

The Liverpool & District Cross Country Championship

The First Decade

Preface

This collection of reports from two newspapers, the Liverpool Mercury and the Birkenhead News, form an account of the origins and early years of the Liverpool and District Cross Country Championships, including the results of the first ten races. I have chosen to reproduce the original text as it was written because this, I feel, gives a more accurate flavour of the times than a modern summary of the content. I have added some text to link the reports together. I have deliberately not broadened the view to include, for instance, the Northern Championships. External happenings in this period have already been well covered in the Centenary History of the Northern Cross Country Association written by Phil Thomas in the 1980s.

The Liverpool Mercury is available online as scanned and searchable pdf files in the 19th Century British Library Newspapers held by Ormskirk Library run by Lancashire County Council. Rob McKenna drew this very accessible source to my attention and triggered my interest with copies of some of the reports.

The Birkenhead News is held on film in Reference section at the Central Library in Birkenhead. Each page of the paper has to be read individually using a viewer to find items of interest - a slow and painful process for old eyes.

As the quality of reproduction from either these sources does not make for easy reading, I have word processed the reports exactly as they were printed, including paragraphing, capitalisation and punctuation. While there are the occasional factual differences in the content of reports, I was impressed by the accuracy and consistency of original type-setting; any typographical errors in this text have almost certainly been introduced by me.

Leo Carroll, December, 2010

Although the National Championships started in 1876, the Northern in 1882 and the English Cross Country Union was founded in 1883, there was no structure at a local level in those days and the majority of "harrier" clubs did not usually compete in the modern sense of the word. A typical report of their activities is reproduced below.

From the Birkenhead News, Feb 21st, 1885

BIRKENHEAD Y.M.C.A. HARRIERS. - On Saturday eight members and two friends turned up at the head-quarters for a run to Leasowe. The hares, Messrs, Quigley and Moore, were started off with the paper at 4.6pm, the pack (which was composed of the following members:- G. A. Clare (pace), G. A. Nathan (whip), W. Blackburn, S. Davies, Geo Jenkins, F. Lightfoot) following ten minutes later. The trail led through Bidston, Noctorum and skirted the Wallasey March, where the hares were sighted, the pack keeping them well in view along Leasowe-road, past the Castle, and again into the marsh, some lively scenes taking place in getting over the dykes, which were almost impassable owing to the recent rain. On reaching Bidston Hill, a steady run for home took place, the hares being overtaken, and all running well together, arriving in at 5.40pm. Distance covered about nine miles.

The *hares* would leave about 10 minutes before the *pack* and lay a paper trail for them to follow. The function of the *pace* and the *whip* or *whipper-in* was to keep the pack together. Variants of this are described involving meetings with other clubs, sometimes with racing, referred to as a *break*, in the final stages.

By the late 1880s, typically four local clubs entered the Northern held on Manchester Racecourse in Salford from 1883 to 1891, but only the select few went to the National. The travel involved was probably a deterrent but not the major one. When the English National was

staged in Birkenhead in 1891, from the HQ of West Cheshire Harriers at the Half-way House on Woodchurch Road using a course over country that would be familiar to their runners, the club flew its flag from a window of the hostelry but did not compete. Out of more than a dozen local clubs, only Liverpool Harriers and Wirral Hare and Hounds entered. Incidentally, the arrangements at the finish were less than satisfactory, but that is another story.

By 1891 however, the local clubs had established the practice of meeting together for the opening run of the season. The article below describes this event that year and an offer that led to the establishment of the Liverpool and District championship.

From the Birkenhead News, Oct 10th, 1891

Cross Country Notes

The cross country season was formally commenced on Saturday afternoon, when the Liverpool and Birkenhead clubs assembled at the Brook House Hotel, Smithdown road, Wavertree, at the invitation of the Liverpool Masonic A. C. Twelve clubs were represented and the total muster was the largest on record for this district, comprising no less than 170 runners. A silver whistle was offered to the club with the largest muster, and the newly formed Sefton Harriers carried off the prize by turning up 29 strong. North Liverpool came next with 23 members. The Birkenhead clubs did not turn out in their full strength, the Birkenhead Eagles being the first with 14 runners. The other clubs represented were the Wirral H and H (7), West Cheshire H (9), Birkenhead Gymnasium H (6), Golden Eagle (8), South Liverpool (21), Roby (14), Liverpool (11), Liverpool Gymnasium (19) and Pembroke (9). F Pennington, (L.G.H) and A T Smith, (W.H. and H), acted as pace makers, the whips being J. Bagot, L H. and G. J. Mudie, (W.H and H) and D. F. Jackson, (L.G.H.), was captain for the day and was kept busy superintending such a large pack, which gave the whips a great deal of trouble. The captain sprained his ankle near Woolton and was obliged to take a cab back to the hotel. The route over which a spare trail was laid, traversed some splendid "harrier" country, which included several hedges offering good opportunities for showing leaping powers, but after it was found that the far side of one hedge was several feet below the near side, and there was a deep ditch behind another, and a small plot of nettles flourishing at the rear of a third, the runners were a little cautious about leaping. After crossing a ploughed field and working round by Woolton, the pack followed the trail into the road and went away at a swinging trot when they suddenly came upon a "Jerusalem" tugging at a cart. He began to bray but in a moment his voice was drowned for 170 lusty voices mocked and derided the poor animal. However when this subsided, Jerusalem, not to be done, started again and with hearty laughter, the pack proceeded merrily on its way at a smart pace, until "Paper" was the cry and it was found there was none near. After retracing their steps they came to a field containing several bulls and here the paper was seen, It went in two directions too, and in a trice, half the pack had dashed one way and the remainder the other way. One of the packs after going down a lane and losing the trail again, discovered that the only way of proceeding was by climbing a wall, which was fully eight feet high, so with much hauling and pushing the pack transferred to the other side, when they proceeded along the road towards Allerton Church, where they found their brethren all ready to start the mile race home. Mr Joseph Bennett fired a pistol, and the crowd dashed off and a grand race (not including those who clung to a cab until the cabby whipped them off) resulted, Waterson of the Liverpool Harriers just beating a club mate in Riding, and winning the marble clock, presented to the first man home by the proprietor of the Brook House. Dixon of the West Cheshire Harriers was third after a magnificent race, and he was awarded a fine pipe - and he doesn't smoke either! Kidd (Wirral Hare and Hounds) was fourth and Bagot (Liverpool Harriers) fifth, The prize offered to the first novice home was taken by Davies of the Pembroke

Harriers, who was near the front. The West Cheshire have something to be proud of in getting all their men within the first twenty. A dinner and social was held after the run, when *Mr Allen Tooth offered to present 12 medals for a Liverpool and district championship if an association could be formed to carry it out.*

This afternoon the West Cheshire hold their first club run for the season from their headquarters, the Half Way House, Woodchurch Road, Oxton, the destination of the pack being Upton. The start is at 3.45.

The Gymnasium Harriers will leave the Y. M. C. A., Grange Road at 3.30, and will conclude their spin with a race home from the Claughton Waterworks between teams selected by the captain and sub-captain.

What the public made of this pack of runners, roaming the countryside, climbing 8 foot walls, goading dumb animals and attempting to steal lifts off cabs is an interesting question.

The text reproduced above in italics identifies the birth of the Liverpool&District Cross Country Association (or Union as it was later renamed).

Allen Tooth was as good as his word and the first championship was staged just 4 months later as the following articles in the Mercury relate.

From Liverpool Mercury, Sat, Feb 13th 1892

LIVERPOOL CROSS-COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIP.

This event, which will take place today, over the Grand National Steeplechase course, Aintree, looks like being big success, and no doubt the Liverpool and Cheshire followers of cross country sport will flock to the famous race-course. Fourteen clubs are competing, making in all a total of 168 runners. Liverpool and District Cross Country Association have done a very wise thing in selecting the course and to make the championship race more interesting to the public. They have arranged the race in such a manner that all the runners will have to jump the celebrated Grand National water-jump four times during the race. Special trains will run from the Exchange Station (L. and Y. R. Co.) during the afternoon.

The following is a list of the clubs competing : - Birkenhead Eagle Harriers, Birkenhead Gymnasium Harriers, Liverpool Florence Harriers, Liverpool Golden Eagle Harriers, Liverpool Kingsley Harriers, Liverpool Gymnasium Harriers, Liverpool Harriers, North Liverpool Gymnasium Harriers, Liverpool Pembroke Harriers, Roby Harriers, South Liverpool, Sefton Harriers, Wirral Hare and Hounds, and West Cheshire Harriers

From the Liverpool Mercury, Mon, Feb 15th, 1892

LIVERPOOL CROSS-COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIP.

Under the auspices of the Liverpool and District Cross Country Association, the first of the championships promoted by that body was decided at Aintree on Saturday, in the presence of spectators who numbered between 500 and 600. The weather was clear but cold, and the going was somewhat heavy. The course was four times round the Grand National course, a distance of about nine miles. The officials were -- Referee, Mr E.A. Tooth; judges, Messrs. W.H. Dutton, C. H. Drake, D.F. Jackson, W. R. Jones, R.R. Ellis, S.V. Gannon, H. L. Golborne, and F.J. Lightfoot; timekeepers, Messrs. H. P. Ellis and G.T. Mudie; starter, Mr. J. Bennett; clerk of course, Mr. J.C. McNeil (captain); honorary treasurer, Mr S Swan; and honorary secretary, Mr J.F. Walker.

The number of clubs which competed was 14, and these sent a grand total of 151 runners, in which were included some of the smartest men in the district. At the end of the first lap A.W.Jones (Liverpool Harriers) led, being followed at a short distance by Allan (Sefton Harriers), Watterson, Shay (Liverpool Harriers), and Kidd (Wirral Hare and Hounds). The half dozen or so who led at the completion of the first round maintained their positions with some slight variation throughout, and as the last lap was entered upon Jones and Watterson were neck and neck with a good lead from Cross and Allan. In the end Watterson, whose chance was always considered a good one, beat Jones by a few yards, the next in order being Cross, who, like Jones, ran with splendid pluck and determination, Kidd, Geddis and Shay. Time 54mins 43secs.

