

## Barnsley Marathon 1975

The Barnsley Marathon of 1975 was an historic event in British Athletics, being the first marathon in the country in which women were allowed to take part over the 26.21 mile distance. The following is a report on the race from the Barnsley Chronicle of Friday December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

### **ANOTHER WINNER!**

*Barnsley came up with another winner on Sunday, when the country's first marathon race for women was promoted by the Barnsley Road Runners' Club. Inevitably, despite the fact that there were 164 starters – making it the biggest race of its kind since the discontinued Maxol – the men's event was rather overshadowed by the interest surrounding the 'other' race for the unofficial British Women's Championship crown, and the big coverage given by both television channels undoubtedly owed much to the 'fair sex'.*

*That phrase, incidentally, is carefully chosen. The 'weaker sex', after this, is a description surely no longer appropriate or applicable. For the time of 3hrs, 13 mins, 27 secs, recorded by 22 years old Hilary Matthews of Blackburn, was faster than that clocked by 36 of the men! What is more, only the previous day, while the men were 'resting', Hilary had won the Lancashire women's cross-country championship!*

*It is no wonder that the Barnsley club decided to call their big marathon the 'Barnsley International'. Last year, it will be remembered, the inaugural event saw an Englishman, a Scotsman and an Irishman taking first three places. Inevitably, the Welsh refused to take that lying down, and on Sunday 28 years old Mike Critchley, of Cardiff Athletic Club, restored the pride of the 'Red Dragon' with a superb win.*

*A town planner, Critchley certainly plotted this race to perfection. He stayed with a breakaway bunch of seven runners until two were dropped, and then made a decisive break just before the turning point at Bolton-on-Dearne. He accelerated coming up to a hump-backed bridge and by the time the others had reached the top of the incline, Critchley was lost in the thickening fog down the other side.*

*The race was won there and then. All Critchley had to do from then on was to keep going. And this he did magnificently. The fog must have slowed him somewhat – half the race was run in visibility which was down to five yards in some places – yet he still recorded a splendid time of 2hrs, 17 mins and 34 secs. Critchley just missed out on selection for the Welsh team for the Commonwealth Games two years ago. On the evidence of this, his first marathon success, his best could still be to come.*

*No doubt reigning Commonwealth and European champion Ian Thompson, who was watching the race with great interest, made a mental note of the name. The race began in bright sunshine and after only a couple of miles, seven runners had opened up a lengthy gap, among them John Newsome of Wakefield. However, approaching Wath-on-Dearne, Newsome and RAF champion, Mick Hurd had been dropped, the latter giving up due to sickness. Then in Wath itself, Critchley made a dramatic surge, which in turn, left a chasing bunch of four.*

*It happened on the approach to a hump-backed bridge on the outskirts of Wath, on the road leading to Bolton-on-Dearne. The fog was at its thickest at this point and Critchley put it to the best possible*

use. When the fog cleared through Wombwell, the Welshman was so far in front that the second man was not in sight and during the last five miles, run again in brilliant sunshine, he increased the pace.

Less than two and a half minutes behind him came Cambridge's Barry Watson, winner of the big Milton Keynes Marathon earlier this year in 2-20-00, and third was Mal Mountford of Stafford, winner of this year's London Marathon, a further two and a half minutes adrift.

The first winner of the South Yorkshire title was Dave Allen, who finished fourth. Although running in the colours of Manchester A.C., he qualified by birth for the competition and, in fact, is currently studying at Sheffield University. Second was Barnsley's George Kay and third Les Outwin (Sheffield A.C.) Bolton United Harriers took the overall team title with 68 points, but fittingly, it was Barnsley Road Runners who won the South Yorkshire team championship with 110 points. They were led by Kay, Dave Bennett and Jim Hinchey, and had 15 finishers. It seems unlikely that there is another club in the country with that sort of in-depth marathon talent and, remember, the Barnsley club is only 18 months old.



**Race winner Mike Critchley (left) being presented with his laurel and trophy by Commonwealth Games Marathon winner Ian Thompson**

# hard Felton

● RIGHT:  
Barnsley  
Road Runners'  
first two  
men home,  
Dave Bennett  
and George  
Kay, having a  
chat about  
the race

● BELOW:  
Barry Watson  
(44) leads the  
breakaway  
group of six  
on Wombwell  
Lane, with  
eventual  
winner Mike  
Critchley (50)  
in fourth place.



