follows the same approach and starts/finishes at the Denbies vineyard near Dorking in Surrey. It's mostly off road and, even if you opt for water rather than booze, is hilly enough not to be a route for PB setting.



While not a large event, it is getting bigger and is a good option if you want a stress-free run (no pressure to race hard) or a race to introduce someone to marathons; though you will need to explain to them that not all events can so easily turn into effectively a 26.2 mile pub-crawl. It's a two lap course which provided two experiences. One was the chance to twice run what must surely be the fastest last mile of any marathon: all on road descending over 150 meters. Feel free to run just as fast as your legs (and hamstrings) will permit.

The other experience derived from there being a half marathon option that starts a while after the full marathon sets off. Thus on the second lap you may encounter some of the 'halfers' making their way round. There's nothing like running through the North Downs and passing a group of a dozen ladies dressed as green bottles to make you question if you might have grabbed the wrong cup of liquid at that last water stop...

#### *October: the Bournemouth Marathon*

In summary: Like Brighton, but in Bournemouth.

Recommended training song: Surfin' Safari by the Beach Boys



Another new race for 2013. This one took place mostly along the seafront and included a couple of short sharp climbs as well as the chance to run out and back along a couple of piers. The later neatly combined my vertigo with desire not to drown to produce a non-stop white-knuckle adventure\* for several hundred meters.

While the climbs made the route a bit slower than Brighton (though I'd actually say it's a nicer route overall) it's still mostly flat and is well worth considering for a (fairly local) autumn marathon. \*- *possible exaggeration*



#### *November: the Athens Classic Marathon*

In summary: Some are bigger, many are faster but this is 'the' marathon.

Recommended training song: Chariots of Fire by Vangelis

As both Bath and Bournemouth were first-time races I had technically ran the world's 'newest' marathon twice already; in November I did the oldest. There are in fact two Athens Marathons: one based purely in the city and this one (the "Classic" version)

which runs along the original route between the plains of Marathon and the 1896 Olympic stadium in Athens.

After about six miles of fairly flat terrain the route spends the next fourteen miles steadily climbing. Granted the last six are then flat or downhill but personally I found by then I didn't have the energy left to make much use of this.

Parts of the route are attractive as you run through the Greek countryside. Mostly it's less inspiring city outskirts. However the support is good, especially later on when you're in the city and the crowd's tendency to hand out olive branches (small ones, thankfully) to runners is a nice touch. Starting actually in Marathon is a goose-bump feeling (even without the pre-race fireworks) but it's the finish down the athletics track of the Olympic Stadium that is the clincher: if you only ever do one marathon, this is the one to go for.

#### *December: the Reggae Marathon*

In summary: Start in the dark, run in the sun, finish on the beach.

Recommended training song: Sun is Shining by Bob Marley

One of the advantages of being married to a marathon addict, aside from a shared understanding of how important it is having *exactly* the right pair of running shoes for each race, is that although I wouldn't have dared suggest going on honeymoon somewhere they hold a marathon, the wife pretty much insisted on it. So having turned down Hawaii as being a bit too far (distance and cost) we picked Negril in Jamaica for the trip, specifically a couples resort circa 500 yards from the start line of the Reggae Marathon.

Despite being actually a small event (180 finished in 2013) the race boasts the "world's best pasta party". Certainly it was nice, if a bit chaotic, with plenty of carb-loading options. This was just as well given the race starts at 5:15am and our resort didn't have any plans to provide breakfast that early.

With no shops around we ended up quietly gathering whatever bread we could and smuggling it out of the party back to our room.



Given that we had paid for the party as part of the race entry fee it wasn't actually theft, just postponement of eating. But that said we both felt glad that, having heard how stiff the penalties for drug smuggling are out there, we didn't need to find out what the policy was on bread smuggling.

There's actually not a lot to say about the actual race. It's basically four times along a fairly straight, flat road, minimal support but regular DJ music stations do help to provide some much needed atmosphere. In principle it looks like a good PB route but the heat determines otherwise. Although I suspect it wasn't much hotter than Dubai, the Caribbean is a lot more tropical than desert, hence it's a lot more humid.

I had an eye on a top ten finish beforehand but ended up rolling in just inside the top forty, circa fifteen minutes slower than Athens and barely able to keep going over the last two hundred meters.

On the bright side the finish includes a nice medal, a steel band, very fresh coconut juice (literally: coconut, remove top, add straw) and is a few steps from a typically lovely sandy beach. It's definitely one of the nicest finishes to a marathon and a fitting end to an incredible year.

#### The Final Sprint.

I'll end with three comments. Firstly, wherever each marathon has taken place I've always been impressed with the organisation and helpfulness of everyone involved, whether it's the organisers themselves or the marshals and other volunteers. While I did prefer some events to others and could think of ways to improve them, every race had plenty to recommend it and would be a worthy adventure to undertake for any runner.

Secondly, here are my 'awards' for the best race in a selection of categories. For those of you who lost the will to live just reading the introduction, just skim through this part and feel free to bluff your way through all those marathon-based conversations I know you're just dying to get involved with.

