

## **HOC history: Part One – Foundation**

Let's start at the very beginning.

The problem is knowing exactly where to start. The events of April 1<sup>st</sup> 1968, which will be commemorated later this year, are not the start of this story. The small group of people who founded Harlequins Orienteering Club in a hall in Kinver on that day did not mystically appear from some sort of void; their story began earlier and is important to this account. Perhaps we need to go back a further two years to the creation of the Halesowen and District Club, following as it did in quick succession to the West Midlands' first club, Octavian Droobers. Or do we perhaps return to 1964 or even 1962, to the respective foundations of the country's first club (South Ribble) and the country's first association (the Scottish).

In fact, I want to start in the pages of the Observer newspaper over fifty years ago. The reason for this is that the story of Harlequins is not really about a sequence of dates and obscure facts. It is about people, a chain of key individuals who made things happen and who effectively passed the baton from one to another. One of the first people in our chain wrote these words in his Sunday column in 1957. "I have just taken part, for the first time, in one of the best sports in the world. It is hard to know what to call it. The Norwegians call it 'orientation'.....". This was probably the first time that the sport had been given such public exposure in Britain. The writer was Chris Brasher, the winner of the gold medal for the steeplechase at the previous year's Olympic Games. His enthusiasm was actually directed at a night event, and it was this same enthusiasm, along with his public profile, that proved to be a key ingredient in creating a climate for the infant sport to thrive once it had made its tentative first steps in Scotland and the north of England in the early sixties.

Inextricably linked to Brasher is another Olympic steeplechase medal winner, John Disley who, via his coach, had been introduced to the sport even earlier (1953 in Sweden). It is commonly stated that orienteering was imported to Scotland in 1961 and 1962 by an invited Swedish delegation including Baron "Rak" Lagerfelt. Although this was the point at which the seed began to grow and bear fruit, the sport had taken place in fits and starts in the 1950s but with no continuity or central organisation. Disley is credited with holding the first ever event in this country which took place at Bryn Engan, North Wales, in 1955. Brasher took part in at least one English "event" during this period. Another person to have been introduced to it was Peter Palmer (1958 in Cambridge), who went on to start it as a school activity at Rydens School in Walton-on-Thames in 1961. However, once the sport began to take hold and the first clubs appeared, people like Brasher and Disley, the newly appointed Physical Education Officer for Surrey County Council, were in an excellent position to help make things happen. There were clearly others too, one notable figure being Gerry Charnley of Clayton-le-Moors Harriers and South Ribble Search and Rescue Team. When, under his guidance, South Ribble OC emerged in the North West, Brasher and Disley were ready to respond from the South, setting up both the English Orienteering Association (with Peter Palmer and Peter Warner) and Southern Navigators. And so the hard men of the fells from the north (Joss Naylor and Chris Bonington included) and the elite athletes of the south (Pirie, Tulloh and Hyman too) were pitted head to head in early clashes.

In fact, these high profile and fit sportsmen were not actually that more successful than other competitors who were less physically able but better navigationally. And so now was the time for orienteering to be taken to a wider market. Training courses and events run by people like Brasher and Disley (incidentally the co-founders of the London Marathon many years later) spread the word and encouraged other clubs to be formed. It was into this environment that our next key baton-holding individual appears. Chris Schaanning, a 37 year old Norwegian then living in Harborne, Birmingham, had knowledge of the sport from his earlier days and was therefore an ideal person to be appointed Development Officer for the new West Midlands Association. At this time, orienteers in the region didn't have to join a club if there was not one nearby; instead they affiliated directly to WMOA. Part of the Development Officer's brief was to encourage new clubs to be set up. Disley recalls running a training

course on the Lickey Hills with Gerry Charnley around this time at which Chris Schaanning was present. It was only a matter of time before sufficient momentum would be generated for it to be possible to set up a club somewhere in the Birmingham area, following the example of Octavian Droobers in Coventry in December 1965. Schaanning managed to gain the support of several fellow Halesowen and District Athletic Club members who had become interested in orienteering, Eric Ostle and Charles Gains included. These two together with Schaanning were the central figures in the events that followed. Fifty members of the WMOA were contacted, inviting them to a meeting in Halesowen at which it was intended to set up a new orienteering club. There seems to have been a fair amount of interest judging by the various press cuttings that have survived. On January 21<sup>st</sup> 1966, the Halesowen and District Orienteering Club (HDOC) was established and practice events were lined up over the next few weeks at both Clent and Lickey Hills.