The various teams were placed as follows:- Liverpool Harriers, 62 points, 1 ; Liverpool Gymnasium, 66 points, 2 ; Sefton Harriers, 131 points, 3 ; Wirral Hare and Hounds, 134 points, 4 ; South Liverpool, 238 points, 5 ; West Cheshire, 270 points, 6 ; Roby Harriers, 301 points, 7 ; Birkenhead Eagle, 305 points 8 ; Pembroke, 9 ; North Liverpool, 10 ; Birkenhead Gymnasium, 11 ; Golden Eagle, 12 ; Florence Harriers, 13 ; and Kingsley Harriers not finishing. The novice medals fell to Sefton Harriers.

The definition of a novice in this context was a club who had not won a team award, but how this was decided for the first championship is not clear from the articles.

There were those in the system did not share the reporter's enthusiasm for the Grand National course as this was the only time it was used for the championship.

Curiously, these two articles do not mention that Aintree was to be venue of the Northern Championships just a week later. Like the District Championship, that race included four laps of the Grand National course, but conditions were very different - the course was covered in snow and so icy that the water jump was barred. Also like the District, the venue was not used again for the championships.

From the Liverpool Mercury, Mon, 3rd Oct, 1892

MONSTRE MEET OF HARRIERS

OPENING OF THE CROSS-COUNTRY SEASON

Saturday afternoon witnessed the official of the cross country season in this district. The custom of one of the principal clubs inviting the others to unite in one large pack to open the season with some demonstration was honoured with more enthusiasm than ever this year. The West Cheshire Harriers, whose headquarters are at the Half-way House, Woodchurch Road, Prenton, outside Birkenhead, issued invitations to 18 local clubs, 13 of which attended the run, the harriers totalling in number to 251, a record muster for the North of England, and this notwithstanding the showery weather of Saturday. The muster last season comprising 186 runners, from which it is evident the meeting is rapidly growing in favour amongst our young men. A Sunlight prize cup, presented by Messrs. Lever Bros., was offered to the club with the largest muster, and it was carried off by Sefton Harriers, who turned out 45 members. The other clubs represented were Liverpool (37), West Cheshire (30), Wirral (27), S Liverpool (25), Liverpool Gymnasium (23), N Liverpool (23), Birkenhead Gymnasium (12), Kingsley (11), Hoylake (8), Pembroke (5), Roby (4) and Deeside (1). The runners were to have been photographed, but the rain prevented this being done. The showers, however, failed to damp the enthusiasm of the harriers and the run, which extended over the fields in the direction of Landican and Storeton to Higher Bebington, was most enjoyable, and full of humorous incidents. At Higher Bebington the hugh pack "lined up" or rather "grouped", and were started off together for a mile race home to headquarters, six prizes being offered , three for the

first three men and three for the first novices. A capital race ensued, feet only separating the first dozen at the finish. The first three were - 1. S. Dawson, Liverpool; 2 J. Griffiths, Wirral ; 3, A Geddes, Sefton. The novice prize-winners were - 1, Whelan Wirral ; 2, Leadbitter, South Liverpool; 3, Bailey, Wirral, all of whom were in the first twelve. The West Cheshire Club had made capital arrangements, and it is most gratifying to be able to state that, despite the wet weather, the run was a complete success.

The headline of this article stuck - the Monstre Meet became a feature of the Liverpool&District programme for many years, the last one being hosted by Liverpool Boundary in October, 1962.

From the Liverpool Mercury, Monday, Mar 6th, 1893

LIVERPOOL AND DISTRICT

On Saturday afternoon the second annual contest between the local harrier clubs for the championship of the district took place at the grounds at Aintree. There were twelve clubs which entered, and considerable doubt was raised as to the ultimate successful combination. Consequently, there was a large attendance, and though the Liverpool Harriers were the holders of the cup, the Sefton Club were favourites. At the same time, it may be said that the Liverpool Gymnasium and the Wirral Harriers were trusted, to a great extent, by people present to carry off the prize. It was expected that Mr. Waterson would win, and, as the result showed, the expectation was fulfilled. Mr Waterson won last year, and in a way upheld the prestige of the Liverpool Club. He was followed by Mr Geddes, of the Sefton Club, Mr Farrill, of the Gymnasium Club, and Mr Griffiths, of the South Liverpool Club, all of them being well together at the finish. The Sefton Harriers proved themselves popular winners with 55 points against Liverpool's 101 and the Liverpool Gymnasium's 119.

It is clear from subsequent reports that the venue was Greenwich Park, Aintree, and the course used the adjacent countryside, rather than the Grand National course.

The reports of the activities of the championships in next two years come largely from the pen of a writer using the pseudonym *Whipper-in* in the Birkenhead News. While the articles are inevitably parochial at times, his down-to-earth style reveals some details and opinions absent from the drier, factual accounts in the Mercury.

From the Birkenhead News, Sat, Feb 10th, 1894

CROSS COUNTRY NOTES

There ought to be a good attendance at Greenwich Park, Aintree, this afternoon to watch the third contest for the District Cross Country Championship. There are eleven clubs competing, comprising 150 runners.

I am inclined to fancy that the old Liverpool will wrest back the coveted title from the young Seftons. The oldsters ran over the Championship course last Saturday.

Ted Watterson is going to try his hardest to carry off the individual championship for the third time, and it is very probable that the old stager will do it, though his clubmate, A.B. George, A.W. Jones, the Waltonite, Geddes, of Sefton, and perhaps, one or two others may give him some trouble.

The South Liverpool are generally tipped for the novice prize, but this is a very uncertain matter.

The race will start at 4 p. m. prompt. Trains leave Exchange Station, Liverpool, for Aintree at 2-15, 3-5 (special) and 3-20; returning at 5-45 (special) and 6-12.

WHIPPER-IN

CROSS COUNTRY NOTES

Ma' conscience the Sefton Harriers are a smart lot of runners. Six in the first eight out of 129 competitors. Bravo! Of course I am talking about the District Championship race last week. Perhaps I may as well give the facts in a straightforward fashion, Here you are then.

Your worships, at about 4-15 on the afternoon of Saturday the 10th of this month, I was present on duty at Greenwich Park, Aintree. There were gathered together on the race course about 130 runners, representing the eleven principal harriers clubs of Liverpool and district. There was also a small, very small crowd (?) of spectators and some men shouting out "Five to four Watterson", and "Six to four George". Then the runners were started off, your worships, on their journey over the track and across fields to the extent of between eight and nine miles. As the race went on, Geddes of the Sefton was always at the front or near it, and it was disappointing to see Watterson and George labouring on about half-a-dozen places behind, I was agreeably astonished at one point to see young Bailey of the Wirral actually taking the lead. When the race was finished, your worships, I saw Geddes and Allen, known as the Sefton Twins, struggling grandly. I thought it was a dead heat, but the judges gave Geddes as the winner of the special gold medal. Watterson was third, and was evidently run out. George, the other favourite, came seventeenth, just behind A. W. Jones of the Walton.

I was sorry Ted Watterson didn't carry off the championship for the third time: Not that I begrudge Geddes the honour, at all, for he ran splendidly. He finished fifth in the first race, second last year, and now he comes first. I believe his time was 59 minutes.

As for the finish of the clubs, I had pinned my faith to the tried team put forward by Liverpool, but now I recognise that the old 'uns are played out, and must give way to new blood, and be content to again take the silver medals, while plucky young Sefton walk off for the second time with the gold medals. As I hinted last week, the South Liverpool were not certainties for the novice prizes. Pembroke beat them by 24 points.

The order of the clubs was as follows:- 1, Sefton Harriers (champions, gold medals), 26 points ; 2, Liverpool Harriers (silver medals), 112 ; 3, Roby Harriers, 155 ; 4, Pembroke Harriers (novice medals) 187 ; 5, South Liverpool Harriers, 211 ; 6, Wirral Hare and Hounds, 249 ; 7, Walton Harriers, 255 ; 8, Prescot Harriers, 275 ; 9, West Cheshire Harriers, 282 ; 10, North Liverpool Gymnasium Harriers, 369 ; 11, Gordon Harriers, 438.

The champions finished thus:-

A. W. Geddes, 1 ; A. Allen, 2 ; J. F. Farrell, 4 ; E. H. Pulford, 5 ; W. Collett, 6 ; S. Henderson, 8 - total, 26 points.

Liverpool thus :- E. Watterson, 3 ; W. J. Nancarrow, 15 ; A. B. George, 17 ; P. Shay, 19 ; W. Harris, 24 ; J. W. Saul, 34 - total, 112.

Pembroke thus :- W. Hale, 13 ; C. E. Pugh, 18 ; R. A. Elliot, 32 ; J. Molyneux, 36 ; J. Power, 38 ; W. Allen, 50 - total, 187

The Birkenhead clubs were bitterly disappointing in their performance. The Wirral could hardly have had a much better team, and though the West Cheshire certainly had not their best men set out they ought really to have done better. Each year they seem to be going worse, the simple reason being, I think, that the runners have not in them enough club patriotism to train properly and well, like the Liverpool clubs. With thorough training and some enthusiasm our runners could hold their own with any of the district teams. The finish last week was like this:-

Wirral.- J. S. Howard, 22 ; E. Whelan, 26 ; O. Jones, 29 ; W. T. Bailey, 37 ; A. M. Dawson, 67, A Pegler, 68. Total, 249.

West Cheshire.- J. C. Band, 23 ; R. R. Mothersole, 35 ; T. Elm, 47 ; W. D. Band, 52 ; L. Harrison, 60 ; F. C. O'Connell, 65 ; Total, 282. Also finished: T. M. Wilkie, 72 ; A. Euing, 81 ; E. Smedley, 86.