Best Start: Paris – the Champs Elysees,

Best Finish: Athens – the 1896 Olympic Stadium,

Best Route: Rome – see the best of a beautiful city,

Best Atmosphere (from spectators): Rome – though with a special mention to the last few miles at Edinburgh,

Best Atmosphere (from runners): South Downs – but all trail marathons were especially good,

Best Food Stations: Bath – cakes galore! This would of course be Bacchus if you fancy some wine,

Best for a PB: Dubai – hot later on but wide roads and so flat,

Best Expo: Paris – size matters. Both Rome and Athens were impressive too,

Best medal: Rome – different each year. Special mention to Paris, Athens and Reggae,

Best for bragging rights: Dubai – a top class elite field in a big city race that's well outside Europe,

Best Value: Rome – sign up early and book well in advance. You get a big marathon in a lovely city. Just make sure you budget for eating out on race day evening so you can show off your medal!

Third and lastly, a big thanks to Natalie, aka 'the wife', for agreeing to let me do all these events. Mind you, after she did her first marathon at Rome, she's become such an addict (five and counting) that she's now the one constantly looking out for races to enter.

Apparently there's one held at Disney World. Given that she ended up missing out on Reggae due to us finding out she was pregnant (and had in fact already done both Bournemouth and Athens before we even knew) I suspect I'll have to plan for a trip to Florida at some point.

Of course by then we'll have a mini-runner with us as well (no pressure baby!). Circle of life indeed...

Adios amigos.

# Embrace the pain

With Walter Grabble



Our club's inspirational guru has uplifting words for Harriers preparing to take on this year's April marathons

So this is it. This is what your training has been all about: marathon day. Within a few hours many of you will be taking on the full 26.2 miles in Brighton and next weekend more of you will follow your comrades in London. This will be the most important thing you do all year, so you don't want to muck it up or it will leave you feeling an utterly pointless human being for months to come.

So, here are my thoughts about your final hours of preparation, the race itself and how to recover.

## **The day before:**

The first thing to say is that none of you have probably done nearly enough training. From what I've seen you're all a pretty lazy bunch of southern softies who wouldn't know a decent 100-mile week if it came along a bit you on your flabby behinds.

Some of you have even been using the word 'tapering' with me in recent weeks. I've repeatedly told many of you that it is a myth that reducing your mileage in the weeks before a marathon will make you run better on the day. I know it's nonsense because I started this myth.

It was back in the early 1970s when I was running for my old Yorkshire club Workingham Harriers. It all started as an April fool's joke – after all who could ever be stupid enough to think training less would be good for you? But then we realised we could stuff our rival clubs, by making them cut their mileage at a crucial point in their training. I am of course mortified that this idiocy has now somehow become accepted practice by thousands of runners, including members of our own club. Tapering is nothing but slacking by another name.

Anyway, what's done is done. (Although to be strictly correct it's probably a case of what hasn't been done hasn't been done.) What matters now is to get your mind ready for the agony ahead. The night before any important race I find some stirring music to help me focus. My LP of war film anthems usually does the trick. After a few blasts of the themes from *Where Eagles Dare* and *The Great Escape*, I am stirred for battle. It's high time we were playing this kind of stuff ahead of the parkrun. This modern Chariots of Fire claptrap that gets played at races these days really is awful.

I do have a few other pre-race rituals, such as

dipping my feet in methylated spirits. This helps reduce the chances of blisters. A big helping of steak and kidney pie and a couple of episodes of *Last of the Summer Wine* to help me relax and then I'm ready off an early night.

#### **On the day:**

On the morning of the race I like a brisk 10 or 15 mile warm-up followed by a good fry-up, with a few extra kidneys and an even bigger slab of black pudding than normal. Our Reliant Robin has a cassette deck which allows me to enjoy a few more bursts of "Where Eagles Dare" on the drive to the race.

I like to get to the start of races in plenty of time to interrogate people who I suspect are starting too near the front of the pack. A few words - a couple in particular - seem to be able to move these jokers into their rightful place. It's a tactic I will also be using soon with some of those young whippersnappers at that Clair Park Parkrun.

Once underway, it's important you stay focused and ready to take on all that lovely pain. Brighton and London are crowded and noisy courses. So do not be afraid to communicate clearly with fellow athletes if they are slowing your progress. I never hesitate to chivvy people along with helpful phrases like "out the bloody way, slow coach" or "what do you think this is - a Women's Institute ramble?"

I get a lot of questions from Harriers about eating or drinking during the run. This is one of those few things in life I actually have strong views about. If it's a hot day, a gulp or two of water may be handy. But frankly all these potions people take in races today are extraordinary. It's nothing short of cheating. What's the difference between taking energy gels and what that Lance Armstrong got up to in the Tour de France business? We never had any of that stuff back in Yorkshire in the 1960s. A glass of Vimto before start was always enough for us.

A lot of people talk about hitting the wall. I suggest you don't do it. It's completely stupid. Just keep going - don't slow down. I will be at 24 mile points at both Brighton and London with one of my favourite canes to make sure this advice is obeyed.

