

## History of Tring Running Club

Chapter.....

### **2001: A Dog Odyssey**

There are times in the life of any club when things can get tough. As related elsewhere, many opinions were expressed over a long period on changing the club's name. Eventually a majority view prevailed.

In 2001, a rather more acute issue arose, namely whether members should be allowed to bring their dogs on club runs. The question gave rise to heated debate and fractures in the club committee. Bob Ford, by then a former chair of the club, was involved in resolving the issue.

If you joined TRC after this episode you might have heard older members speaking in hushed terms about the controversy of "DogGate" without quite getting the full story. Now it can be told.....

Bob Ford writes:

"When we had changed the club ethos and were mainly running off road, a few members started to bring dogs with them on Wednesday night runs. This added to the entertainment as you would have small dogs, like Linda Collison's Wisper, running between your legs and tripping you up or large dogs, like Jim Sinton's Munro, carrying a four foot stick clearing the whole path as he ran from the back of the pack to the front to catch up with Jim. Anyway, most of this was taken light heartedly.

Eventually, we had about five dogs running across the different running groups. However, some people became less tolerant towards them than others and comments were made about how acceptable this was. Early in 2001, things came to a head when two dogs had a "set to" in the Cricket Club bar and TRC's committee decided it had to do something about it. Inevitably, there was strong feeling on both sides, especially amongst committee members, leading to some resignations. In fact, it became such a contentious issue that an Extraordinary General Meeting was called.

The meeting was well-attended and strong views were expressed on all sides. In view of conflicts of interest within the committee, a special sub-committee was set up to seek professional advice and to consider what the club's position on dogs should be.

The sub-committee consisted of Bob Ford (chair) Alison Harding and Brian Nicholson. In time honoured TRC fashion, the first meeting was held in the Robin Hood. Tasks were delegated to members in the main to establish what the 'experts' advised and what was the position in other clubs. Sounds easy - letters were written to the Amateur Athletic Association, to local vets, the club's insurers, local running clubs and the RSPCA. We waited and, as you might expect, got nothing back of any use from virtually all of them apart from the RSPCA.

The RSPCA sent us a copy of a leaflet they had produced on running with dogs and at last we had something to discuss. The theory put forward was that dogs are pack animals and, as such, will follow their leader/master where ever they go, possibly past the point where it is good for the dog's health. Different sizes and breeds of dog have different stamina, endurance and physiological abilities when it comes to running, so the RSPCA could not support the club's practice of running with dogs.

Having read this advice and discussed it over a few drinks, the sub-committee came to the conclusion that it was not possible for the club to allow running with dogs. This was reported back to the committee and the club adopted the rule that running with dogs on club events would not be allowed.

This led to more strong feelings and some resignations from the club which was all very unfortunate. Luckily time passed and things got back to normal and no longer-term damage was done to the club.

#### Postscript

After it had all died down, we found that the Cricket Club already had a rule in place banning dogs from the clubhouse. It's arguable that if this had been enforced the whole situation could have been avoided and I expect we would still have dogs running with us today.

This also why the Saturday run from the monument at Ashridge is not a club run. Runners like to take their dog with them as the runs don't go near any roads. However, when one small dog is there it manages to run between my legs and I invariably fall to the ground. Fortunately, I bounce well!"