From a sporting point of view the race was a success, but financially a failure. I hear since that there was a protest made against the results as given by the judges. The committee is considering the matter. I think they might consider at the same time the method of advertising the race. I refer to the handbills associating the names of a couple of prize-fighters, Corbett and Mitchell, with the sport of cross-country running. Surely the L. and D. C. C. A. was formed for the purpose of elevating the sport and not degrading and vulgarising it?

WHIPPER-IN

Whipper-in's moral outrage at the association of the sport with prize-fighters did not evidently extend to on-course bookies offering odds on the outcome of the championships. Perhaps his disappointment with the failure of his predictions had a more practical origin than the stain on his athletic know-how!

Other short-comings of the race appear.....

From Whipper-in's article in the Birkenhead News, Sat, Mar 3rd, 1894

CROSS COUNTRY NOTES

The District Association is in a bad way just at present. There is a deficit of £13 odd, which will have to be cleared off somehow. Besides that, anything but satisfaction is felt at the result of the last race. A protest was lodged by the South Liverpool against the result as given by the judges. Special committee meetings have been held and the judges have been called together in solemn conclave. The outcome of this is that, subject to the referee's confirmation, the finish is so altered that South Liverpool instead of being beaten by the Pembroke by 24 points have really beaten the latter by 2 points and become the winners of the novice medals. The alleged mistake seems to have arisen through some of the judges marking off runner No. 52, a Prescot man, as finishing 49th, whereas it was No. 82, a South Liverpool man who finished in that position, No 52 coming in a long way down the list. This makes a considerable difference in Prescot's total and removes them below the West Cheshire who now rank 8th club, instead of 9th. Let this be a lesson to judges to be very careful in their arrangements for marking off the finish, and to refrain from hurry when checking the result and placing of the clubs.

The same thing may be taken to apply to the Northern, as there appears to be dissatisfaction with the judges' ruling in that race, for I see the North Lonsdale harriers have challenged all the competing clubs with the exception of the first two. It has been found out, too, that Stockport should rank 6th club instead of 8th, their sixth man having been overlooked.

There will be a special general meeting of representatives from the District Association clubs on Tuesday night week to consider the best means of extinguishing the debt and placing the Association on a satisfactory financial basis. Meanwhile, suggestions on the subject are invited.

It would be good, too, I think, if at this meeting, some one called attention to the unsatisfactory method of advertising the race, and also to the objectional hand-bills that were issued, running after the style : "Mitchell and Corbett will not be present at Aintree, but all the local champions, &c., &c." The names of the prize-fighters were the most prominent on the bill, and this, as I said once before and repeat now, is calculated not to elevate the sport, but rather to degrade and vulgarise it. Whoever was responsible for those bills should be censured, and then allowed to resign. It's on a par with the absurd arrangement of the first season by which the prizes were presented on a theatre stage during a pantomime performance! How can the Association be as successful as it should be when such undesirable proceedings are introduced? This kind of thing should be stopped at once, and those who have the best interests of athletics at heart should see to it.

From Whipper-in's article in the Birkenhead News, Mar 24th, 1894

The District Cross- Country Association at their meeting last week decided to call upon the affiliated clubs for 25s., to be paid about the middle of next month. These payments would clear off the deficit, but it is a question whether the calls will be met, and also whether next season will see the association, in its present form at any rate, in existence.

One web-based calculator gives the inflation between 1893 and 2010 as 9600% . On that basis the call on the clubs was for £120 each in today's money. Whether or not they all paid up is unclear, but the Association appears in good health to judge for the preparations for the Championships with a planning meeting attended by almost forty delegates.....

From Whipper-in's article in the Birkenhead News, Jan 12th, 1895

The affairs of the Liverpool and District Cross-Country Association appear more and more promising as time goes on. The general meeting last Monday was attended by almost forty delegates, and was full of enthusiasm. The president, Mr E. A. Tooth, was in the chair, and received a hearty welcome, which was made heartier still when he announced his intention of presenting the bronze medals for the first novice club home in the championship. He also promised substantial support for the coming concert in aid of funds. The main business, of course, was the selection of a course for the race. Only two places were considered seriously - Greenwich Park, Aintree, and the Parkgate Race Course. The voting for each place was fairly even, but Parkgate found most favour, and it is certainly the better course for a cross-country race. The arrangements for the championship will now be hurried along though the date was left over till next week, a postponement till the end of February or the first Saturday in March being apparently desirable for various reasons. The railway company have promised to run a special train, and if the clubs will only induce their friends and supporters to come and witness the race its success will be assured.

The various clubs are beginning to select their teams to go into regular training now. The West Cheshire have picked out of their large membership 18 names, and from that 18 their team will be selected when the race approaches nearer.

The Wirral Hunt course at Parkgate was to be the venue for the rest of the races described in this account. It was situated on the land on the left of Boathouse Lane just before crossing the Wirral Way on the route to Parkgate from the A540.

From Whipper-in's article in the Birkenhead News, Jan 26th, 1895

The Liverpool and District Championship will be decided on the Wirral Hunt Steeplechase course at Parkgate, on Saturday afternoon, March 2nd. An entertainment is being given next Monday evening by the City Darkies, in the Picton Lecture Hall, Liverpool, with the object of increasing the prize fund. Tickets can be had from the members of cross-country clubs.

From Whipper-in's article in the Birkenhead News, Feb 23rd, 1895

The race for the district championship as most of you well know, takes place next Saturday afternoon on Parkgate racecourse at 4pm. The course is grass covered and a little over a mile round, consequently the runners will have to encircle seven laps to cover the necessary eight miles. There is a splendid accommodation for spectators who will enjoy the advantage of having the runners in sight during all the race. A special excursion train leaves Woodside Station on the arrival of the 2-30 boat from Liverpool. The runners will dress at the Town Hall, Neston, some 500 yards from the starting point for the race. After the race a smoking concert for the harriers and their friends will be held at the Royal Hotel, Neston. It is impossible to fix the winner at present. There are several of them. The race, both for the individuals and clubs can be said to be a perfectly open one.

The smoking concert seemed to be a favourite social event of the time. Smoking was fashionable : there are references in Wirral A C minutes twenty years later to weekly raffles for cigarettes to raise funds.

From Whipper-in's article in the Birkenhead News, Mar 2nd, 1895

The special train for Parkgate leaves Woodside Station at 2-30 this afternoon, and the fare is 1s 2d return. Now, all runners and others interested in cross-country racing, or those who would enjoy a visit to such a pleasantly-situated place as the Parkgate Race-course, know what to do if they would witness the fourth grand race for the cross-country championship of Liverpool and district. The course is that utilised for the Wirral Hunt Steeplechase, as the distance of the race is eight miles. Ten clubs have entered, and the total number of runners will be about 120, and as the competitors will be within sight of the spectators from the start to the finish the sight ought to be a most interesting one. The following clubs will compete:- Liverpool Sefton (holders 1892-93 and 1893-94), Roby (junior champions 1892-93), South Liverpool (junior champions 1893-94), Ashfield, Berkley, Florence, Gordon, West Cheshire, Walton and Liverpool Pembroke.

Of course it is a most difficult thing to attempt to pick out the winning club and particularly as the demon influenza has attacked many of the teams. I should have expected the W.C.H. to win but for the sad death of one of their members recently, a circumstance which cannot fail to subdue the enthusiasm of the team. However, I fancy the holders will take a lot of beating though I expect Roby will run them close, West Cheshire and the Walton will not be far behind. As for the first man home, Rawlinson, of Roby, who finished 11th last year, and 15th the year before, is said to be running strongly, and I am inclined to fancy that the honour lies between him, Geddes and Allen of Sefton, J. C. Band, of the West Cheshire, Powell, of Pembroke, and one or two others perhaps.

The special train will return from Parkgate at 5-45, but as most of the runners and many of their friends are holding a smoking concert on a large scale in Neston after the race, the tickets will be available by any later train.

The terms *Junior* here meant the same as Novice used earlier, rather than a younger age group.

The death referred to was that of Edward Whelan, a twenty year-old from West Cheshire Harriers, who had collapsed from exposure in bitter conditions in the Northern at Blackpool and died a few hours later.

CROSS COUNTRY RACE

CHAMPIONSHIP OF THE DISTRICT

On Saturday afternoon the fourth annual race for the championship of the Liverpool and district cross country clubs took place over the eminently suitable and pleasantly situated Wirral Hunt Steeplechase Course at Parkgate. The race is run under the auspices of the Liverpool and District C.C. A., which was formed for years ago with the object of furthering the interests of the pastime and has already done much to stimulate enthusiasm and a healthy rivalry among the various harrier clubs. The first championship race was run in 1892 over the Grand National Course at Aintree and the two following years the championship was decided at Aintree the course starting from Greenwich Park and taking in the adjoining country. The first champions were the Liverpool Harriers, Liverpool Gymnasium and Sefton being second and third. In 1893 the result was Sefton, Liverpool and Liverpool Gymnasium and last year, - Sefton, Liverpool and Roby. This year only nine clubs competed, among the absentees being Liverpool and this latter fact rendering the race much more open and interesting. The race was carried out most successfully, thanks to the admirable arrangements of the staff of honorary officials among whom the president, Mr E. Allen Tooth, the hon. secretary, Mr. C. E. Pugh, and the marshall, Mr. T. J. Gleave, deserve special credit for their good service.

