

## History of Tring Running Club Chapter.....

### **Those were the days!**

The early life of TRC was focused mainly on road running and, during the winter evenings, the streets round Tring provided some degree of light to show the way. The now central feature of club Wednesday nights, running off-road all year round, didn't start until the mid-1990s.

There was a conventional 5km route round Cow Lane, London Road and Station Road but, after a while, some more adventurous souls started to explore roads less travelled by. The legendary Bell Loop became a favourite run and, for some, a rite of passage. It is still frequently run and much revered today.

In 2011, former TRC chair Jonathan Mulcahy entertained the readership of the club newsletter with his account of TRC life in the nineties including a very helpful guide to the Bell Loop. Club member John Boielle is mentioned throughout Jonathan's article. John joined Tring Jogging Club shortly after it started. He was an eccentric, much-loved and unforgettable character with encyclopaedic knowledge and the ability to talk the hind legs off a donkey!

From the TRC newsletter April 2011

### **The Bell Loop – a new member's info pack By Jonathan Mulcahy**

Last Wednesday I ran The Bell Loop (without getting the bus, and in a record time - for me anyway - of 6 hours 42 minutes) and later in the clubhouse someone asked me what The Bell Loop was. And so I decided to pen the following history - by way of explanation for all new members - of The Bell Loop. What it is, what it means, and how long it is.....



I joined Tring Running Club in 1992, when it was known as Tring Jogging Club. In those days, it was a very different club from today. There were no runners for a start. Members used to limp and shuffle aimlessly about the back streets of Tring and then meet in the “bar” of the old Clubhouse to compare injuries and moan about varicose veins.

You must understand 1992 was before the advent of the internet, before mobiles, before email and GPRS and Sat Nav. There were no heart rate monitors, no multi-functional watches to record splits or times, in fact, no times and certainly no running shoes, other than a pair of Hi-tec Silver Shadows and, for the more well-off and showy, perhaps a pair of Dunlop Green Flash. Off road running hadn’t been invented, because there were no head torches (other than those used by miners lit by candle, which were to prove impractical for joggers).



Club nurse Tony Hill pictured in 1993

The old clubhouse itself was a dank, dark, Dickensian workhouse of a place, with a wasp nest in the so called “bar area” and a decidedly suspicious green ceiling. So decrepit were the showers it was obligatory to shower well at home after using them. Listeria, salmonella and rickets were rife throughout the club and regular inspections for nits were made by the Club nurse, at least that’s what Tony Hill told me, but I think perhaps he just liked dressing up

The most popular route on those dim and distant Wednesday evenings appeared to be as follows: the A41 (this was before the new A41, of course, and the only traffic we would encounter would be the cow herd crossing the road from the clubhouse to the field opposite where the “new” Tescos is now), down Cow Lane, down Station Road and, eventually, the exciting and wonderful destination of Tring Station.

Having reached the station, and after a brief moan and comparison of varicose veins, we would then jog back along Station Road, up Cow Lane, and back down the A41. Those reckless enough to demand more were encouraged to complete a lap of the cricket field, before returning to the club house for a lukewarm shower and a dusty, warm bottle of Rodwells ginger beer.

Conversations in the Club in those days were limited to who might be “running the Kodak”, or perhaps the Tring 10k (which turned out to be 2 laps of the aforementioned hallowed A41, Cow Lane, Station Road circuit) or perhaps doing

“The Chinnor”, another 10k, remarkable by the bewildering provision of a spice rack to any victors. This was later surpassed by those completing “The Windsor” where the prize was an ashtray.

As exciting as all this was, the transformation of my Wednesday nights wasn’t fully complete until after a few weeks I realised that a certain group (Nicholson, Pearce, Boielle, Williams, Hill (T), Hill (J) and Hill (R)), were jogging somewhere different, somewhere new.

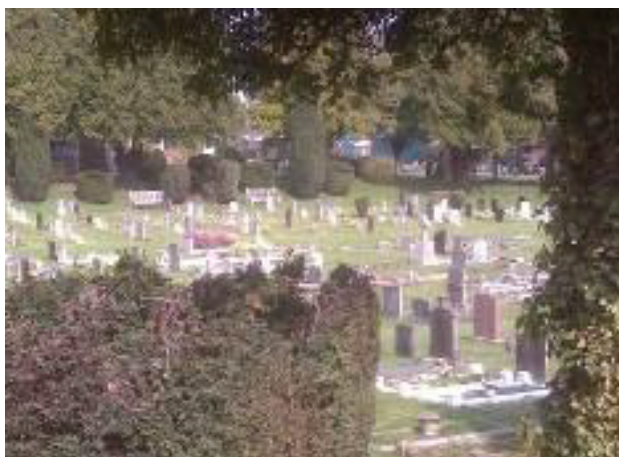
They returned hot, flushed and excited, with stories of discovering a hinterland, places beyond even Tring itself. “We’ve been to Aston Clinton!” they would exclaim, “and we’ve run The Bell Loop!” “It’s exactly 8 miles” said John Boielle, then a sprightly 82 year old, and brandishing a bottle of Rodwells ginger beer aloft, “I should know, I’ve measured it!”

And so it was The Bell Loop came into being, and The Bell Loop it was so named, and the following week we all jogged it.

