

Shaftesbury Barnet Harriers memorial to **GEORGE HARRISON MBE** with contributions of memories and photographs from friends and members. **GEORGE** passed away on Monday 23 January 2023

GEORGE received his MBE on 26 November 2014, from **PRINCE WILLIAM**.



The following contributors are from **LISA WEBB, MARTIN ROCHFORD, NADEEM SHAIKH, RACHEL FELTON, ALAN WELLER, LIAM AND JAMIE DEE, JAMES LOVELL, EMILIA ECONOMU, KAREN HARRISON, TIM UNDERHILL, GLEN WATTS, JOANNA WINFIELD and SHAUN CLIFFORD**

From **LISA WEBB**, who also wrote - It is very sad news about **GEORGE** who coached me to my best performances. For inclusion in your SBH memorial document, please find attached a photo of **GEORGE** with his squad in the early 1980s. The photo was taken by my dad (**RON WEBB**) at Potters Crouch in Hertfordshire where we used to train in the woods on a Sunday.



From **MARTIN, ANN and BEN ROCHFORD**, who also wrote - As a family we were sad to hear of **GEORGES'** passing.
I have attached some informal shots of **GEORGE** which might be useful to include in any future tribute.

Regards **MARTIN, ANN and BEN ROCHFORD**

The first photograph shows **SHEILA** and **GEORGE** waiting for the Queen. History was made at Berkhamsted School on Friday 6 May 2016 when we had the honour of celebrating the School's 475th anniversary in the presence of our Patron Her Majesty The Queen. It was the first time a reigning monarch had visited the School.

The next two were taken at the 2016 National X/C Championships at Donnington Park, with first with **BEN ROCHFORD** and the second **KOJO KYEREME**
Finally **KYLE LANGFORD** with **GEORGE** at Watford



From **NADEEM SHAIKH**

I would like to pay tribute to my coach, mentor, dear friend & father figure **GEORGE HARRISON MBE** who sadly passed away on Monday morning.

GEORGE was 90 years of age & had been coaching for over 50 years, working with Shaftesbury Barnet Harriers, Highgate Harriers & St Alban's School. He helped many athletes progress, improve & achieve performances & accolades they never thought possible. As a coach, he produced over 100 international athletes & helped 4 athletes run sub 4 minutes for a mile - truly incredible. But **GEORGE** was more than a coach.

Spending time with **GEORGE**, you always learnt so much more than just running & athletics. You got snippets of his wisdom, his observations, his life skills, his athlete management, his insight knowledge & experience, his preparation, organisation skills & the importance of attention to detail. He never missed a thing & his memory was as sharp as ever, remembering every athlete's running time & position, whether it was in a training session, race or competition. He treated everyone equally, regardless of whether you were a club/school runner or a National, World, European, Commonwealth or Olympic Games athlete. He was a true legend.

Sending the email to Shaftesbury Barnet informing them of **GEORGE'S** passing yesterday was honestly one of the hardest emails I have ever had to send. The outpouring of shock, sincere heartfelt sentiments & condolences was phenomenal - but I would expect nothing less remembering a gentleman who impacted so many people's lives in such a positive manner. I was so incredibly proud that **GEORGE** was awarded a Coaching Excellence Award by the club in December last year & that I was able to present it to him at his home after a special awards dinner organised by the athletics club.

GEORGE & I had known each other for 35 years. He coached me from the age of 14-15 when I first joined Shaftesbury Barnet. We had many trips away together in the UK & overseas, & we shared so many great laughs & memories together. When I got a bit older & wider & my competitive days as an athlete were coming to an end, I began coaching. I was then his assistant coach for many years - his right-hand man if **GEORGE** was ever away or unable to take training. As I progressed through my performance coaching qualifications **GEORGE** was my main performance mentor & I could always rely on him to point me in the right direction or give me another perspective to consider & understand. I learnt so much more than just my coaching philosophies from **GEORGE**.