The officials were as follows:- Referees, E. Allen Tooth (president) and S. V. Gannon (Walton H.) ; judges, J. J. Biggar (South Liverpool H.), H. Cannell (Liverpool Pembroke H.), J. Simmonds (Gordon H.), J.W. Taafe (Roby H.), W.F. Threlfall (Roby H.), J.F. Walker (Ashfield H.), and J. Walton (Walton H.) ; timekeepers, W. Lunt (Sefton H.) and H. Taafe (Roby H.) ; starter, W. Rogers (W. Cheshire H.) ; hon. treasurer, Charles J. Godfrey (South Liverpool H.) ; hon. assistant treasurers, Charles E. Dodd (Liverpool Pembroke H.) and T. A. Woodhouse (South Liverpool H.) ; marshall, T. J. Gleave (W. Cheshire H.) ; hon secretary, Charles E. Pugh (Liverpool Pembroke H.) ; and two clerks of course from each club. The only disappointing feature in connection with the event was the attendance of the spectators, who numbered about 300 only, the smallness of the numbers being to a great extent due to an unfortunate snowfall, which occurred an hour before the race and continued almost up to the start. Among the spectators were many representatives of the local gentry and a good sprinkling of the neighbouring villagers.

Previously 14 clubs, 12 and 11 took part in the race, but this year only nine clubs sent teams, and the total number of runners to turnout was 85, The course was eight miles and a couple of hundred yards, and comprised seven laps of a springy turf track, now snow covered, with obstacles in the shape of low hurdles, and a wide and most "inconvenient" water jump, the passage of which caused considerable amusement to the onlookers, if not to the runners themselves. The clubs competing were:- Sefton (holders), Roby, South Liverpool, Ashfield, Berkley, Gordon, West Cheshire, Walton, and Pembroke. The runners were started off on their long journey in fine style at 4.38 p.m. Francis of the West Cheshire team went to the front with a gallant rush, and had the honour of leading the way over the first hurdle, 300 yards from the start. This he cleared easily, and indeed throughout the race the graceful easy way this runner cleared the obstacles was the subject of admiration among the spectators. Francis was closely followed round the first mile by Griffiths, of South Liverpool, and J. C. Band, of the West Cheshire, but the two latter dropped out altogether in the second mile. At the half distance the favourite, W. Rawlinson of Roby, was leading and among the first flight were Geddes, Collet, and Allen of Sefton and Francis of the West Cheshire. These runners kept in the van with but slight variations in their position till the last lap, when Collett rushed away and finally won by some forty yards from Rawlinson, Geddes, last year's winner, being third. The winner's time was 47mins 50secs. The first twelve were - 1. W. Collett, Sefton; 2 W Rawlinson, Roby ; 3. A

Geddes, Sefton ; 4 T. E. Francis, West Cheshire ; 5, J Bailey, Sefton ; 6, H Jeanrenaud, Roby ; 7, J. F. Farrell, Sefton ; 8 H Wellings, Roby ; 9, J Powell, Pembroke ; 10, H Barr, Roby ; 11, H Davies, Roby ; 12 J. Molyneux, Pembroke. Altogether 52 runners completed the distance. The clubs finished as follows:-

FIRST - SEFTON H. (Gold Medals) - Collett 1, Geddes 3, Bailey 5, Farrell 7, Allen 15, Goode 16. Total, 47 points

SECOND - ROBY H (Silver Medals) - W. Rawlinson 2, Jeanrenaud 6, Wellings 8, Barr 10, H. Davies 11, F. Rawlinson 14. Total, 51 points

THIRD - WEST CHESHIRE H. - Francis 4, Mothersole 13, Pryce 19, W. D. Bond 10, Day 23, Francom 28. Total, 107points

FOURTH - LIVERPOOL PEMBROKE H. - (Novice Bronze Medals), - Powell 8, Molyneux 12, White 17, Bellard 31, Hooghton 43, Pugh 45, Total 156 points.

FIFTH - LIVERPOOL GORDON H. - J. Bathgate 18, H. E. Bibby 25, C. Petrie 33, F. Henry 38, T. Bathgate 42, W. Bruce 44, Total 200 points.

As one of the conditions of the race was that each club to count must finish six the following clubs were unplaced: - Walton (finished 5), Ashfield (5), South Liverpool (3) and Berkeley (0).

After the race a smoking concert was held by the runners at the Golden Lion Hotel, Neston, with Mr. J. Townsend, vice-president West Cheshire H., in the chair, and vocal and instrumental selections were given, the reception accorded to the new champion, W. Collett, who took part, being a most enthusiastic one.

This report was an extended version of one that appeared in the Mercury and was published in the mid-week edition which was unusual for cross-country reports, so it was likely to have come from a professional reporter.

Not to be up-staged, Whipper-in had his say in the Saturday edition. Some points from his account are reproduced below.

From Whipper-in's article in the Birkenhead News, Mar 9th, 1895

.....The Parkgate course proved, as was generally anticipated, admirably adapted for such an event. The only improvement that could be made in the course would be the shortening of the water jump either by the removal of the artificial hedge or decreasing the width by a foot or two. As it was last Saturday only one runner, Francis of the West Cheshire Harriers, could clear it and the others had to jump over the hedge splash into the water. And wet costumes make the race very unpleasant for the competitors.

.....The gate receipts totalled up to a little over £5, and thanks to the effort of the various clubs, probably an equal value of tickets was sold beforehand.

.....The staff of honorary officials worked well, but, unfortunately, there were not enough of them.

By this time the Association had taken over responsibility for the Monstre Meet at the beginning of the season.....

From the Liverpool Mercury, Mon, Oct 7th, 1895

LIVERPOOL&DISTRICT CROSS COUNTRY ASSOCIATION

Upon the invitation of the above-named association, the cross-country season in the Liverpool district was opened on Saturday by a muster of the various clubs at Wallasey. Notwithstanding the wretched weather, a persistent drizzling rain falling the whole of the afternoon, there was a very fair muster, 135 runners turning out, representative of the following clubs:- Roby, Sefton, Walton, Gordon, Florence, West Cheshire, Pembroke, Berkely, Spellow,

Thornton, Birkenhead Gymnasium, Ashfield, Liverpool and St Margaret's. A run was made in the direction of Leasowe Castle, and finished with a mile break. Six prizes were offered in connection with the proceedings, three being awarded to the first, second, and third in the break, two to novices, and one to the club with the best muster. The winners in the break were - 1, E Watterson, Liverpool Harriers ; 2, H Looney, Douglas ; 3, C Band, Birkenhead Gymnasium. The first novice prize was captured by J Charlton, Sefton Harriers, and the second by T Lloyd, Gordon Harriers ; and the prize for the best club muster was taken by West Cheshire Harriers with a turnout of 20 runners. The referee was Mr E A Tooth, President of the association ; the judges were Messrs, J. P. Lee, J. B. Grayston, J. F. Walker, H. P. Ellis and S. V. Gannon ; and the honorary secretary Mr C E Pugh. After the run tea was served in the Black Horse Hotel, to which about 120 sat down, and a social was afterwards held.

From the Liverpool Mercury, Monday, Mar 9th, 1896

LIVERPOOL AND DISTRICT

The fifth annual race for the Cross Country Championship of Liverpool and District took place last Saturday afternoon on the Wirral Hunt Steeplechase Course at Parkgate. The championship race was promoted in 1892 by the Liverpool and District Cross-Country Association, to which all the harrier clubs whose headquarters are within a radius of ten miles from Liverpool Town Hall are eligible for membership. The past winners have been - 1892, Liverpool Harriers first, Liverpool Gymnasium second, Sefton Harriers third; 1893, Sefton Harriers first, Liverpool Harriers second, Liverpool Gymnasium third; 1894, Sefton Harriers first, Liverpool Harriers second, Roby Harriers third ; 1895, Sefton Harriers first, Roby Harriers second, West Cheshire Harriers third. The individual champion last year was W. S. Collett, of the winning club, who accomplished the distance, 8 miles 200 yards, in 47mins 50secs. Last Saturday being comparatively fine, a large number of spectators journeyed with the runners by the special train from Woodside Station to Parkgate, and the race was witnessed by close upon a thousand persons. Thirteen clubs had entered, and all competed, each turning out teams of twelve runners, six of whom were to count for places. The favourites were the Liverpool Harriers, the West Cheshire Harriers, and the Roby Harriers, with the odds in favour of the West Cheshire Harriers, who defeated the Liverpool club in the Northern Championship. As for the individual runners, Davis, of the West Cheshire, was a strong favourite, while Watterson, of Liverpool, and Rawlinson, of Roby, were much fancied. Owing to the late arrival of the train bringing the runners, the race was delayed, and instead of starting at four o'clock, it was 4.40 when the big field of runners, numbering over 150, were despatched on their journey. The course consisted wholly of springy, undulating turf, with obstacles in the form of low hurdles, hedges, and a formidable water-jump, the passage of which afforded the spectators considerable amusement. The total distance was 8 miles 200 yards, and was made up of seven laps of the course. The runners got away to a good start, and Shepherd, of the Roby, shot to the front and had the honour of leading the way over the first hurdle. Very soon, however, Davis (West Cheshire), Watterson and Looney (Liverpool), and Tennant (Ashfield) forged ahead, and, with slight changes in their positions, these led the van all the way. The pace was very fast for the first four miles, but as the rain then descended and the wind blew, the runners were forced to slacken speed, and the race finished in a discomforting rainstorm. For the last three miles Davis and Tennant, the latter a very young runner and quite a surprise in the race, had a clear lead, and lapped many of the competitors. These two went round the last lap neck and neck, and it was only when coming up the straight that Davis spurted away and won a magnificent race by about 40 yards from Tennant, Watterson being about 150 yards behind. The following give the times of the first six to finish :-

	min.	sec.
1. H. E. Davies, West Cheshire....	47	03
2. J. G. Tennant, Ashfield.....	47	10
3. E. Watterson , Liverpool.....	47	35
4. J. Hosker, Liverpool.....	47	50
5. A. Looney, Liverpool.....	47	59
6. R Smethurst, West Cheshire...	48	16