#### **When the race is run:**

After the race, it's important to rehydrate. Whitbread Best has always been my preferred option. There's energy in it and it can certainly help dull the pain. I usually find not much is needed to improve your spirits after 26.2 miles.

It's important to get running again as soon as possible after the race. I recommend you leave it no more than a couple of hours, although you may want to leave it until the next day before you get back to proper speedwork or interval sessions.

If you are happy with your time why not share your delight with others who ran the event, especially those who were disappointed with their time and may need a pick-me-up. I often like to tell these losers about my race and offer advice on where I think they mucked up. It's really quite therapeutic.

What about if you yourself have under-performed? Well, you should of course be asking yourself why you are such a pathetic failure in life. You may want to consider resignation from the Harriers for having undermined the credibility of our club. There have certainly been times after a disappointing race when I've consulted the Samaritans, but I should warn you that the limitations of their distance running knowledge can be frustrating. I am happy to listen to any Harrier disappointed with their marathon time and offer criticism. Don't worry, I won't hold back.

Good luck all of you. Remember that I'll be out there watching you all.

Now, flipping get out there the lot of you.

# My Week: Will Pay-Later\*

## Wednesday

Felt great this morning, waking up with no aches. Yes, it was a really good session last night at Oathall. However, I arrived there just a tad too early and had to sit through yet another notice about late payment of renewal subs by certain members. They do keep going on about this. And on. It's repetitive, relentless, persistent and unremitting.

I'm a master at delaying stumping up: cheque's in the post; still thinking about Senior versus Associate; not sure if I've turned 60 yet; the dog must have eaten the envelope I left out for the missus to post – the list just goes on.

## Thursday

Got home to find an invitation to renew my car insurance. I really like the dog in their tv advert so I rush upstairs after dinner and pay on-line. No messing about with me – I pay all my bills straight away.

## Friday

Another bill. I do like to maintain a good relationship with the travel insurance company, and they too have a great tv advert. Just before going to bed I pay – on-line, of course. It's a great feeling not having any debts hanging over me.

Not sure I want to travel all that way on Sunday for a Fun Run race. It's all too easy though – you just sign the sheet and you're entered with the £2 taken care of. If the club never bothers to chase up no-shows then I'll keep quiet, eh!

No e-mails about late renewals from Harriers this week. Perhaps they've given up. After all, they do have a stonking amount of dosh in Santander. Or did they move from there? Yes, I seem to recall some e-mail where this was tacked on the bottom of another demand for late payers to cough up.



**Taking no prisoners:** The appointment of the new Harriers' "subs collection ambassador" was finally approved at last Tuesday's AGM

## Monday

Cannot believe it! Another e-mail – the fifth I reckon. This one is personal, suggesting I'm one of the very few still attending training who haven't renewed. And what's this? Banned from Tuesday training if I don't pay immediately. I don't believe it! It's only April for heavens sake.

Time to think of another wheeze. Ah ha! Claim I've paid into the closed Santander account. That'll take them months to sort out!

## Tuesday

Back home from Oathall at 7:15. List of non-payers on the gym door. Banned from training. Mine was the only name on the list.

*\* as told to Ron Jinx*



## **Cheek:** Highwayman Editor Shock

**Ron Jinx, at it again, says:** Harriers has been rocked by Private Eye's revelations concerning the Highwayman's editor, one Robert Watts.

Having seen fit to use unsavoury material from grubby reporters and dodgy pictures from grubby photographers in an attempt to boost the falling circulation of his tired and dated right wing organ, Watts has been publicly named and shamed in Eye's latest Street of Shame double-page spread as being one of the "fugitives" – a polite name for deserter – who has brought the Telegraph stable to its knees.

Harriers stalwart Walter Grabble remarked: "To bring one organ to its knees might be just an accident – but two suggests incompetence. That lad should do back-to-back marathons – each day for a week."

Harriers next management committee meeting has been put back a week to enable emotions to settle before a vote of no confidence in Watts is debated. A source close to the committee revealed that the resolution has attracted six proposers and five seconders.

Phone calls and e-mails to Watts have gone unanswered. (Ed writes: that's because we have caller ID on our handset, Ron)

---

## **MORE CHEEK:** No! Marion has not left Harriers

People keep asking me why TWH has left the Club. Well, she hasn't. She's just become unrecognisable following her recent attribution of Grandmother. It seems that her new responsibilities of nappy changing and babysitting – coupled with far less time in which to train – have brought about a rapid increase in ageing. A visit to the housewife's favourite sports masseur, Josh Pewter, could not arrest this decline – and may very well even have accelerated it. So, it's TWH to TGH.

For those who need a reminder of TWH's former elegant, radiant and fragrant self (© Mr Justice Caulfield, 1987, describing Mary Archer at Jeffrey Archer's trial), this was her, below left, a few years ago at Capel Curig's Tyn y Coed showing her delight with the first prize in the annual blind date competition. And doesn't James Jinx look equally pleased with the outcome too!



On the right is a very recent picture of TGH captured by Harriers' grubby photographer. Yes, the camera never lies and grandson Ben confirmed with a cry of "Granny" that it is indeed his maternal grandmother. **Grubby reporter**