

THE MIDLAND MASTER ATHLETE NO. 227
The official publication of the Midland Masters Athletic Club

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Welcome to this special edition of the MMAC Newsletter honouring our late Treasurer, Colin Simpson, who sadly passed away on the 24th July 2011, aged 82.

Colin was the Treasurer since the Club's inception in 1972 and indeed his membership number was the very first, number 1.

Reproduced in the following pages are tributes to Colin from his close friends and colleagues and a copy of the order of service at his funeral.

All of MMAC will miss Colin's contribution to masters athletics in the Midlands and indeed nationally.



COLIN SIMPSON (1929 – 2011)

Reflections of Colin's life in Athletics, shared by Irene Nicholls

Well now Colin. You have caught us all by surprise this time.

Only a few weeks ago we were enjoying your company at yet another Athletics Championships, having our traditional end of meet ice cream and winding down – and now you've gone.

Colin – number 1 Midland Veteran. He took that number because he won the inaugural MVAC race and has kept it for nearly 40 years. He was always our Treasurer and for most of that time he was the Membership Secretary, only relinquishing that role when computerisation became essential to cope with the growing numbers of new members -at the last count we have had 4300 members joined since Colin. (How he hated computers).

He was a great Treasurer – Club finances were in safe hands and he was never `stingy' , Midland Vets or Masters as we became were often at the forefront in donating funds to events to ensure that they were viable. He acted as Treasurer very profitably for many British Masters Championships including the National Relays and the recent Cross Country held at Birchfield.

Colin was involved in planning many, many events giving freely of his time and the hospitality of his home. The Committee meetings at Willow Road were eagerly anticipated, not for the boring bits but for the lovely supper prepared by Margaret and Colin that followed.

I often wondered what the local supermarket thought of the trolley full of prize bottles that preceded the Nuneaton 10 or the Midland Relays – another Party Colin?

But Colin was first and foremost an athlete. His great joy was participating in competitions to a high standard (I won't go into details of performances here but I am sure that you will enjoy the photographs on the video loop at the reception and have many tales to share of past encounters).

What a lovely photograph the family has chosen for the front of the Order of Service. This was taken in San Diego at the USA Championships prior to the Eugene World Veterans Championships in 1989.

It epitomises the wonderful benefits of belonging to this great organisation of athletes. Colin and Margaret have visited many countries and toured the United Kingdom in pursuit of the dream. They have made many friends and shared some fantastic experiences.

He was keeping his Training Diary right to the end. Only on the Tuesday before he died he noted that he had *reached the end of an era* – how prophetic was that?

Colin was also the Editor of the Midland Masters Newsletter. Together with Margaret's administrative help and unstinting support he kept us all in touch with the doings of our members - the presence of so many of his athletic friends here today bears testament to the links that he nurtured throughout his career.

Colin and Margaret - a great partnership, strong and loving to the end. Our thoughts are with you Margaret.

His worlds overlapped at times – he was an enthusiastic family man, jazz fan, and film buff, Old Edwardian, gardener, charity worker, football supporter and much more.

To end, may I share a thought with you? On the last occasion that he helped with the National Track & Field Registration Colin recognised a fellow West Bromwich supporter in the crowd. All work stopped as they exchanged greetings and, on parting, the Stand at the Alexander Stadium re-echoed with those immortal words that will be forever associated with our dear friend –

`BOING, BOING THE BAGGIES.'.....

We shall miss you Colin.

Irene Nicholls – friend and Chair MMAC #W0019

A tribute from Mike Wrenn

This is the speech I would have given at The Old Edwardians. Unfortunately we were too dispersed to make this a sensible proposition. With Margaret's approval I am now making it available to a wider audience.