GEORGE & I used to speak over the phone every 7-10 days & I would always visit **GEORGE** whenever I came down to Hertfordshire or London. I received the sad news of his passing at 8am yesterday morning (Monday 23 January). I am devastated & I know it will take some time for it to sink in.

Over the last few years & months I could see that **GEORGE** was becoming frail & fragile - who wouldn't at the age of 90! Those who knew **GEORGE** will always take comfort in reminiscing of all the happy fond memories & joy we all shared. **GEORGE** leaves a tremendous legacy & I will be forever grateful to call him my coach, my mentor, my dear friend & my father figure. Without him, I would not be the person I am today. My mother, who passed away 10 years ago and **GEORGE HARRISON MBE** have been two of the most influential people in my life. They may be gone now, but they will never be forgotten & remain in our hearts & minds forever.

Thank you for being a huge part of my life **GEORGE**. My thoughts & condolences are with your wife **SHEILA**, your daughter **KAREN**, son **COLIN** & all your family at this sad time. When you get up to heaven, I know the first thing you will do is mark out a 400m running track & then ask for a stopwatch! God bless you always **GEORGE**, rest in eternal peace #CoachingLegend.
Love & respect **NADEEM**







From **RACHEL FELTON**

He has been such an important part of my life for so long, he coached me from the age of about 12. I did very little training to start with and kept my mileage low under his careful guidance, I honestly believe that is why I am still able to run 30 years later. Even after going to University in Birmingham then off to the US on a scholarship then moving to the Cotswolds for work, he was always only a phone call away. We would chat regularly, mostly about running but other things too. He always offered sensible advice if I was ever unsure about something. He brought out the best in me as a runner and for that I will be forever grateful. Even in recent years, if I ever made it back to St. Albans during the week I could wander down to the park and find him with the school and he was always so happy to see me - as happy as I was to see him. At weekends I would head to Watford for a cricket ground session, I took great pleasure introducing my daughter Eve to him when she was old enough to run a little bit. He gave me some money to buy Eve her first trainers. I still have them. She is 11 now and loves running. I don't let her train yet as George would have said hold off till she is a bit older. What wisdom and kindness, George, you were amazing. I will miss you so much.

One thing I thought of the other day. It was Liverpool XC trials in 2016 and I was in great shape but having a dip in confidence. My coach in Stroud had said I'd do well but I was getting out the car and I just didn't want to do it. My head was talking me out of it, I was tempted not to race and drive home. I phoned George and asked him what I should do. He said, you've driven there, you should run. you'll be ok. I was ok. I ran well and was picked to run for GB in Edinburgh off the back of that.

From **ALAN WELLER**

On joining Shaftesbury on the 6 February 1984 (yes 40 years next year), **GEORGE** was one of the first Shaftesbury coach I met. Prior to this I was living in Harrow, and decided to take up running went to Bannister Stadium. There was a group of some 20 athletes, who were preparing for a pack run through Northwood. The group included **MARTIN GREY, VIC GILLICK, JOHN BROE, ANDY BEATTIE** and **DAVE THOMSON**, and after a few chats they suggested I did a few easy laps of the field. So off they went and after my 3rd lap of the field, I was looking for an excuse to stop, then I heard this 'alright' and it was **BOB PARKER**. We chatted for some 10 minutes, and convinced me the benefits I could achieve in the coming year. I classified myself as a steady club runner, but I was always welcomed at **BOB'S** Tuesday and Thursday sessions from his house in North Harrow until his untimely death.

I met **GEORGE** not long after joining, also at Bannister. We chatted, and at the end of the conversation he gave me 2 or 3 aims for that year, and he often ring me to see how I was progressing. From 2012, I took on the role of producing the SBH Newsletter, and the consistent contributor was **GEORGE**. I would ring him on a Sunday and he would reel of yesterday's results, as his memory for storing information was outstanding.

His legacy will live on, not only in Shaftesbury but also St Albans School. In early 2014 **GEORGE** was preparing his team for the upcoming King Henry VIII races.