The placing of the clubs and the positions of their teams were as follows:-

- 1 West Cheshire (gold medals) - H. E. Davies 1, R. Smethurst 6, C. Ledsome 10, T. E. Francis 11, B. Francom 15, R. R. Mothersole 18 ; total, 61 points
 - 2 Liverpool (gold centre medals) - E. Watterson 3, J. Hosker 4, A. Looney 5, A. Poole 21, C. Wright 27, A. W. Jones 34 ; total, 94 points
 - 3 Roby (silver medals) - T. Davies 7, W. Wellings 12, J. Griffiths 13, W. Rawlinson 14, F. Rawlinson 25, W. Bryan 31: total, 102 points
 - 4 Sefton (ex-champions) - J. Bailey 9, J. Shaw 17, H. Dodd 19, C. Davidson 30, J. Summer 36, F. Bartlett 38 ; total 149 points
 - 5 Ashfield (novice medals) - J. G. Tennant 2, J Meharry 20, W. Hale 22, P. M. McIntrye 40, J. Benbow 47, D. Formby 52 : total 183 points
 - 6 Gordan - C. Bolton 23, J. H. Bathgate 32, D Watson 33, G. Brewer 35, W. Huskisson 50, T. Bathgate 62 ; 235 points
 - 7 Birkenhead Gymnasium - C. Band 8, P. Hopkinson 43, J. W. Smiley 54, C. S. Tilston 60, S. Band 65, T. Scott 66 ; total 296 points
 - 8 North Liverpool Gymnasium - J. Glover 29, E. Battersby 59, R. Jackson 63, W. Lewis 69, R. White 72, J. Halton 75 ; total 357 points.
- Unplaced clubs- Liverpool Pembroke (4), St Margaret's (4), Thornton (4), Berkley (2) and Florence (2).

The winner, H. E. Davis will receive a special gold medal, while extra novice medals will be awarded to C. Band (Birkenhead Gymnasium), J Bailey (Sefton) and J. Molyneux (Liverpool Pembroke). It may be interesting to note that the 1896 champions, West Cheshire Harriers, finished sixth, seventh, ninth and third in previous races, so that they have well earned the honour.

From the Liverpool Mercury, Mar 10th, 1897

LIVERPOOL&DISTRICT CROSS COUNTRY ASSOCIATION

A special committee meeting of this association was held on Monday evening , at the Bee Hotel, Mr J. Merlin (Sefton Harriers) presiding. The following teams were passed for the Liverpool and District Championship on March 20th at Parkgate:- West Cheshire, Sefton, Ashfield, Anfield, Birkenhead Gymnasium, Farnworth, Gerard's Bridge, Liverpool, Liverpool Pembroke, Prescot, Liverpool North End, North Liverpool Gymnasium, and St Margaret's. The officials for the race were elected. This year's event is expected to be one of great interest, as there are to be no fewer than 150 runners. A special train will leave Woodside Station at 2.35, returning from Parkgate at seven. Some of the best runners and jumpers in the North of England will take part in the race, which is expected to be one of the keenest contested in the history of the association.

The reference to the best runners and ***jumpers*** is interesting. The harrier tradition obviously still remained strong with the organisers, if not the runners.

CROSS-COUNTRY RUNNING

Liverpool and District Championship

Although the number of competitors was slightly smaller as compared with last year, the quality of the runners in the sixth annual race for the cross-country championship of Liverpool and District, held at Parkgate, Wirral, on Saturday afternoon was of a high class and the event was most keenly contested. In fact, in point of interest, competition, and attendance of spectators, Saturday's race was the most successful of the series, started six years ago by the Liverpool and District Cross-country Association, an organisation which includes in its ranks the harriers' clubs of the neighbourhood. The only drawback to the event was the slight drizzling rain which fell during the race; otherwise the weather was beautifully fine. The first championship of this district was decided over the Grand National Steeplechase Course at Aintree, and was won by Liverpool Harriers; the following year Liverpool Sefton carried the honours at Greenwich Park, Aintree, and succeeded in holding their position as champions at Parkgate in 1894 and 1895. Last year, however, also at Parkgate, the Sefton Harriers dropped to fourth place, a Birkenhead club, the West Cheshire Harriers, finishing a good first. The Wirral Hunt Steeplechase course at Parkgate was on Saturday utilised for the third time in succession, and, indeed, it would be difficult to choose a more suitable of picturesque spot for such a race. The course covered eight miles 200 yards, and consisted of seven laps of springy, undulating turf, with obstacles in the shape of low hurdles, hedges, and a formidable water-jump, the passage of the latter by the runners being a source of considerable amusement to the spectators if not to the runners. Twelve clubs entered teams of a dozen runners, but the Liverpool Anfield Harriers were non-starters, leaving eleven clubs, comprising 128 runners, to compete. Tennant, of Ashfield, who chased Davis, of the West Cheshire, home last season, was now a strong favourite for first place, while Smethurst, W.C.H., Wright and Hosker, of Farnworth, were also greatly fancied. At the commencement of the race, Tennant and Smethurst dashed to the front, and the former at once assumed the lead. At the half-distance he was about 50 yards ahead of Smethurst, with Hosker, Wright, and Haynes, all of Farnworth, gradually closing in. Tennant galloped on at top speed the whole journey, and ended a magnificent display by winning easily by 500 or 600 yards from Wright, the latter having his club-mate Hosker and Smethurst on his heels. Tennant's time for the distance was 47 mins 42 secs. Eighty-three runners completed the distance, and when the results were made out it was found that the holders had dropped to third place, Farnworth taking the championship, while Sefton (ex-champions) had reached second place.

The first twenty to finish were - 1, J. Tennant, Ashfield (gold medal); 2, G. Wright, Farnworth ; 3, J. Hosker, Farnworth ; 4, R. Smethurst, West Cheshire ; 5, A. Haynes, Farnworth ; 6, W. Rawlinson, Sefton ; 7, J. Kelly, Farnworth ; 8, W. Collett, Sefton ; 9, H. Dodd, Sefton ; 10, A. Poole, Sefton, 11, H. Jeanrenaud, Ashfield, 12, J. W. Hale, Ashfield ; 13, W. Aston, Farnworth ; 14, M. Follon, Farnworth ; 15, F. Bartlett, Sefton ; 16, W.T. Denton, Prescot ; 17, T. Poole, Prescot ; 18, C. Ledsome, West Cheshire ; 19, J. Summer, Sefton ; 20, J. Benbow, Ashfield.

The club placings were as follow:- First, Farnworth Harriers (champions 1896-7 - gold medals) : G. Wright 2, J. Hosker 3, A. Haynes 5, J. Kelly 7, W. Aston 13, M. Follon 14 ; total points 44.

Second - Sefton Harriers (silver medals) : W. Rawlinson 6, W. Collet 8, H. Dodd 9. A. Poole 10, F. Bartlett 15, J. Summer 19 ; total 67

Third - West Cheshire Harriers (ex-champions) ; R. Smethurst 4, C. Ledsome 18, J. S. Howard 21, J. C. Bond 23, A. W. Jones 24, R. Mothersole 27 ; total, 117

Fourth - Liverpool Ashfield Harriers : J. Tennant 1, H. Jeanrenaud 11, J. W. Hale 12, J. Benbow 20, H. Walker 40, H. Tindall 41 : total, 125

Fifth - Prescott Harriers (novice medals) : W. T. Denton 16, T. Poole 17, J. Hardman 32, W. Cropper 33, T. Jones 47, T. Barton 66 ; total, 211

Sixth - Liverpool North End Harriers : J. Bailey 22, R. Dryhurst 26. W. Huskisson 34, J. Simmance 59, J. Turner 63, J. K. Teare 77 ; total, 280

Seventh - Liverpool Pembroke Harriers : W. White 30, A. B. White 36, J. Molyneux 37, E. A. Elliot 43, F Maund 54, J. Whitby 83 ; total, 283

Eighth - North Liverpool Gymnasium Harriers ; D. Watson 29, J. Halton 44, T. Bathgate 46, J. Oliver 48. J. Bathgate 57, J. Jacques 74 ; total, 298.

Ninth - Birkenhead Gymnasium Harriers ; R. Hopkinson 42, H. Roberts 56, J. H. Bucknell 65, C. S. Tilson 67, T. Scott 72, R. Merry 81 ; total, 383

The judges made no return of the Gerard's Bridge Congregational Harriers and the Liverpool St. Margaret's Harriers, the inference being that these clubs failed to finish the necessary six runners. At night the harriers held a smoking concert at the Bee Hotel, Liverpool, under the chairmanship of Mr E. Allan Tooth (president), and during the evening acknowledged, by votes of thanks, the success of the arrangements carried out by the honorary secretary (Mr. C. E. Pugh) and other officials.

From the Liverpool Mercury, Monday, Oct 4th, 1897

Harriers

Great Gathering at Wavertree

"Record" breaking seems to be the order of the day, and, not to be behind in the race for fame in their particular section of athletics, the Liverpool and District Cross Country Association topped all previous gatherings by that which they organised and carried out on Saturday. The "meet" was at the Lamb Hotel, Wavertree, and the scene in connection with the mustering of the forces was of the most animated description, the Wavertonians and others from a considerable distance turning out in large numbers to see the start and finish. The officials were as follow:- Messrs F. T. Parry, F. C. O'Connell, J. P. Lee, and J. Merlin, judges, starter, &c.; captain, R. R. Mothersole, West Cheshire Harriers ; vice captains, Messrs J. Molyneux, Liverpool Pembroke Harriers, and T. Welsh, Sefton Harriers; hon treasurer, Mr C. J. Godfrey; hon secretary, Mr C. E. Pugh. J. Cropper and others watched the rooms during the absence of the competitors. These numbered upwards of 200, being nearly double the number of starters as the first run of the season last year, representative of the following clubs:- Sefton, West Cheshire, Ashfield, Liverpool Pembroke, Grosvenor, Wallasey, Farnworth, North Liverpool Gymnasium, Liverpool, Gerard's Bridge, Prescott, East Liverpool, Gordon, Gordon Athletic, 1st Cadet Battalion and 1st Cadet Athletic. The "trailers" started shortly after four o'clock, taking a course through Broadgreen, on to Childwall, from thence to Woolton, and back to Wavertree - a six miles track of a stiffish nature, involving in its progress many fences, hedges, and fields. The immense "pack" started at 4.30, keeping to the course admirably, and finishing at the original starting place in good time. Subjoined were the prizes and winners:- Silver watch, presented by Mr L. V. Gannon : 1st prize. E Watterson, Liverpool Harriers ; 2nd, J. Tennant, West Cheshire Harriers ; 3rd. H. C. Jeanrenaud, Sefton Harriers. 1st novice, gold centre medal, presented by Mr J. Merlin, E. Haughton, Farnworth Harriers; 2nd, silver medal, J. Duckett, Ashfield Harriers. Muster prize, presented by Mr F. C. O'Connell (gentleman's dressing case) ; the Sefton Harriers (40 in number ; hon sec, Mr J. Merlin). The whole of the competitors and officials were photographed before the start took place by Mr Hinchcliffe, Cazneau-street. Under the chairmanship of Mr E. Allan Tooth, president of the association, who was supported by Messrs J. J. Biggar and F. T. Parry, a pleasant smoking concert was held at the Star and Garter Hotel, Queen-square, in the evening, when the prizes were delivered.

