

The Tring Midsummer Fun Run

“Why, this is very midsummer madness” Two Gentlemen of Verona

As the twentieth century gave way to the twenty first, Tring Running Club approached its twentieth anniversary. The club was well established with a very strong base of active members. Furthermore, its flagship event, the annual Ridgeway Run, continued to attract 500 or so runners.

In 2000, the club committee was chaired by long-standing member, Clive Cohen. No doubt thinking of his legacy, Clive turned his mind to the state of TRC in the 21st century. Despite being twenty years old, the club existed largely in isolation from the local community. If anyone wanted to make contact with the club, the onus was very much on him or her to find us, where we met and when. The club's first website and internet presence had started only in 1998/99.

This was also the era long before parkrun and Start to Run courses. Clive was determined that the club could do more to raise its profile and promote interest in running. And whilst TRC has welcomed family membership, it has never had a junior section. Since TRC's separation from the Athletics Club of Tring, youngsters interested in athletics were directed to Dacorum and Tring AC or the Vale of Aylesbury AC.

At Easter 2000, Clive and his family were visiting his in-laws in France. In search of running events to distract him, an advert in the local newspaper caught Clive's eye – “Les Foulees de Bourges” or The Strides of Bourges. It was a 10k and 20k race but with the addition of races for children over distances of 0.8km to 3.1km. What's more, the advert read “*Courses des enfants : Gratuit*” – free entry for children. Clive didn't get to the race but, as he recalls, “*it served as an inspiration and so, across La Manche, were sown the seeds of the Tring Midsummer Fun Run*”. Now the challenge was to turn the dream into reality.

Back in Tring on a Wednesday night run and adopting the philosophy of “I know a man (or woman) who does”, Clive got talking to Colin Rees. “*I have an idea on how we can organise a fun run for the local children*” said Clive “*Are you willing to help?*” Colin thought it a great idea and also knew “a man who does”. Soon Rob Brown was roped in and the three musketeers were later joined by Michelle Hadland as design guru.

A year in the planning

From the outset, the primary aim of the Fun Run has been to promote running by giving local juniors and novice adults the opportunity to run in a fun and supportive environment. Or, as Clive puts it more simply, to “give it a go”. It was also agreed that it should be affordable with any entry fee being a small

token sum, especially for the children's races. The club readily agreed that if any surplus remained after paying costs, it should go to worthy causes.

Looking around the local charity sector, it didn't take long to identify what was then the Iain Rennie Hospice at Home as a great partner for the event. In the early years IRHH played a major role in collecting entries and providing volunteers on the day. IRHH is now known as Rennie Grove Hospice Care and continues to share in the funds raised at the Fun Run.

Colin recalls the planning process being enjoyable and fun and Rob recounts how the first year involved lots of setting up: working on how the run would look, how to satisfy health and safety, liaising with the cricket club, police, highways and canal authorities, visiting local schools to get them to join in. The cricket club grounds have been the venue every year with the children's races looping round the cricket pitches. Local businesses were approached as sponsors – FW Metcalfe hardware shop has been a sponsor every year.

Whilst Clive was the inspiration and Rob the original organiser, Colin was the key man on the day for many years, setting up the course markings and finish-line banner with practical expertise. As the event got bigger over the years, it became more challenging to manage hordes of excited, running children at the finish. Colin's finish-line funnel evolved culminating in an elegantly curved affair in 2010.

The route of the adult Fun Run has remained the same since the outset – once round the cricket field then along Station Road, down onto the canal towpath, up to Marshcroft Lane and back via Grove Road, about 6k.

Of course, as well as the organisers, the Fun Run only happens with the help of an army of volunteers from the club. For several years, David and Gill Heron would hand deliver running numbers around Tring to save on postage and maximize the profits for charity. Then on the day, club members help set up the field, take late entries, marshal the route, corral the kids, check numbers at the finish, process the results and escort the winners in the kids races to the podium. With at least 8 children's races (and sometimes more), Fun Run evening is always very busy. Children's races usually involve at least one Grand National-style trip and pile up, thankfully without injury apart from bruised pride.

The medals

One of the first decisions of the organising committee was that all competitors



should receive a medal. It has been a tradition of the Fun Run ever since that, as exhausted competitors flop across the finish line, they are presented with their medals, often by the Mayor of Tring,

Whilst the medal ribbons and decals change each year, the core image has remained constant. Michelle Hadland came up with a design logo for the Fun Run depicting seven runners (two small children and five adults) running in a line.