Colin was a multi-faceted man. It didn't take too long an acquaintance to find out that his loves, passions and interests included his family, the Baggies, jazz, Laurel and Hardy, gardening, having membership number 1 in MVAC, and being a father and son veteran running partnership. He was a wit, an observer of the absurd, efficient administrator, journalist and somehow found the time to be a first-class athlete. Time does not allow me to touch on all of these. In the main I shall speak of my personal experiences.

I first met Colin in 1965. I'd just started work at Aston University where Colin was a personnel officer. He obviously read new employee CVs very thoroughly. I was soon invited to join his lunch-time training group. I declined; I'd given up running six months earlier. Eleven years later, having got badminton and squash out of my system, I returned to running. Though fit I was in no shape for competitive athletics. I recall running in the Wednesday afternoon West Midlands Cross-Country league at Cosford in September 1976. Colin, twelve years my senior, floated away into the distance and beat me by over 2½ minutes (Mike Fidgett was 4 seconds ahead of me). One month later I'd closed the gap to Colin to just over a minute (and I was 10 seconds ahead of Tom McCook). It took me two years to defeat Colin in this league.

We frequently trained at Salford Stadium under Spaghetti Junction or the footpaths surrounding the stadium doing repetitions following the warm-up jog from Aston Uni. Colin offered encouragement not just to me but to a constantly varying group of student runners from Aston.

My first veteran championship was the cross-country championship at Birkenhead in 1981. I was 23rd in the M40 class, Colin 3rd in the M50 and Edgar Nicholls was 1st M55. If I didn't know it already Colin had taught me the importance of doing well in the first year in your age group. Good "pot-hunting" advice if you have the talent.

In MVAC newsletter 69 (March 1982) Colin gives some details of his training. He was probably one of the first in the West Midlands to regularly train twice a day and did so from 1970 to 1981. Somehow Colin had acquired a key to a small room at the rear of the great hall at Aston University and so had his own private changing room, conveniently placed by toilets and a shower. He would run into work and home again on many days each week.

1981 is a significant date. Colin took early retirement when only 52 – clearly a benefit of working in personnel where he would know the ropes of early departure in considerable detail. His retirement do has never been equalled – it broke the bank.

Irene has already made reference to Colin's lengthy term of office as MVAC Treasurer from 1972. He also unfailingly volunteered for the task of meeting treasurer whenever the Midlands put on a National championship. The one I've been closely associated with since it started in 1988 is the National Open Veterans Road Relay Championship. MVAC has promoted it for 17 of the 24 runnings with Colin as treasurer. Every year we have made a profit to the benefit of BVAF and MVAC. Every year Colin played a more than full role – attending the February meeting with City of Birmingham officers, reporting back to the rest of the committee, engaging St Johns and physiotherapists, paying out expenses and promptly producing a balance sheet.

More recently, and for me this only came to light when making a general internet search, Colin's sterling contributions were recognised by England Athletics. In 2010 he was the West Midlands regional award winner for "Services to Athletics".

[The citation for Colin's Award was as follows: - "Colin Simpson was a founder member in 1972 of the then Midland Veterans AC, renamed Midland Masters AC in 2006. For 38 years he has taken on the role of Treasurer and his tight rein on the finances has meant that the Club has always been financially viable and amongst the top regional veterans/masters club in the country.

For the majority of this time, together with his wife, Margaret, Colin has produced a Club Newsletter 5 times a year, again always ensuring it didn't run at a loss. A good proportion of this time was also acting as Membership Secretary, keeping all membership records.

He served as President of MVAC in 1986/87 and was awarded the President's Trophy for services to MVAC on two occasions, in 1994/95 & 1996.

He hosts the vast majority of the Club committee meetings in his own home with everyone who attends being made welcome.

Colin is a predominate member of the sub-committee that organises the annual National Masters Road Relays in Sutton Park.

After a formidable career as a competitive athlete, Colin has spent years putting back into the sport all his years of experience and still does so at the age of 81”]

I shall conclude with some highlights of Colin’s athletic achievements. I’m grateful for assistance from Mike Fidgett, John Mills, Wilf Morgan and a splendid MVAC article (MVAC newsletter 61) from Alf Sparkes.