This was **GEORGE'S** report - St Albans School with four Shaftesbury athletes (Legs 2, 4, 5 & 6) in the 6 man team won the King Henry VIII School annual cross country relays on 5 February 2014 for the 11th time. With boys and girls from over 60 schools across England, the race has a strong legacy, boasting former competitors of the calibre of **SEBASTIAN COE, ALISTAIR & JONATHAN BROWNLEE** and **RICHARD NERURKAR**.

In high winds the course as set up as best could be, having to tie the tape to objects and allow it to wave, banner-like, rather than spanning it between posts as usual! Record-breaking rainfall over the UK had not missed Coventry, and the woods section particularly had some impressively deep and wide puddles to ford. However the course overall was less muddy than in 2013, and fears of a slow course seemed to have been misplaced. The rain continued to fall all morning, as schools from as far afield as Kent, North Yorkshire and even the flood-hit Somerset all made their journeys to the War Memorial Park, where the event is held. It was fortunate that the rain stopped just as the race began, allowing the spectators and waiting competitors to watch in greater comfort.

St Albans won in a time of 74.38 – Leg 1 **DANIEL MYERS** (12.53), Leg 2 **MARK PEARCE U20** (11.53) 3rd fastest time of the race, Leg 3 **HARRISON PYRKE** (12.49), Leg 4 **ROBBIE LIGHTOWLER U20** (12.04), Leg 5 **ADAM THORPE U20** (12.35), Leg 6 **JOE REDWOOD U20**

(12.24). Team result 1st St Albans School 74.38, 2nd The Judd School 75.33, 3rd Shrewsbury School 76.10

From **LIAM AND JAMIE DEE**

Just a note from **JAMIE** and myself who were very sad to hear of **GEORGE HARRISON'S** passing whilst we're away in the States.

GEORGE was always such a presence at SBH and Herts fixtures throughout our time as Juniors. As a team manager for Hertfordshire schools, his commitment to the sport was always on display. Mostly I remember his support for all athletes, allowing us to tag along with his Watford group on Saturdays, even prior to joining SBH. I think I personally owe more to **GEORGE'S** quiet hard-work than I realise, which shows the impact he had across athletics.

From **JAMES LOVELL**

I first met **GEORGE** when I was 12 years old and felt an instant respect for the man he was. He had this ability to know what made each of his athletes tick on a running and personal level. He definitely knew by telling me how well all my closest rivals were running would get me motivated!!

GEORGE wasn't just a coach to me and so many but someone you could talk to about things that were going on in your life and he would give you the most direct and best advice.

Running under the guidance of **GEORGE** has made me the person I am today. I was lucky to have very supportive parents but **GEORGE** has had such a massive impact on the way I look at life.

When my eldest son **JAKE** was 12 he asked me if he could train with **GEORGE**. So I took him down to Garston for a few sessions and myself and **JAKE** felt so privileged. Watching **GEORGE** count the seconds down on his multiple stop watches and seeing **JAKE** run those laps was something I will never forget.

Thank you **GEORGE** for everything and you are going to be missed by so so many of us.