From the Birkenhead News, Sat, Feb 26th, 1898

LIVERPOOL&DISTRICT CROSS-COUNTRY ASSOCIATION

A meeting of the above was held on Monday evening, at the Star and Garter Hotel, Mr J. Merlin presiding, for the purpose of passing teams and electing officials for the Liverpool and district cross-country championship race, at Parkgate, on Saturday, the 5th March next. The following clubs will compete:- Ashfield, Birkenhead gymnasium Farnworth, Gerard's bridge, Gordon Athletic, Gordon, Grosvenor, Liverpool. Liverpool gymnasium, Liverpool Pembroke, North Liverpool gymnasium, Prescot, Sefton, and West Cheshire, comprising 170 runners. The election of officials resulted as follows:- Referee, E. Allen Tooth ; judges, Marshall, J. Merlin ; timekeepers, Messrs, H, P. Ellis and J. P. Lee ; starter, W . Rogers ; chief clerk of course, T. J. Gleave ; Marshal, J. Cole ; press steward, E. Battersby ; hon treasurer, Charles J. Godfrey ; hon. secretary, Charles E. Pugh. There were also selected twelve gentlemen as judges, and eight as a finance committee. Additional interest is being taken in the race owing to J. Hosker, who will take part, having won the Northern Counties ten miles championship on Saturday last, at Trafford Park, Manchester. J. W. Hale who finished seventh in the same race, losing one of his pumps at the commencement and after running the whole distance barefoot. J. Tennant, and other well known runners will also compete.

Sadly, the Liverpool Mercury records have a gap covering both the 1898 and 1899 championships. Furthermore, Whipper-in appears to have put down his pen and reports in the Birkenhead News are irregular.

Despite pre-view of the 1898 event reported above and Jason Tennant retaining his title in the colours of the local club, West Cheshire Harriers rather than Ashfield, no report of the championship was published in the Birkenhead News.

Articles in subsequent years mention that the 1898 team race was won by Sefton by 2 points from Farnworth.

From the Birkenhead News, Mon, Mar 15th, 1899

LOCAL CROSS-COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIP

The eighth annual race for the cross country championship of Liverpool and district took place on Saturday afternoon on the old Wirral Hunt Racecourse, Parkgate. Local interest in the event was very strong owing to Farnworth and West Cheshire Harriers having run as closely in the Northern Championships at Crewe, and to the fact that the race was popularly supposed to rest between the two. Jason Tennant, of the West Cheshire club, was generally fancied, and the other much favoured candidates were J Hosker (Farnworth), J. W. Hale (Liverpool Pembroke), and Rimmer (Liverpool Harriers). A record was established in the club entries which numbered fifteen, each of which was represented by twelve runners, six of whom were to be placed in the final. Gloriously fine weather prevailed, which induced a large number of spectators to put in an appearance, amongst them being a large contingent of the local gentry, with whom the steeplechase is yearly becoming more popular. The distance to be run was the same as last year, 8 miles 200 yards. The track was interrupted with ditches, hedges and a good water jump, which proved as great a source of merriment to the spectators as of annoyance to

the runners. At half-past four a good start was made, Smethurst (West Cheshire) being the first to take the lead, Tennant and Hale following at his heels. On passing the post the second time, Rimmer (Liverpool). Smethurst and Tennant appeared in a bunch and at half distance Rimmer had put about 30 yards between himself and the other two. The runners had separated greatly, several being lapped, whilst Hosker gave up at half distance, Tennant was troubled with a stitch about this time, and in consequence of it lost a fair amount of ground. At the fifth round J. T. Rimmer still maintained his lead, followed by Smethurst, Cook and Mercer (Farnworth) and Tennant. Rimmer finished 20 yards ahead of Cook, and Smethurst, who ran capitally, secured third place, followed by Mercer and Tennant. On figuring out the result of the club championship West Cheshire, with 57 points, were found to be an easy first, Farnworth being second, a position they occupied last year, with 83 points, whilst Sefton Harriers were third, with 128 points. Gordon Harriers, who occupied fourth place gained the novice medals. Details:-

	min	sec
1 J. T. Rimmer, Liverpool Harriers.....	49	11
2 H. Cook, Farnworth H.....	49	14
3 R. Smethurst, West Cheshire H.....	49	23
4 W. Mercer, Farnworth H.....	49	29
5 J. Tennant, West Cheshire H.....	49	54
6 J. J. Walsh, Liverpool Harriers.....	50	22
7 J. W. Hale, Liverpool Pembroke H...	50	32
8 W. H. Jones, Farnworth H.....	50	55
9 T. E. Francis, West Cheshire H.....	51	45
10 D. Walsh, Liverpool Harriers.....	51	55
11 C. Band, West Cheshire H.....	52	11
12 G. Cropper, Prescot H.....	52	15
13 A. G. Nicholson, West Cheshire H...	52	21
14 J. Roberts, Sefton H.....	52	28
15 W. Cropper, Prescot H.....	52	33
16 C. Ledsome, West Cheshire H.....	52	35
17 T. J. Roberts, Gordon H.....	52	39
18 G. W. Barris, Sefton H.....	52	40
19 W. E. Richmond, Liverpool Gym.....	52	45
20 E. Shipton, Sefton H.....	52	55

CLUB PLACINGS (LOCAL)

1 (Champions) - West Cheshire H. R. Smethurst 3, J Tennant 5, T. E. Francis 9, C, Band 11, A. G. Nicholson 13, C. Ledsome 16 ; total 57 points
 Also finished : A. O. Taylor 28, J. C. Band 38, R. R. Mothersole 50, W. D. Read 65.
 10 Birkenhead Gymnasium H. J. W. Smiley 39, R. Hopkinson 55, F Speed 68, T. W. Maddocks 73, C. Breuninger 75, W. Campbell 78 total 388 points.

WEST CHESHIRE HARRIERS,

WINNERS OF THE LIVERPOOL AND DISTRICT CHAMPIONSHIP, 1899.



W. ROGERS
(Trainer)
 A. G. NICHOLSON. J. TENNANT. A. O. TAYLOR. R. SMETHURST J. P. LEE
(Hon. Secretary)
 T. E. FRANCOIS. C. LEDSOME.
(Captain)

This photograph, sadly damaged by years of damp storage in the old Wirral A C headquarters in Holm Lane, shows five of the winning West Cheshire team in 1899. According to the result in the article earlier, the third counter, C. Band, appears to have been replaced by the seventh finisher, A. O. Taylor, hopefully simply to make up the numbers for the photograph in the absence of Mr Band!

A. G. Nicholson went on to found Wallasey Harriers, now Wallasey AC, in 1906 and was their Club President for 45 years. He played a prominent role in the West Lancs CCA. which was formed as one of four districts of the Northern Cross Country Association in 1910-11, becoming its first President. He was President of the Northern CCA in 1913-14 and due to the WWI effectively remained in post until 1919. He clearly dominated the West Lancs as he was their nominee for the NCAA Presidency again in 1922-23, 1926-27, 1930-31, 1934-35 and 1947-48. He was also President of the English Cross Country Union in 1927 when the National was held at Crewe. The programme of the Liverpool&District Championships in 1925 lists him as the President of the Liverpool& District Cross -Country Union, a post he held for many years according to his obituary in the Wallasey Chronicle in 1955. Other honours included the Presidency of the Northern Counties AA in 1933 and the Cheshire CAAA in 1953.

Jason Tennant's career included the two Liverpool&District titles in 1897 and 1898, as well as 3rd in the "4 miles English Championship", presumably the AAA 4 miles track championship. He became the first Senior Captain of Wirral AC, when it was formed in 1911 by a disaffected group from West Cheshire Harriers.

R "Bob" Smethurst was elected a Vice President at the inaugural meeting of Wirral AC and remained so till his death in the winter of 1942-43. His services to the club, particularly as a starter, are frequently acknowledged in club records.

T. E. Francis was the athlete whose jumping prowess caught Whipper-in's attention in 1895.

C. "Charlie" Ledsome became President of Wirral AC from 1923 and remained in post until his death in 1946. His ashes were scattered on the club's course in Prenton. This is not a myth - there is a photograph of the group of members in club vests and shorts with the casket at the start of the run.