Colin joined Small Heath Harriers in 1944 and competed in the Post Office Sports that year.

His first love was handicap racing over ½ and 1 mile. It was possible to compete twice in a week. Colin once managed to race twice in a single day, winning a prize on both occasions! It was a wonderful opportunity for a young man to furnish a home. In the Alf Sparkes interview Colin states “I wasn’t such a good runner in scratch events”. Too modest by far.

Colin was 4 times a winner of the Coronation Cup, awarded to the winner of the Warwickshire senior men’s mile, later 1500 m. He won in the inaugural year, 1953 and ’54, ’56 and ’58. No other runner has equalled the feat of four victories; and later winners have included such distinguished athletes as Basil Heatley, Maurice Herriott, Dave Black and Peter Stewart. Add to this a victory in the Bournville Bowl (1 mile) and representative honours with the AAA and you recognise a very talented and competitive athlete.

As a veteran his success continued.

In August 1972 an elite squad of Americans arrived on a European tour. At Crystal palace Colin, representing GB, finished second in the 800m, 1st Brit.

Successes at Midland and British Veterans Championships are too numerous to mention. I shall just present his World-level successes.

In 1975 at the first World Veterans Athletics Championships held in Toronto Colin was 2nd in the M45 800m & 1500m. In 1979 at the 3rd World Athletics championships held in Hannover Colin gained two more World medals, 2nd in the 10,000m and 3rd in the 1500m. For those who associate Colin just with the track it may come as a surprise that in August 1976 at Rugby Colin was 3rd M45 (1st Brit) in the World veteran 10km road race.

Even now I feel you will not be getting a full picture of Colin’s participation in the full range of running events. From the 1979/80 MVAC newsletters I have listed the events in which Colin competed. No doubt this will not be a fully comprehensive list but certainly demonstrates his versatility and enthusiasm. National Vets cross-country, Sparkhill 5, MVAC 3 x 5km RR, World Vets 10km road (Bolton), BVAFF T&F, World T&F (Hannover), 5 mile road, MVAC 10 mile road, Tipton 10, Leamington to Banbury AP 20, MVAC 10km X-C handicap, MVAC X-C champs, Sparkhill 5, MVAC 3 x 5km RR, 1st Peoples Marathon, Nuneaton 10, 3 Towns 20 km.

The last races I have found recorded for Colin are the Midland and British Masters track championships of 2004. He was still winning! If you remember back to the first date I gave for Colin’s participation in running you’ll readily calculate that this gives an unbroken period of at least 60 years in which Colin competed at a very high level with great success.

In so many ways we will not see his equal.

Mike Wrenn – MMA #M0373 - August 2011

From Eric Horwill

Colin was one of the founder members of Midland Veterans (Masters) AC and was proud to hold number M0001. He was Treasurer from the beginning up to the present time, a period nearly 40 years.

He regularly competed until a few years ago. He also was fully committed as an administrator; official and supporter. Along with Margaret, his wife, he was one of the mainstays of the Midland Masters Newsletter.

In his early years he was an accomplished middle distance runner with Small Heath Harriers and following the merger, with Solihull & Small Heath Harriers.

Colin was very supportive of walking events. I will miss his brief (sometimes sharp) reminders that results or information were required for the Newsletter. He would often help us at a water station in longer track walks and runs.

Colin and Margaret were both on duty, as usual, at the recent BMAF T&F Championships at the Alexander Stadium.

There was a huge turnout on the 1st August at the Robin Hood Crematorium for his funeral, a fitting tribute to his contribution to all aspects of athletics.

We offer our sincere condolences to Margaret and the family. He will be sadly missed by us all. A unique character; a great sportsman; and a much loved family man and friend.