For several years it featured on the publicity material and entry forms. One of the runners is allegedly based on club member Rick Ansell – probably the one with the bushy beard and curly hair. A second runner wears the blue and white two-hooped vest of TRC. A third is a bald, portly gentleman - we don't know who he is based on.

The design was adapted to fit onto the medals so Rick and one of the women runners were dropped from the team with the 5 others making it as a group onto the medal.



Fun Run medal 2001



Fun Run medal 2016

For 8 years the Fun Run Five strode proudly across the medals. In 2009, as the mobile phone operator dropped the slogan - "The Future is Bright, The Future is Orange" - TRC seems to have picked it up. The blue and white hooped vest on the medal mysteriously turned orange!

The Fun Run Five were rested in 2010 in favour of a 10/10 emblem to recognize the tenth anniversary of the Fun Run but were back in 2011, still in orange. And so they stayed until, in 2018, Judi Hopcroft revisited the design. Over the years, the images had become blurred to the extent that the boy runner appeared to be wearing a voluminous nappy instead of shorts and the

portly gentleman had acquired one blue and one orange trainer. Judi refreshed the image and even brought the club shirt up to date with the familiar blue and white zebra stripe.



The first Fun Run

20 June 2001. It's 6pm and the very first Fun Run is underway.



Rob Brown (race director 2001-2003) remembers it like this:

On the first night we had no idea how it would go, and I for one was glad to see anybody enter and then turn up! I thought 100 was a reasonable target, we got 233 and that seemed amazing. A potential storm was spotted but it blew away from Tring and the weather was kind.

That first night Clive somehow got a regular TV football commentator along, Peter Drury, to support Gareth Owens! All the under 11s went in one race and ran both fields at the cricket club, which we realised was far too long if you are 5! After that two year age groupings were brought in for juniors, before finally being changed to school years. TRC stalwart Bob Garland brought the Sambuka samba band along to entertain the crowd.

Processing the results was difficult and we hadn't really had time to work it out before the night. It took a lot of time to sort them out. I knew my son had run but he didn't turn up in the first draft of the results We were all exhausted after months of effort and wondering whether it would even work.

Rob mentioned Gareth Owens, also a club member, who has officiated every year on PA announcements in his own inimitable style. Gareth has a way of whipping up the kids into an even bigger frenzy than they would be anyway. And Gareth has usually had an eminent sidekick from the world of sport or media. As well as Peter Drury, the Fun Run has been graced by football coach Stuart Stedman and World Cup referee Graham Poll. One-time local resident and World Heavyweight boxing champion Frank Bruno was invited one year but in a bizarre telephone call to the race director's son-in-law, politely declined.

Fun Runs over the years

The race director for the fun run has changed every three years. After Rob, Dave Jones took over, then Tony Hill, John Manning, Nigel Kippax and Richard White. Numbers taking part have increased virtually every year. The 130 children and 103 adults of the first year turned into 738 children and 200 adults in 2013, more than realising the aim set out by Clive at the outset.

Dave Jones (2004-2006) writes:

My first Fun Run as race director in 2004 was in really bad weather. We couldn't get the finish line set up and local schools told their kids it was cancelled so I had to ring round to tell them it was on. When a large number of people, especially those 6 year olds running in raincoats, still came on a night of terrible weather we knew that we had a definite fixture on the Tring calendar.

Tony Hill (2007-2009) remembers:

One of the big breakthroughs in my tenure [2007-2009] was connecting with the (then-called) School Sport Partnership. They really helped promote our event in local schools - and we saw a significant increase in the number of kids taking part.

My most positive memory of the kids races was two four year old girls running quite well for the first 100 yards, or so, of the race when they spotted something of interest near the hedge by Station Road. Still holding hands, they took a "break" mid-race to properly investigate the dead slug (or similar). They duly finished a few minutes behind everyone else!

On a less happy note, I'm sorry that in 2008, I think, we had our first clear-cut case of cheating. In the race for 10 year-olds, a certain young lad joined the race at the top bend. He timed his intervention well and duly finished in the top three. I believe that Alison Harding spotted this and we took steps in the

following years to avoid a repeat performance. It's a measure of how seriously our races are taken that the mother of the fourth-placed youngster, who of course should have been third, came and complained to me and then promptly burst into tears!