Love to **SHEILA** and family.- **JAMES LOVELL**



From **EMILIA ECONOMU**







From **KAREN HARRISON**

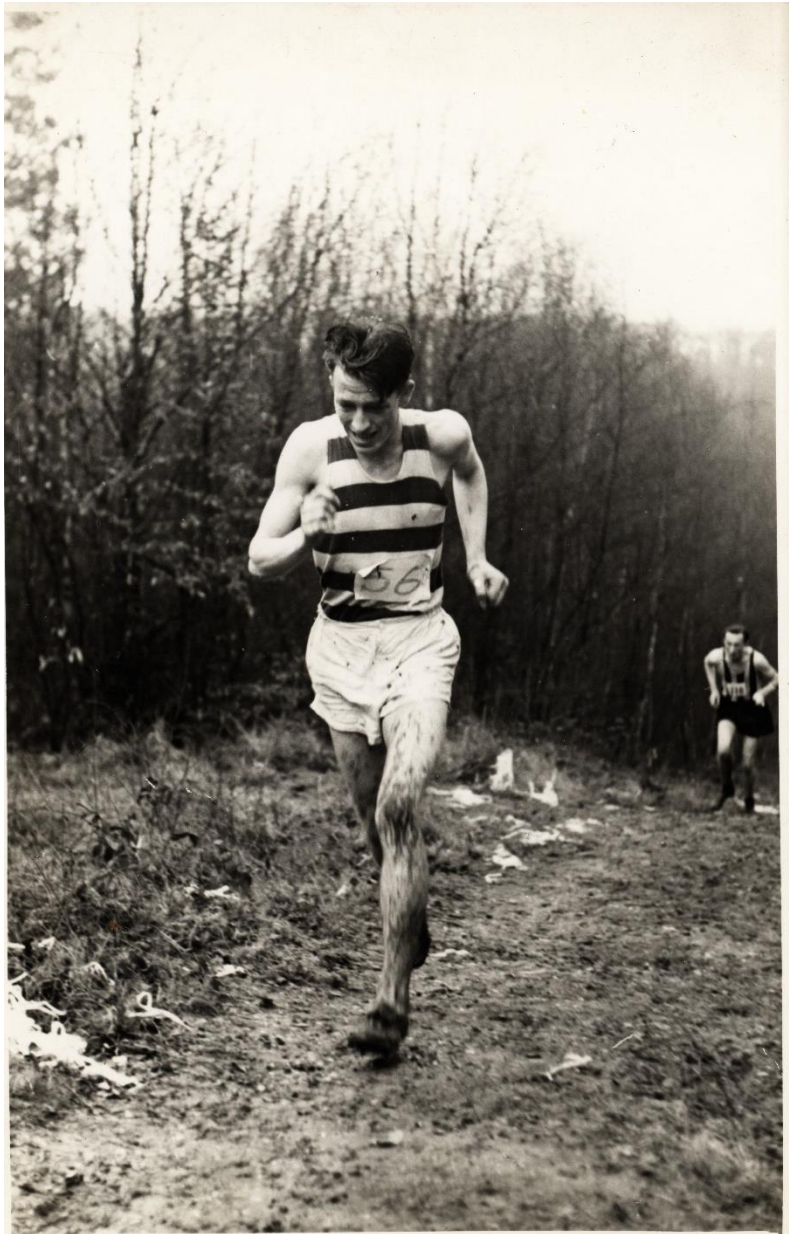
Thank you for publishing a tribute to **GEORGE** in the Shaftesbury Barnet Harriers newsletter. **SHEILA, KAREN** and **COLIN** would like to thank everyone for the kind messages, cards and flowers we have received. These are a selection photographs of **GEORGE** running - beginning at Crown and Manor boys club and then with Highgate Harriers. **GEORGE** loved cross country and road races. His favourites were 15 and 20 miles, he always said the marathon was just too far and he narrowly missed selection for the marathon at the Rome Olympics in 1960.

The first photograph feature **GEORGE** with the Crown and Manor Boys Club team (**GEORGE** is on the far right) prior to the Federation of Boys Club Championships in 1950, the second shows **GEORGE** leading the race.



Moving on to 1953, the first photo sees **GEORGE** receiving the Wilton 10 winners cup from the Pageant Queen. Second is **GEORGE** winning the North of the Thames, running for Highgate Harriers.






It is now 1959, with **GEORGE** passing the 22 mile marker, lying in 7th place in the Polytechnic Marathon.



In 1958 **GEORGE** featured on the front cover of Athletics Weekly, leading the Finchley 20, finally the 1963 Finchley 20 in which **GEORGE** set a Southern Counties Championship Best Performance with a time of (1:44.26).