Eric Horwill – Race Walking Association, Dudley & Stourbridge Harriers and MMAC #M0077

Thoughts from Pam Horwill

Colin Simpson's membership number of MMAC was No. 1 – that says it all! His contribution to the Club over the years in many differing roles was without equal and he was always supported by his wife, Margaret.

Colin always spoke his mind without fear or favour. You might sometimes be surprised at what you heard but you always knew exactly where you stood and for that I respected him.

My last memory of Colin is at the BMAF T&F Championships in July. As usual, Edgar Nicholls, Colin and I were on Registration. It was the end of two long and tiring days and we sat in a row, in the sunshine, like the three wise monkeys eating choc ices, which Colin had kindly bought us.

I'll miss Colin. He was one of a very few people who quite often called me by my name – Pamela!

My condolence and kind thoughts are with Margaret and all the family.

Pam Horwill – Dudley & Stourbridge Harriers and MMAC #W0006 - 08/08/2011

Phil Owen's Memories of A great Athlete and friend "Colin Simpson"

Colin is not only irreplaceable to his wife and family, but to the world of Athletics

Colin was No 1 in the Midland Veterans and was responsible for a great many to take up and continue in our great sport, a true grit Harrier and an inspiration to all that trained with him and competed against.

My first encounter of Colin was seeing him pass the bus I was a passenger on, (stuck in the usually rush hour Birmingham Traffic) on his journey from work, possible the first athletes who forsook the car or bus to supplement his training (or was it saving fuel or bus fares perhaps).

I will always appreciate the way he dealt so efficiently with financial matters, on several occasions moving accounts to get the best deals for Midland Masters, always investing wisely, putting us in this remarkable strong position we now find ourselves.

On the only occasion I managed to get anywhere near him in a race, he was so encouraging when I struggled past him "Saving go on young un" then he sprinted past to pip me yet again.

Great bloke who will be missed by us all.

Thanks Colin for your friendship. I guess he will be chasing Bill (*Taylor*) in the Heaven 3 mile handicap

Phil, Sheila & Hannah – Tamworth AC & MMAC #M0778

Online Tributes

Very sad to lose such a knowledgeable athlete, always prepared to show an interest and give advice. Rest in Peace in your Harriers Haven. ***Bernie Wareing – Sparkhill Harriers & MMAC #M2181***

I was shocked and saddened to read of the death of Colin Simpson. Colin was a great inspiration to me in my early athletics career with Small Heath Harriers and someone I always looked up to. I was proud to be a member of many Small Heath road teams which included Colin and he was always my target to beat in the early days. Colin remained a good friend and we have kept in touch over the years and shared many fond memories of Small Heath Harriers before the amalgamation with Solihull A.C.

John Rowe – Solihull & Small Heath Harriers

I first met Colin in the 50's with Small heath Harriers, what a great athlete and friend.

Dave Mace – Birchfield Harriers & MMAC #M1357

Very sad news indeed. His commitment and wit will be sorely missed. He was an inspiration to me throughout my athletics career. ***Mike Wrenn – MMAC #M0373***

That's terrible news. Colin was a great guy and I was hoping to see him again at the Inter Area.

Arthur Kimber – BMAF Chair, Dartford Harriers AC & MMAC #M3240

How sad indeed. He was a stalwart. ***Bridget Cushen – BMAF Secretary***

Online Tributes continued

Thanks for passing on this sad news. I obviously had a lot of dealings with Colin as your predecessor. He was always very apologetic about the fact that he was a bit behind the times technologically and I received everything in long hand. In fact he couldn't have been more helpful and was the easiest of people to deal with.

Chris Jager – BMAF Register & Webmaster

Extremely sad news. I used to train on the canal banks with Colin in the early 1970's. A great athletics enthusiast.

Hopefully Colin will now be updating Paschal Morris, Ken Dare, Mike Rawson, Bob Reid, Brian Clifton, Dave Skelcher, Graham Lovell and other Midland stalwarts about recent developments in athletics.