Let me take all aspiring new members through the route, because completion of The Bell Loop is no modest undertaking. To approach The Bell Loop with any degree of light-heartedness is to underestimate it. Please, respect The Bell Loop, for it will not respect you. Hardy members, those who have completed mountain marathons and other less worthy circuits such as Mont Blanc, Snowdon and Crib Goch, have all been caught out by The Loop (as it is now colloquially known) and survived to regret it.

I recall Mike Gaunt returning from the vigil one evening, red-faced and gasping for breath (and that was just the stairs). “The Loop takes no prisoners,” he spluttered, before collapsing into Nurse Hill’s lap and downing a bottle of Rodwells warm, dusty ginger beer by way of comfort.

The route starts by one leaving the clubhouse and collapsing into an immediate heap by virtue of tripping over the potholes in the car park. Having picked oneself up, and completely ignoring any attempts at being mown down by those Tennis Club members leaving in their cars, cross the road. This can take anywhere up to 45 minutes, traffic being what it is today, and all this with no cow herd in sight. If you reach the “new” Tesco’s (est. 1993), turn around because you are going the wrong way. The route leads through the Town Centre where again, agility, dexterity and skill is needed to traverse those small rectangular bricks that constitute the pavement and road because someone, somewhere, decided they would look nice.



Leaving Tring, and with a courteous and mindful nod to the cemetery on your right, head out to your first destination, the Bus Stop Before the Roundabout. Now be advised, I have wasted many a tortuous hour here waiting for a bus to complete the circuit and I can readily tell you no such bus exists. I think they packed up coming through Tring

shortly after the Second World War.

Having drawn breath, admired a varicose vein or two, please make for the vast illuminated roundabout ahead (it looks like Heathrow Airport and cannot be mistaken) and then head down the old A41. Please, please, under no circumstances go down the new A41, for who amongst us knows where that leads and what may lay beyond...Aylesbury perhaps, whatever that is? Stick to the old A41 and this will bring you to the summit of Tring Hill.

In 1994, the invention by Petzl – manufacturers of the salted German biscuit snack – of the head torch, later surpassed by the provision of a Rob Hill Mark One special (I still have one if anyone wants to look at one of these worthy and historic items) proved to be one of the most innovative running aids of all time. In truth, it opened up new vistas, new horizons, and quickly became singularly responsible for enabling Tring Joggers to be able to make it down Tring Hill without getting killed.

For here, upon Tring Hill, it is dark, and dangerous. And when I say dark, I mean Dark Dark. Do not get too far ahead of yourself for you will shortly reach the 2 mile point of The Bell Loop, The Crows Nest (I know it is 2 miles because John Boielle has measured it).



Pausing to catch breath and keeping the Crows Nest on your right (and at some distance, for whilst I have never dined there, I do know of joggers who have popped in to use the loo and never returned) continue ploughing downhill, arms stretched ahead groping through the dark (for even with a headtorch it is still dark) and, alternatively skipping over the oh so narrow kerb and under the oh so overhanging branches, make towards The

Wooden Bus Shelter (2.5 miles, I know, because John Boielle has measured it). As with the first bus stop, waste no time stopping there, unless for protection from any adverse weather Tring Hill may throw at us.

At the bottom of the hill, and after what seems like an eternity but is really only Aston Clinton, you will arrive at The Rising Sun public house. This is 3 miles (yes, John Boielle measured it) and is a famous Tring Joggers landmark, although now it's "a Thai" and only remarkable for some interesting and yet vaguely pornographic topiary surrounding it.

Heading straight on, pausing only to snigger at the aforementioned topiary, keep going until at last you will reach The Bell public house. Revered in the sixties for being a pub notable for attendance by such luminaries as Liz Taylor, Richard Burton,



Oliver Reed and those other sixties hell raisers, club members Beth and Geoff Dennis, do not stop, for the Loop is not over.

In fact, the loop hasn't even looped, so to speak, for that doesn't even start until one has almost but not quite reached what for some represents the finest petrol station in Aston Clinton, the Total garage.



There is nothing remarkable about the Total garage, other than, as John Boielle once told me whilst taking a break from measuring distances, it used to sell roast chickens on a rotisserie for just £3. But it is a useful reminder to turn a sharp right down Brook Street and head round the back of Aston Clinton for what is - all too soon for some and not soon enough for others - the return journey.

And now, simply retrace your steps past The Bell and back up the hill...yes, it really is as exciting and as simple as that. Perhaps it's that simplicity that lends the Loop the hallowed reverence it has.



The late, great John Alexander once told me, as we were finishing a run somewhere that on the return journey, with the full, comforting knowledge of 8 miles (I know because John Boielle measured it) under the belt, to look out for an old milestone just before the "new" Tesco.

The milestone reads "Watford 16 miles" and is a timely, yet somehow dispiriting, reminder to all of you training for your first marathon that completion of the Loop means you still have to run into Watford Town Centre, and then a little bit further!

And that concludes The Bell Loop! Well Done – you have completed not just 8 miles (we now all know this because John Boielle has measured it) but also a rite of passage.

In fact, can one really call oneself a Tring Runner if one hasn't completed The Bell Loop? Surely not....!