From the Liverpool Mercury, Mar 1st , 1900

CROSS-COUNTRY RUNNING

LIVERPOOL AND DISTRICT ASSOCIATION

The committee of this association met at the Star and Garter Hotel, Liverpool, the chief business being to pass teams and elect officials for the championship, which takes place on the old Wirral Racecourse, Parkgate, Cheshire, on Saturday, March 10. Owing to the refusal of the association to accept Southport Harriers as members, J. T. Rimmer, who won the championship last year as a member of Liverpool Harriers, will not be able to defend his title . The following are the teams:

West Cheshire Harriers (holders), Sefton Harriers, Farnworth Harriers, East Liverpool Harriers, Everton Harriers, Halton View Harriers, Liverpool Harriers, Liverpool Gymnasium Harriers, Liverpool Pembroke Harriers, North Liverpool Gymnasium Harriers, Prescot Harriers, Richmond Harriers, Runcorn Harriers, Sacred Heart Harriers, Sutton Harriers. (*The article included all the names*)

J. "Jack" T. Rimmer would win the Championship again, in 1909 as a member of Sefton Harriers. He remained with Sefton to become Club President from 1951-61.

From the Mercury, Mon, Mar 12th, 1900

CROSS-COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIPS

LIVERPOOL DISTRICT

The ninth annual race for the Cross-country Championship of the Liverpool District was run on Saturday afternoon over the old Wirral Hunt Steeplechase Course at Parkgate, The distance, as usual, was a little over 8 miles, made up of seven laps of undulating grass lands with a big water jump, several dry and wet ditches, and placed hurdles. Four of the 15 clubs (Grosvenor, Gordon, Birkenhead Gymnasium and Gerard's Bridge Harriers) which competed last year were missing from Saturday's entry, but four new clubs appeared - Sutton, Runcorn, Richmond and Halton View (Widnes) - leaving the competitors numerically the same as last year, 180 runners representing 15 clubs. Beautiful weather favoured the event, and fully a thousand spectators made their way from Liverpool and Birkenhead, either in the special trains or by cycling to the venue of the race, which offered a pleasant view of the misty hills of Wales beyond. The prospects of a keen contest were good, as it was generally agreed that the West Cheshire Harriers, the holders of the championship, Farnworth Harriers, last year's runners-up and Sefton Harriers, who were third club last year, and have held the championship on four occasions, all stood an equal chance of victory. As for as the individual championship, favour seemed to be divided between J Hosker, of Farnworth, and J Tennant, West Cheshire, who won in 1897 and in 1898, and was fifth last year, but there were others who pinned their faith to J Roberts, of Sefton, a speedy runner, who has improved considerably since he finished 14th in the race last March. It was 4.23pm when the starter fired his pistol, and the runners who had been grouped across the track, leaped forward on their long journey. Tennant, Roberts, and Hosker at once went to the front. The two leaders gradually drew away from the rest of the field, and maintained a ding-dong race right through, hardly a yard separating them at any time, while often they ran together stride for stride until the last half of the last lap. Then Roberts increased his speed and, although Tennant pluckily responded, he could not again catch his man, and Roberts sprinted home a popular winner by about 40 yards from Tennant. The winner's time was 50mins 55secs, being 1min 33secs better than his performance last year.

G Southward, of Sutton, a novice, who kept the lead of the second flight from the half distance, finished third, while Hosker who seemed content to run fourth throughout, finished next. During the biggest part of the race, the spectators greatly enjoyed themselves by watching the runners splashing over the low hedge into the water-jump, only one or two clearing it successfully every time. As for the running of the teams, Sefton accomplished a grand performance in placing their six men within the first 15 home, Farnworth's six tailing out to 33rd position. The West Cheshire were handicapped by the unexpected loss, through illness, of the services of R. Smethurst, who was third last year, and A. O. Taylor, while early in the race T. E. Francis and C Ledsome, two others of their front rank, left the track. Under the circumstances they did well to secure fourth place. The surprise of the race was the strong running of Southward and Webber, two members of the novice Sutton team, who finished 3rd and 6th respectively. One hundred runners finished the race. Appended are the individual placings and the times of the first 20, and the club placings:-

1	J. Roberts, Sefton	50min 55secs
2	J. Tennant, West Cheshire	51min 5secs
3	G. Southward, Sutton	51min 38secs
4	J. Hosker, Farnworth	51min 46secs
5	J. Walsh, Liverpool	51min 52secs
6	F. W. Webber, Sutton	52min 3secs
7	J. W. Hale, Pembroke	52min 4secs
8	W. Williams, Sefton	52min 6secs
9	A. G. Nicholson, West Ches	52min 15secs
10	M. Fallon, Farnworth	52min 17secs
11	G. W. Barris, Sefton	52min 23secs
12	S. Colville, Sutton	52min 26secs
13	J. Griffiths, Sefton	52min 33secs
14	W. B. Longmore, Sefton	52min 35secs
15	A. R. Holmes, Sefton	52min 53secs
16	W. Ray, Runcorn	52min 59secs
17	J. Henderson, Pembroke	53min 1sec
18	R. W. Sherratt, Liverpool	53min 3secs
19	W. Thomas, Runcorn	53min 10secs
20	T. Duckett, Sefton	53min 13secs

CLUB PLACINGS

1st Sefton (Champions)- J. Roberts, 1; W. Williams, 8; G. W. Barris, 11; J. Griffiths, 13; W. B. Longmore, 14 : A. R. Holmes, 15: total 62points

2nd Farnworth - J. Hosker, 4 : M. Fallon, 10; W. Mercer, 21 ; W. H. Jones, 22 ; R. Ratcliffe, 25 ; P. Brady, 33 ; total 115points

3rd Liverpool Pembroke - J. W. Hale, 7 ; J. Henderson, 17 ; W. Close, 29 ; A. Spiers, 32 ; J Spiers, 34 ; J. Molyneux, 35 ; total 154points

4th West Cheshire (ex-champions) - J. Tennant, 2 ; A. G. Nicholson, 9 ; J. Brown, 37 ; J. C. Bland, 39 ; G. M. Dutton, 52 ; E. Tennant, 57 ; total 196points

5th Liverpool - J. I. Walsh, 5 ; R. W. Sherratt, 18 ; W. Cropper, 30 ; W. Steele, 50 ; W. Walpole, 51 ; E. G. McSweeney, 56 ; total 210points

6th Sutton (novice medals) - G. Southward, 3 ; F. W. Webber 6, : S. Colville, 12 ; F. Evans, 76 ; J. Eden, 79 ; J. Preston, 80 ; total 256points

7th Liverpool Gymnasium - W. E. Richmond, 26 ; C. G. Beachey, 28 ; J. P. Jackson , 31 ; H. Sanders, 49 ; D. F. Imlach, 83 ; B. Y. Jackson, 84 ; total, 301points

8th Runcorn - W. Ray, 16 ; W. Thomas, 19 ; J. Goodall, 45 ; S.Hopkins, 68 ; T. Shallcross, 87 ; F. K. Welch, 88 ; total 323points

9th Sacred Heart, St Helens - J. Caldwell, 54 ; W. Glover, 65 ; J. Ashton, 67 ; J. Richardson, 72 ; W. Cook, 73 ; D. Fildes, 74 ; total 405points.

10th East Liverpool - J. Pollitt, 48 ; W. Patterson, 59 ; A. Roberts, 77 ; J. Atherton, 82 ; E. Hudson, 86 ; J. Bragg, 90 ; total, 442points.

Everton Harriers, Halton View H (Widnes), Richmond H (novices), North Liverpool Gymnasium H and Prescott H did not finish a team.

From the Birkenhead News, Sat, Mar 13th, 1901

CROSS-COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIP

FINE SPORT AT PARKGATE

HOW THE CLUBS FINISHED

Favoured by glorious weather, the annual race for the cross-country championship in connection with the Liverpool and District Cross-Country Association, which took place over the old Wirral racecourse at Parkgate on Saturday, attracted a large concourse of visitors from Liverpool and different parts of the Peninsula. Undoubtedly the day was the finest so far of the year. The sun, in its setting of blue, almost cloudless sky, shone brilliantly throughout the day, imparting to everything a pleasant warmth and cheerfulness that contrasted acceptably with the cold, miserable character of the elements for some time past. The country had a freshness about it that was pleasant to behold, and the waves of the Dee had a beautiful silvery lustre about them as they caught the rays of the first spring sun. Over in Wales, the mountains stood forth unusually bright and green. Everything considered, it was a day calculated to put one into excellent spirits. Special trains to cope with the anticipated heavy traffic were run, and on the one from Woodside at 2-35 some 350 persons, all bound for Parkgate, travelled.

Year by year this event grows in importance and interest, and probably, on Saturday, the once popular racecourse presented a scene more animated than it has done since, on certain days every year, races used to be contested, not between men, but "gee-gees". As in former years, the race attendant upon the championship consisted of ten miles (seven times round the course) of undulating country, all fine springy turf, and comprising numerous ditches, hollows, "kopjes", hurdles, and a huge water jump, offering a severe test of the leaping and staying powers of the competitors. A paper trail and small flags defined the course, which work, Mr T. J. Gleave, a prominent member of the West Cheshire Harriers, had undertaken with excellent results.

Fourteen harriers clubs entered teams of twelve men, six to count at the finish, and every one was represented in the race. The clubs were - Sefton (champions 1893-94-95-98,1900), West Cheshire (champions 1896-99), Farnworth (champions 1897), Liverpool (champions 1892), Liverpool Pembroke, Sutton (novice champions), Liverpool Gymnasium, North Liverpool Gymnasium, Prescott, Runcorn, Sacred Heart, East Liverpool, Halton View, and Richmond. Among the individual runners, first favourites were J. Roberts, Sefton (last year's champion), J. Tennant, West Cheshire (champion 1897-98), W. Williamson, Sefton (runner-up last year), J. Hosker, Farnworth (fourth last year), M. Follon, Sefton (tenth last year), R. Smethurst, West Cheshire, and F Webber, Sutton (sixth last year).