It is interesting to note that the choice of name for the club may have been one of the reasons for its lack of longevity. Such a specific connection to one particular place (despite the addition of “district”) was unusual for club names of the time. Some were general (e.g. Occasional Orienteers), some referred to a wider geographic area (e.g. West Cumberland, Mole Valley) and some were just esoteric (e.g. Combined Harvesters and the oddest of them all, Octavian Droobers). Despite this, the new club gained membership, spurred on by the series of introductory courses that Chris Schaanning continued to organise in his role of the region’s Development Officer. The names of Hickman, Griffin, Maynard and Price first appear in the sport around this time, drawn from an area well beyond the boundaries of Halesowen. In capturing the interest of the last of these four, Schaanning, in hindsight, was inadvertently sowing the seeds of HDOC’s downfall. Harry Price, who he had first met at a meeting at Lickey Youth Centre, was the leader of the Kinver Youth Centre and it is to him that the baton now passes. The Centre was an



ideal location for meetings and instruction; not surprisingly the membership’s centre of gravity was gradually pulled to the west of Halesowen. Harry and Chris worked together but, as

*Kinver Million was one of the main areas used for training courses in the early days of West Midlands orienteering. Their success was one of the factors in the formation of HOC (photo Gordon Griffiths)*

Harry himself recalls, he never actually became a member of HDOC. The courses staged at the Youth Centre, as well as at Kinver Edge and Kinver Million were extremely successful and as a consequence Harry decided that there was enough interest for a new club to be established from the many new participants. That club was to eventually become known as Harlequins.

Let’s remind ourselves of the state of play going into 1968. The previous twelve months had seen the formation of the British Orienteering Federation and the staging of the first National Championships in Hamsterley Forest in which HDOC member Gnut Kjemhus had finished second to Gordon Pirie. At this stage the purpose drawn orienteering map was still a thing of the future; 1:25000 OS maps were used, sometimes with corrections, and control descriptions either contained the definite article (signifying the feature was on the map) or the indefinite article (signifying it wasn’t!). Few courses were offered at events and it is fair to say that the sport was dominated by males in the 20-40 age bracket. On the whole, winning times were much longer than on modern courses (the standard of the maps had a lot to do with this) and times of more than 3 hours were quite common. The West Midlands still only had two main open clubs (OD and HDOC) but elsewhere they were appearing with gathering frequency and

about a quarter of the clubs that exist today were already up and running. Nonetheless, it was more than two years since the WMOA had seen a significant new club start up. On All Fools Day 1968 fourteen people came together at the Kinver Area Youth Office, Harry Price took the chair for the meeting and proposed that “an orienteering club be formed.” This was unanimously accepted. The club name was agreed and Mr Tony Pardoe was elected the club’s first Chairman. Harry became Secretary and Bert Pardoe was appointed Treasurer. The club arranged for its first training event to be held at Kinver some three weeks later.



*Many orienteering clubs were founded in pubs. The Plough and Harrow in Kinver was the venue where the amalgamation of HOC and HDOC was agreed upon in late 1968*

The name “Harlequins” has an obvious link to the date of the foundation and had almost certainly been decided upon before the meeting. It has been attributed to Bert Pardoe, one of two rugby playing brothers who were on the initial committee and whose trophy we compete for to this day at the Club Championships. The initial part of the HOC story doesn’t quite end there however. Now there were two neighbouring clubs, HOC and HDOC, seemingly in competition for new members. Whatever the relationship was between the two clubs, it must have become obvious fairly quickly there weren’t really enough members to go round and that the best way to achieve a critical mass and best exploit

the area’s potential for orienteering was to join forces. In December 1968 a meeting was convened between the Executive Committees of both clubs at the Plough and Harrow in Kinver. It was here that an amalgamation was agreed, to be rubber stamped at a further meeting in Kinver a month later. The centre of gravity of activity was clearly now Kinver and it must have made sense to all for the HOC name to prevail. The fact that HDOC formally dissolved itself (proposed Ostle, seconded Schaanning) and its members invited to join HOC (proposed Price, seconded Maynard) was more of a technicality than the result of a power struggle. Indeed, Chris Schaanning remembers it as essentially a name changing operation for HDOC members.