Athletics
WEEKLY

MAY 19th 1932
9
Vol. 12 No. 17



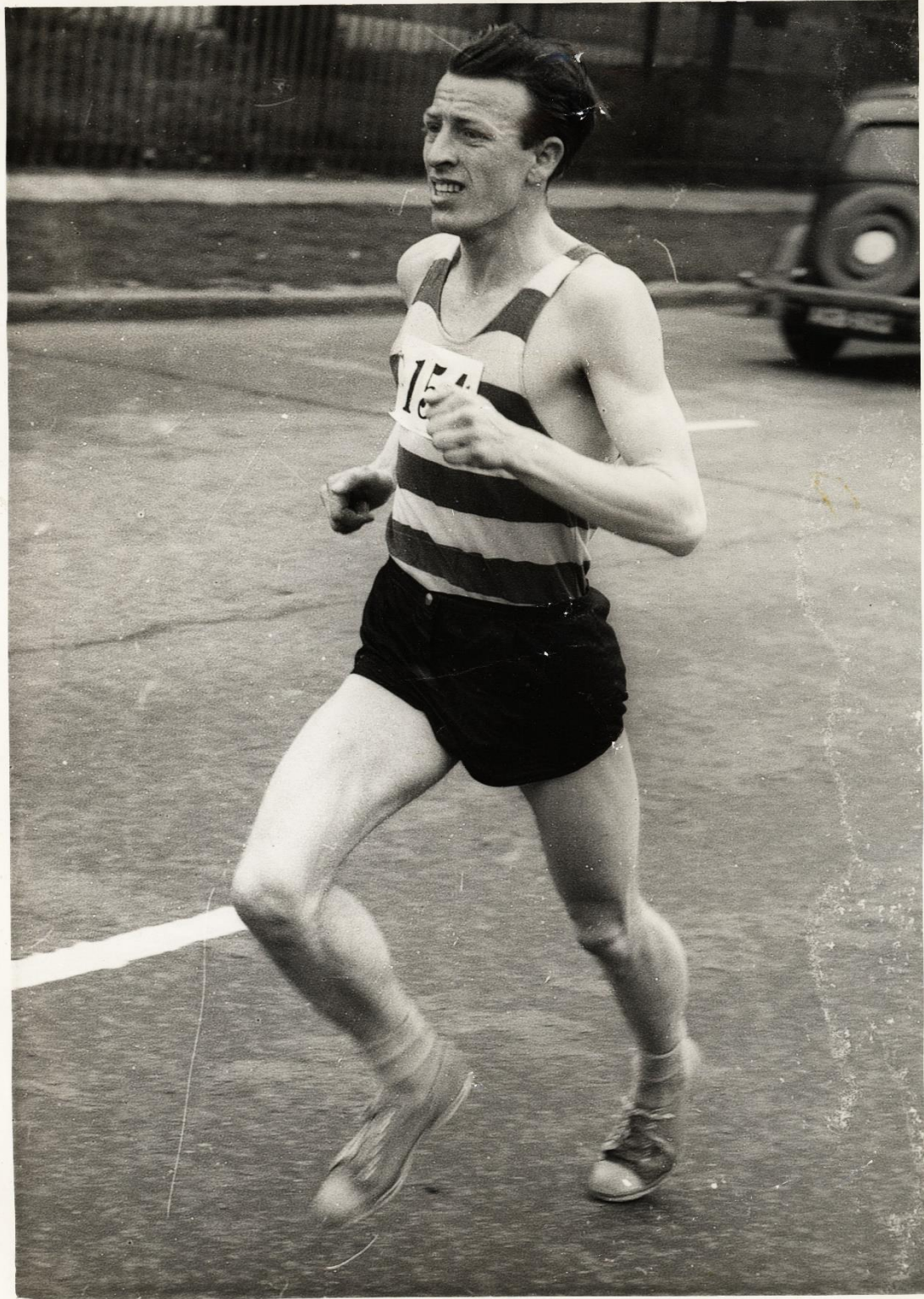
G. Harrison leads J. C. Hazden & E. Smith to Finisley "20."