Tom McCook – Birchfield Harriers President

What a great man. Colin was a really nice chap, I only met him on a few occasions but you always felt comfy with his stories and where he'd been. Very sadly will be missed by many I'm sure.

Paul Tasker – Tamworth AC & MMAC #M3374

That's really sad news. Colin reminded me of those tough old school guys but with a kind heart. He was from that generation of Pirie, Kuts and Zatopek. Colin knew his running. Sadly missed.

Jonathan Jennings – Knowle & Dorridge RC from Facebook

Great guy and irreplaceable, not sure the MMAC will be the same without him.

Phil Owen – Tamworth AC & MMAC #M0778

We were shocked and saddened by your news that Colin Simpson has passed away. He has been a good friend for many years and (as we in Midland Masters know) he, together with his dear wife, Margaret, have worked tirelessly to

ensure the success and high standards of MMAC. He will be sadly missed.

John and Mollie Mills – Stroud & District AC & MMAC #W0087

A fine, inspirational man always willing to help. His encouragement and ready smile will be sadly missed.

Wendy Skitt – Variety Club, Midlands

I first meet Colin when Small Heath Harriers amalgamated with Solihull AC. And his age group performances have always been a great inspiration. He will be sadly missed by many people.

Louis Satterthwaite – Centurion RC & MMAC #M0511

Long ago he pounded the track (grass and cinders) like no other with determination and nobody else will win. That's what it was about sport and social athletics. I will miss your business brain and organisation and friendship. Irreplaceable friend.

Allan Meddings – Birchfield Harriers & MMAC #M1784

By Email

In the early part of the second half of the 20th century, rivalry between athletic clubs was socially prominent. There being a dozen or more in the then Midland Birmingham area. At any meeting, "handicap-team-county and area championship" one would always see a blue and white ringed vest thundering over the grass or cinders with one thought in mind "I am here and I am going to do my best to get over all and sundry" but with a smile and open endeavor of social and sporting activity. Colin Simpson, a rival in different events, was a true person to be respected. This special gift he continued to portray as a founder member of veterans /masters athletics in competing and officiating which will not be surpassed. Irreplaceable but sure enough he will always do a good job wherever.

Allan Meddings – Birchfield Harriers & MMAC #M1784

For those who missed the Funeral, re-produced below is the Order of Service

IN LOVING MEMORY
OF



Colin Simpson

2nd April 1929 – 24th July 2011

Monday August 1st 2011
at 2.30pm

ROBIN HOOD CREMATORIUM

ORDER OF SERVICE

Introduction and Opening Words

By Richard Honeysett, MICF

A reading of the poem 'Flowers', written by Wendy Cope

Read by Sarah Unsworth, granddaughter

Reflections of Colin's life in Athletics

Shared by Irene Nicholls

Chairman of Midland Masters Athletic Club

A reading of the poem, much loved by Colin, 'To His Coy Mistress',

Written by Andrew Marvell

Read by Helen Hadley

Family Memories

Shared by Colin's daughter, Lyn

Farewell and Committal

Richard Honeysett MICF



Donations in memory of Colin for the

British Heart Foundation

Or

The Royal National Institute for the Deaf

Sent c/o Thomas Bragg & Sons, Funeral Directors,
562 Stratford Road, Shirley, Solihull B90 4NY

I could not let this 'special' newsletter go to press without adding a postscript.

Colin's death came as a shock to me and our family. We had been married for 58½ years and MMAC has been a major part of our life together.

When Tom asked for my approval of what he had produced it was a complete surprise and there could not have been a more fitting tribute to Colin. My thanks go to Irene, Tom, the Midlands Committee and all the dozens of athletes who attended the funeral, sent donations in Colin's memory, sent cards and telephone messages, and left tributes on the website. The warmth and friendship of the great 'family' of master athletes has helped to sustain us all at this sad time

With love and sincere thanks to you all.

Margaret Simpson

13th August 2011