Thus, on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1969, all of the movers and shakers of the western part of the WMOA were finally united under one common roof. With Tony Pardoe in the chair, Harry Price as secretary and Bert Pardoe and Eric Ostle also on the committee, a new future beckoned for all.

*(Next month: Growing pains, division, the mapping revolution, Sport for All, the route to WOC 76 and beyond)*

## **HOC history: Part Two – Formative Years**

The period from 1968 to 1976 takes us from the year of HOC's foundation up to the hosting of the World Orienteering Championships at Darnaway and Culbin in Scotland. These years saw many significant changes to the sport and WOC76, in some sense, represented the coming of age of Britain as an orienteering nation. These changes were felt keenly at club level and for the newly formed Harlequins, not all of them were easy to cope with. The central focus of progress was undoubtedly mapping standards and the differences between 1968 and 1976 were so huge as to alter the fundamental nature of the sport. Another change was that of the demographic profile of competitors. The sport became more oriented towards families (this was reflected by the shift of sponsors from Guinness to Robinson's Barley Water) and the range of age classes expanded. This fitted in well with the Sports Council's Sport For All initiative of the time. However, in this climate it is not perhaps surprising that it took a few years for the infant club to properly find its feet.

By 1968 some of the sport's future stars were starting to appear, as opposed to former international athletes such as Gordon Pirie and John Disley for whom orienteering represented their second sporting career. Names such as Mike Wells-Cole and Carol McNeill were appearing at the top of leader boards, but it was Geoff Peck who emerged as the premier British orienteer going into the 1970's, a position he defended for the best part of a decade. At successive World Championships including WOC76 he was consistently our best performer, but Britain was yet to make a significant impact on the world stage and he was nowhere near winning medals as the Scandinavian countries continued to dominate. At club level, this period saw the foundation of the majority of current clubs. BOF membership and participation rose steadily and many of the well-known "signature" events such as the White Rose, November Classic and BOK Trot were established.

These were some of the BOF rules and guidelines in place in 1968. Events were classified as Club, County, Regional, National or International. Competition classes were: under 15 years, 15-18, 18-21, 21-40 and over 40, for both men and women, where the age was calculated on the day of the competition. Courses were measured in miles by the best possible route length. At night, no girls aged under 18 or boys aged under 15 were allowed to compete singly; pairs or groups were stipulated. Control cards were to be stamped or signed at each control and for Regional and National events the regulations stated that preferably, each control should be manned. Control flags themselves had to be of an approved type, which included the 30cm prism design we use now (although in red rather than orange), but for practical reasons, other designs were permitted (e.g. a cylinder) as long as they were correctly coloured and 3-dimensional (official control markers were generally unavailable in Britain so home-made canvas designs were often used). If the control was located amongst thick foliage it was considered desirable to festoon the immediate area around the marker with red and white coloured streamers. Conversely, if there was any chance that the control might be too obvious, it had to be situated so that it couldn't be seen from more than 50 yards away. At night, controls were to be illuminated. If competitors were started at intervals of 1 minute or less (30s was acceptable) then eight copies of the Master Maps were advised. Control descriptions could include 6-figure grid references. Form of clothing was optional (no mention of arm or leg cover) unless otherwise determined by the organiser. Competitors were expressly forbidden to "hang-on" to another runner; miscreants could be reported to the Organiser. Collaboration was also not allowed.

From this, it is clear that early HOC events would not be very recognisable to today's orienteers. Ordnance Survey 1:25000 maps were the norm, with what added corrections were possible. These were reproduced under licence; earlier reprographic capability had in fact been one of the factors holding up the development of the sport. The Rank Xerox 914 electrostatic copier (pre-dating photocopying) was a commonly found machine. For its time it produced excellent results but had two interesting anomalies. Firstly, it suffered from blue colour blindness so that streams and rivers had to be overmarked with a wiggly line, and

copies were 1% larger than the original (this was an intentional design feature). Fortunately this did not affect bearings.