HULL MARATHON
University Matches

CROMPTON "8"
County Road Races

Lancashire's Scheme for Encouragement of Youth

THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ATHLETICS IN GREAT BRITAIN



From **TIM UNDERHILL**

I was lucky enough to be coached by George Harrison when at St Albans School in the early 1980s. My abiding memory is of this sprightly, light-footed and kind man cajoling the cross country team as we made our way back to school after the latest session in Verulamium Park, giving us some words of wisdom post-session and keeping our feet on the ground ahead of the next race.

We were all proud to wear the school vest under the tutelage of Coach George and he had that rare ability to get the best out of you simply because you didn't want to let him down. 40 years later I'm enjoying cross country more than ever with SBH - thank you to the legendary Coach George Harrison for planting and nurturing that seed back in the day!

From **GLEN WATTS**

Like scores of others, my early progress in athletics was furthered by George without my knowledge. As a schoolboy looking to improve PBs and hit qualification standards, I often took the pilgrimage from the fens of Cambridgeshire to the fabled Watford track to enter a Wednesday evening Open Graded Meeting. Waking for school the following morning was a challenge, when the 3km would often start at gone 10, due to the number of athletes travelling, like me, great distances. I didn't learn until joining the squad that George always sat on the far end of the table, quietly doing the 'grading', with only a small glass of beer as remuneration. "How many 800s tonight George?" "Fifteen. 10 per race." It was an honour to occasionally sit with him and help arrange the entries as they came in.

George made Watford feel like home when I arrived age 20; he took me into his running family, as did his athletes. Echoing many others, he meant so much to so many, not due to his success. Because he devised his sessions carefully and could manage many groups at once, with people doing parts of others' sessions (he made it look so effortless!) there was no performance standard to join the squad. He didn't expect everyone to run sub four minutes for 1500; just to be committed, have fun and be respectful. I think the mix of age, ability and gender all within one coaching group helped it feel like a family.

When George said you could do something, you didn't doubt him. No matter that you wouldn't have dreamt it on your own. He knew, so you believed. And on the day he was never wrong. I remember in my first season with George, at the university champs some fellow competitors asked me the day before the steeplechase final what I thought I'd run. "George said I can do 9:05" I said. "Oh, that could win it!" was the surprised reply, unsure if I was being serious. "Ah, I hadn't realised that" I said. My PB was 9:19 from the season before I started with George. Running my own race I ran a strong last 800 and ran ... 9:05. I was as shocked as anyone to have won, but the time was not in doubt. George "had been here before". That he had driven to Bedford on a bank holiday morning made it even more special. That one year with George was enough to seal a scholarship to the US. I owe so much to George: what he put into the sport and how he helped me to get so much from it.

I could list numerous memories and highlights, from races, sessions, to chatting in the car park! Things George did for me that went beyond what anyone would expect from a coach. The extra steeplechase sessions so I could practice over the barriers. Bringing in hurdle coaches to offer advice. Driving me to the Tough Ten curry night the day after my first time running for England, so I could show the youngsters my kit. I will treasure these memories, and be forever thankful to George Harrison, the original.

From **JOANNA WINFIELD**

JOANNA sent me a photograph of **HERSELF, MAX, DYLAN** and **BEN** with **GEORGE** on a Saturday morning training session on 23rd December 2017. I will add it to the document.



From **SHAUN CLIFFORD**

Many thanks to **SHAUN** for this outstanding photograph of **GEORGE**. **SHAUN** recalls his children, **HARRIET** and **JOSH CLIFFORD** ran for SBH between 2008 – 2015 and trained with **GEORGE** in St Albans.

The photograph makes me smile as I distinctly remember **GEORGE** saying "I never cancel training when it's snowing. The only thing that would stop the session would be mist". I'm sure many other SBH athletes could testify to this.