Four o'clock should have witnessed the start of the race, but it was twenty minutes after that time when Mr W. Rogers' pistol cracked, and the 210 runners bounded away upon their long run. The picturesqueness of the start can hardly be imagined by those who have never seen it. The brilliant and harmonising tints of the runners' costumes produce an exceedingly pretty effect, and as the large gathering of competitors kept well together for pretty nearly the whole length of the course, the picturesque spectacle was maintained for some little time. Soon,

however, the class men forced the pace and rapidly forged their way ahead of the main body, which by and by strung out to such an extent that there were harriers in every part of the field.

Of course the water jump, and the efforts made to negotiate it, were a source of considerable amusement. Every man had his own way of "doing" the jump, and many fantastic and original leaps were made. It was noticed, however, that only once was the jump properly cleared, and that was by F. Longmore of East Liverpool. The many laughter-provoking efforts to clear the jump evoked numerous witty and otherwise - mostly otherwise- remarks from the large body of spectators who had crowded round the water jump. The harriers were asked "Why don't you dive?" and told to "Mind De Wet" - this was a very popular remark - and to "Hurry up, Never sweat," &c. Ere long the water was more like clay than anything else; one jumper's "pumps" stuck in the bottom, and he pluckily finished the race in his bare feet. F. Webber was the first over the water jump, J. Roberts was second and J Tennant was third. In the next five rounds the first three over the water jump were - 2nd time over: 1. M. Greene (Sefton), J. Roberts and F Webber, the fourth man being Tennant ; 3rd time : 1 J. Roberts, 2 F.Webber, 3 M. Greene, Tennant again being fourth ; 4th time : 1 J. Roberts, 2 Tennant, 3 F . Webber ; 5th time : 1 J Roberts, 2 Webber, and 3 Tennant ; 6th time : 1 J. Roberts, 2 Tennant, and 3 Webber. At the commencement of the last lap Tennant cleared a hurdle in fine style and stole away from Roberts, and maintained the lead until the water jump when Roberts darted off and, again obtaining the lead, raced as hard as ever he could go for the winning post, which he passed a populous winner about ten yards ahead of Webber, Tennant being about 30 yards in the rear. Roberts' time was 51 mins 6 secs which was 11 secs slower than his performance last year. This year the club placings were much more divided than has been the case for several years, but eventually it was ascertained that Sefton for the sixth time, had won the championship, Farnworth again being runners-up; while Sutton, last year's novices, by an excellent performance, had gained third place, managing by eight points to thrust the West Cheshire team into the fourth position. Detailed finish:-

1.	J. Roberts, Sefton.....	51m 6s
2.	F. Webber, Sutton.....	51m 8s
3.	J. Tennant, West Cheshire...	51m 15s
4.	M. Greene, Sefton.....	51m 21s
5.	G. Southward, Sutton.....	51m 26s
6.	J. Whittle, Sacred Heart.....	51m 55s
7.	J. Hosker, Farnworth.....	52m 3s
8.	S. Colville, Sutton.....	52m 11s
9.	W. Williams, Sefton.....	52m 30s
10.	W. Bailey, Sutton.....	52m 38s
11.	W. H. Jones, Farnworth.....	52m 45s
12.	M. Follon, Sefton.....	52m 48s
13.	A. G. Nicholson, West Ches.	52m 49s
14.	J. P. Jackson, L'pool Gym...	52m 53s
15.	P. Brady, Farnworth.....	53m 10s
16.	J. Stoddart, Sefton.....	53m 12s
17.	W. Thomas, Runcorn.....	53m 15s
18.	J. M. Handley, Farnworth....	53m 37s
19.	A. Haynes, Farnworth.....	53m 42s
20.	C. Ledsome, W Cheshire...	53m 45s

Champions.-Sefton H. (gold medals) : J. Roberts 1, M. Greene 4, W. Williams 9, M. Follon 12, J Stoddart 16, M Geddes 23 ; total, 65 points.

2nd. - Farnworth H. (gold centre medals) : J. Hosker 7, W. H. Jones 11, P. Brady 15, J. M. Handley 18, A. Haynes 19, P. Flynn 28 ; total, 98 points

3rd.- Sutton H. and A. C. (silver medals) : F. Webber 2, G. Southward 5, S. Colville 8, W. Bailey 10, J. Moss 29, J. Hill 65 ; total 119 points.

4th. - West Cheshire H. : J. Tennant 3, A. G. Nicholson 13, C. Ledsome 20, R. Malcolmson 25, W. E. Richmond 31, T. E. Francis 35 ; total, 127 points

5th, Runcorn H., 203 points ; 6th, Sacred Heart H., 214 points ; 7th, N. Liverpool Gymnasium H., 233 points, 8th, Liverpool Pembroke H., 280 points ; 9th , Liverpool H. and A. C., 332 points ‘ 10th, Liverpool Gymnasium H., 412 points ; 11th Liverpool H., 494 points ; 12th, East Liverpool H., 515 points. Halton View H. and Prescot H. did not finish a team. Out of the 150 runners who started the race 102 ran the full course. Runcorn H. gained the silver medals offered for the first unplaced novice team ; J. Tennant (W.C. H.) the gold centre medal for the first man from an unplaced club ; J. Whittle (Sacred Heart H.) silver medal second ditto; and J. P. Jackson (Liverpool Gymnasium H.) silver medal for the first novice home.

The following is a list of

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1892.- Liverpool Harriers.	E Watterson, Liverpool Harriers.	Won by 4 points
1893.- Sefton Harriers.	E Watterson, Liverpool Harriers.	Won by 56 points.
1894.- Sefton Harriers.	E. W. Geddes, Sefton Harriers.	Won by 36 points.
1895.- Sefton Harriers.	W. S. Collett, Sefton Harriers.	Won by 4 points
1896.- West Cheshire.	H. E. Davies, West Cheshire H.	Won by 33 points.
1897.- Farnworth Harriers.	J. Tennant, Ashfield Harriers.	Won by 23 points.
1898.- Sefton Harriers.	J. Tennant. West Cheshire.	Won by 2 points.
1899.- West Cheshire.	J. T. Rimmer, Liverpool Harriers.	Won by 26 points.
1900.- Sefton Harriers.	J. Roberts, Sefton Harriers.	Won by 53 points.

Two figures are given in this article for the number of starters. The first reference to 210 runners must be wrong as only 14 teams started with a maximum of 12 runners each.

Closing Comments

The number of clubs entering Championships in 1901 was fourteen, the same number as in the first race in 1892. The club scene was far from static however, as only six of the original clubs remained at the end of the period and no less than 32 different clubs had entered the championships during these first ten years! This represents an average turn-over of 2 or 3 a year. Of the six survivors from 1892, Liverpool Harriers are still competing, while Liverpool Pembroke and Sefton Harriers amalgamated in 1995. Liverpool Gymnasium continued to compete until at least 1925 when they were one of the eight competing clubs listed on a copy of the Championship programme. West Cheshire Harriers never recovered from the split among their members which led to the creation of Wirral AC and merged into Hercules AC, an amalgamation of a number of clubs across Merseyside, formed in 1921. Although Hercules entered a team in the 1925 Championship, it never fulfilled its original purpose to “produce a club capable of holding its own against other well known clubs” and within a year or two it must have folded taking West Cheshire Harriers with it. (The present West Cheshire AC, based in Chester has no connection with West Cheshire Harriers). North Liverpool Gymnasium, who did not finish a team in 1901 but were still active in 1910, are not on the 1925 programme.

The figures given in the reports of the 1895, 1896 and 1900 races show that the number of runners failing to finish was typically about 35%. This may be due in part to an optimistic estimate of the number of starters, but indicates that the drop-out rate was much higher than in recent times. It is not hard to see why - the water jump may have amused the spectators but would have discouraged many tired runners, unless they bred them differently in those days. In fact, by 1909 the race had moved from Parkgate to the Bebington Showground, now the site of the Oval track and there is no talk of water-jumps or indeed obstacles of any kind.

Beyond the narrow perspective of the District, the sport was in the painful process of establishing a set of rules by which to operate. The history of the Northern Cross Country Association by Phil Thomas, mentioned in the Preface, contains details of numerous disputes about eligibility of athletes to represent this or that club as well as the establishment of Championships for Juniors based on age, rather than the novice category, itself a definition open to debate. By the mid 1920s, a system that would be recognised today had been established, albeit without the very young age groups.

By 1909, the Liverpool and District had a separate race for clubs who had not won a medal previously, the winners being promoted to the Senior race. This could, however, exclude a good athlete from a weaker club competing in the Senior event, as the report of the 1910 championship noted when L Drinkwater of St Helens AC repeated his 1909 win by a margin of 26 seconds. Perhaps this triggered the change in rules which must have occurred by 1912, when Wirral AC, in its first season, won both the Senior title and what is referred to as the Novice title in their annual report and repeated the feat in 1913. Presumably the Novice definition was now based on individuals, rather than clubs.

The subsequent history of the Championships from fragmentary records available to me rather than systematic research is as follows. Wirral AC reports start referring to a Junior Championship, rather than the Novice race, from 1921-22 and to a Youths Championship from 1931-32, though this may not be the first race as there is a gap in the Wirral records immediately prior to that season. A Boys Championship (U16) was begun in 1951-52, a Colts Championship (U14) in 1972-73 and the Junior race was merged into the Senior race in 1966-67. The Championships followed the national change in age groups in 1974-75 to U13, U15, U17 and U20, i.e. all age groups moved down a year.

With the coming of a new National Governing Body for athletics, British Athletic Federation, in 1992 and the consequent formation of the Merseyside County AA, the Liverpool and District dropped the championships for the younger age groups in 1992-93 and reverted to a single race for Seniors and Juniors.

One final observation: in 1900-01, 12 teams and 102 runners finished from a field of 150 in a single L&D championship race, while in 2009-10, 10 teams and 142 finished in the single L&D Championship race. Has the Union returned to its roots? Not really - 15 of those 142 were females, a result more unlikely in 1901 as a medal presentation at a pantomime or a smoking concert today. And as for water-jumps..... forget it!