*Barnsley Road Runners Dave Bennett and George Kay, winners of the South Yorkshire Team title*

**A further sports editorial focussed further on the fact that this was the first British women's marathon:-**

*'Some Vital Statistics'*

*New statistics, some may say vital ones, were added to marathon racing on Sunday when four women – running under the experimental rule passed by the Women's A.A.A. last April – successfully completed the 26 miles 385 yards of the second Barnsley Marathon. Inevitably there was criticism from some quarters that the women had been allowed to compete in athletics' most gruelling event. But while officials of the Women's Cross-Country Association hold an inquiry into the event, Dr. Peter Travers, medical adviser to Britain's international team commented: "There is no physiological reason why women should not compete in marathon races – so long as they are properly prepared. Women do a lot of endurance tests in other activities, so why not running? Any talk of it being damaging to their health or physique is sheer poppycock".*

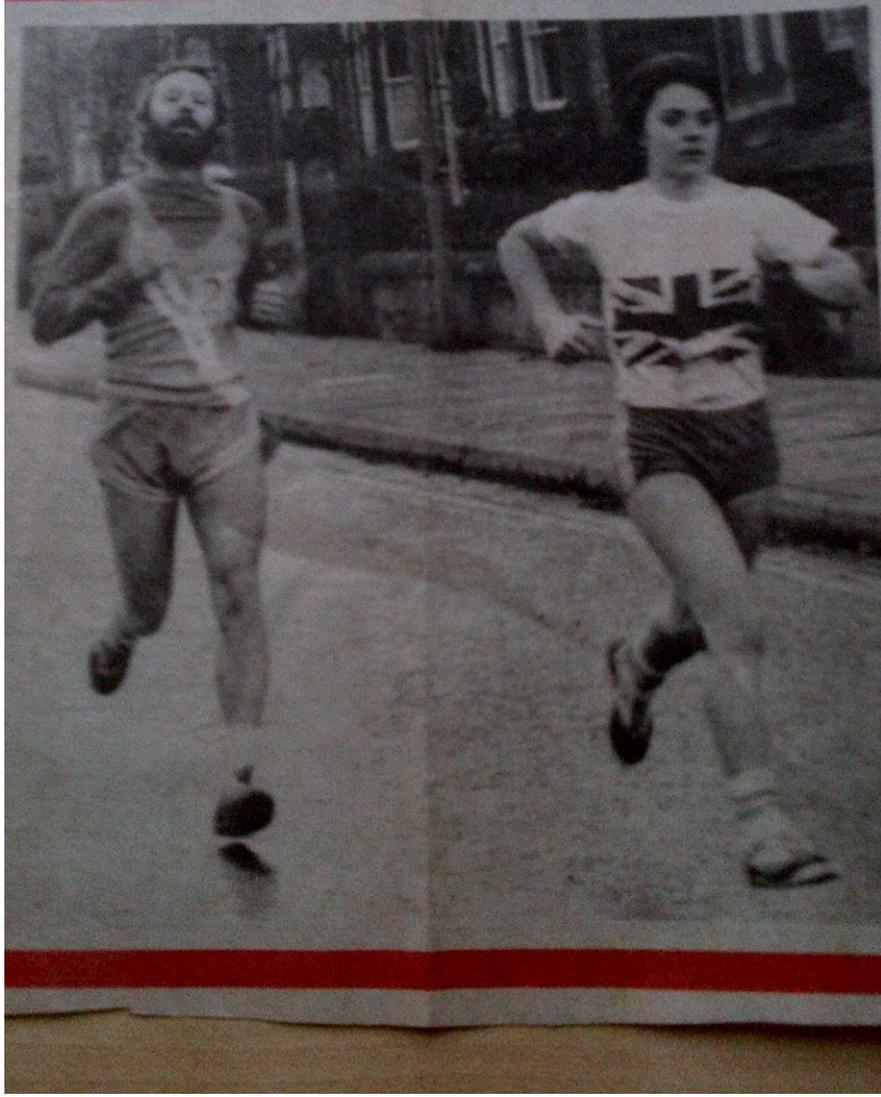
*Certainly those who witnessed Sunday's historic race will echo those sentiments. Twenty two years old Hilary Matthews, from Blackburn, who won the event and thus became Britain's unofficial women's marathon champion, she had enough strength left at the finish to outstrip Gordon Standish, of Barnsley Road Runners, who had run with her, 'to give her a bit of help'. And an even bigger argument for 'marathon equality' was put forward in this Women's International Year by second place Norma Campbell.*

*Norma, a Scot, is a 47 year old mother of three, yet she, too, had a faster time than 31 of the men, and she finished looking quite cool. And anyone daring to argue that marathon running is damaging to physique should take a long look at the third-placed Lesley Watson from London Olympiades. Quite a girl is Lesley. And quite a runner too.*

**GOLF IS CHEAPER**  
 at  
**MIDWOOD'S in the SHAMBLES**  
 SNOOKER TABLES — all sizes  
 LOOK at our PRICES  
 SHOP peacefully in our pleasant surroundings, with a  
 coffee in the LIBRARY across the way.

B

port Marathon picture spe



Finally, to all those who still have doubts about the wisdom of women taking part in such a demanding event, have a look at our picture on the right (shown below). It was taken immediately after the race and shows Hilary in the centre with Norma on the left and Lesley on the right. Do they look to be 'worse for wear' after their 'ordeal'? If women want to run in marathons, good luck to 'em, say I.

**Left: Women's winner Hilary Matthews outkicks Barnsley Road Runner Gordon Standish in the final stages**

**Below: The first three women ever to complete an official marathon in the UK, left to right Norma Campbell, Hilary Matthews and Lesley Watson**