John Manning (2010-2012) recalls:

My first year as RD [2010] coincided with the tenth anniversary of the Fun Run and the football World Cup in South Africa. On a warm, sunny evening, we enjoyed a record field and celebrated the 4 people who had taken part in all 10 events – Laura Brown, Greg Brown (Rob's son and daughter), Amy Pezet and Jack Quoroll.

The date of the Fun Run was brought forward by a week to avoid a clash with England playing in the World Cup. One of the memorable sounds of that tournament was the loud, rasping vuvuzelas – trumpets that sounded like a prolonged and deep raspberry. They were everywhere and, on the night of the Fun Run, several made it to the cricket club. As 60 excited boys lined up for the Year 3 & 4 race, someone blasted away on a vuvuzela. Mistaking it for the start horn, the boys set off. I sprinted to the finish line to tell them, after one lap of the cricket field, that it was a false start and they would have to start again. I didn't know 8 and 9 year olds (and their parents) knew words like that!

Nigel Kippax (2013 – 2015) writes:

How do you make an excellent event even better? Answer: Get a stuffed bear to help! As with previous fun runs we worked closely with Rennie Grove Hospice charity, but I was looking for ways to put the F back into fun. When the Rennie Bear arrived I felt the atmosphere took a wonderful lift. I remember standing on the balcony and laughing so much with our two commentators as the bear tried to run the first race. "Come on Rennie Bear, get a move on!"

I also remember our efforts to ensure the event was inclusive for those with a disability, trying to pick up on the legacy of the 2012 Paralympics. There is still much to do on this, but we did manage to include one runner with cerebral palsy. She started with all the other runners in the adult race, and she finished with all the runners in the adult race. What went between start and finish is our secret! We were so impressed that we found a special award to recognise her efforts. There were smiles all around.

Nigel mentions the children's favourite character, Rennie Bear. It was always a struggle to find volunteers to fill the furry bear costume, especially as the Fun Run takes place at midsummer. The heat inside the costume can be stifling so a rota was developed for 2 or 3 club members to don the outfit during the course of the evening. It was even harder to find a volunteer to be the third person to climb inside the sweat-soaked fur!

And speaking of heat, race director Richard White (2016-2018) was in charge on 21 June 2017, the hottest day for 40 years, with temperatures of 34 C. Numbers were inevitably down but still over 700 turned out for the fun of the Fun Run.

Are we there yet?

The Tring Midsummer Fun Run is now a permanent fixture in the local calendar and regularly sees nearly a thousand people turn up to run plus many more family members there to support. The majority of runners are children, especially from the primary school age groups, and they seem to love the opportunity to pin a number to their shirts, run round the field and be rewarded with a shiny medal. Whilst many other races attract club runners, the adult Fun Run is mainly populated by “unattacheds”, often the parents of children who have run earlier or novices taking on a run for the first time.

Over the years, IRGH and other local charities have benefited from about £80,000 of funds raised.



And the Fun Run exemplifies one of the best attributes of TRC as a club - a legion of club members consistently working together to make the event a great success.



After the event we often get feedback from those who have taken part. In 2012 one family conjured up the feeling of community spirit like this:

“We love the combination of friends, families, schools and running. It makes us happy to live in Tring and particularly the sight of proud youngsters snaking their way home through the streets of Tring wearing their medals”

Clive Cohen’s dream has truly become a reality.

Fun Run statistics

Adult run – approximately 6k. One loop round the field then down Station Road to the canal bridge, turn left along the towpath, up to the bridge and turn left at Marshcroft Lane, left at Grove Road and right at Station Road back to the cricket club

Children’s runs - 400m, 800m and 1500m round the cricket pitches according to age plus a non-competitive run for pre-school age children and their parents/grandparents/carers

Runner numbers

Year	Junior Runs	Senior Run	TOTAL
2018	607	249	856
2017	566	164	730
2016	699	229	928
2015	675	208	883
2014	729	195	924
2013	738	200	938
2012	630	184	814
2011	673	198	871
2010	641	209	850
2009	517	241	758
2008	511	190	701
2007	381	166	547
2006	390	199	589
2005	339	175	514
2004	300	153	453
2003	309	161	470
2002	239	114	353
2001	130	103	233