With the recent foot and mouth epidemic dying down, HOC's early events were held on areas such as Kinver Edge, Kinver Million, Clent Hills, Wyre Forest, Uffmore and the Wrekin. Because these were not at that time mapped by individual orienteering clubs (i.e OS maps were used), there appears to have been less "possession" of areas; other clubs such as OD were holding some of their events on the same areas as HOC during this period. To give a real flavour of what orienteering was like then, it is worth looking in detail at the first major West Midlands event that took place after HOC's foundation. This was the 1968 West Midland Championships held in the Mortimer Forest on May 12<sup>th</sup>. Organised by OD and pre-entry, this was a hugely important event at which many of the big names were present (senior winners were Tony Walker and Carol McNeill). However, the results make interesting reading. The writing was on wall from before the event; the advance details stated "Good luck – you will need it!" It is clear that the map caused many problems, with at least one control described in the comments as a treasure-



hunt and further confusion being created by a track being coincident with the county boundary. Times were extremely long, averaging over two and a half hours, and on the Junior Men's course the average time (of about 30 competitors) was three and a half hours. For this latter course there is no apology; the comments merely note that the standard of the competitors "is disappointingly low". Even more intriguing is the comment that a boy who was manning a control (a fore tower) foolishly chose to take his position at the top of the tower while leaving his coffee and sandwiches at the bottom, whereupon they were soon found and consumed by a competitor having "a strong Scottish accent".

*The 1968 West Midlands Championships in the Mortimer Forest were claimed to be one of the toughest events ever held and were the venue for the outrageous theft of some sandwiches*

Events at this time seem to appear and disappear from the fixtures list with alarming rapidity. HOC's inaugural event (other than training events) was scheduled for September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1968. It took place on that date, but at Kinver rather than where originally planned, and was therefore promoted as the "Makeshift Event". There were 89 competitors. In 1969 HOC's first Badge event (the "Bo Peep") was planned for February on Enville Sheepwalks but was subsequently moved to Brown Clee in April only to be postponed again back to October and downgraded. As a result of this the club's first Badge Event (actually a National Event) went ahead in the Wyre Forest in May 1969, where the official Senior Men's winner was Geoff Peck. Somewhat confusingly another Badge event held in January of that year went ahead as the last HDOC event, even though the club had already been wound up. The

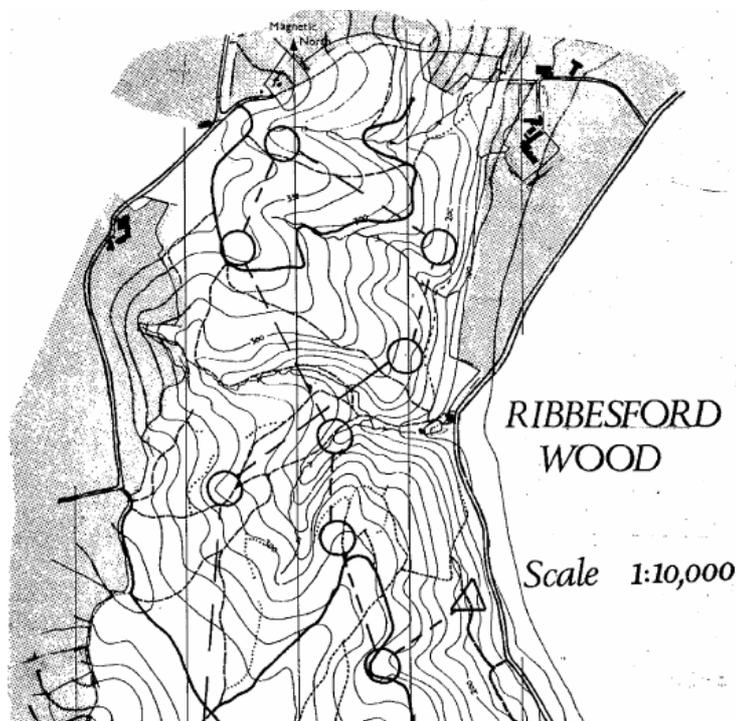


problem with fickle fixtures was not due to map availability (this was to come later) but permissions. It should be remembered that the sport was yet to set up the established links

*Another pub that featured in early HOC history – the Cat at Enville was the venue for the first annual club dinner in 1969*

with landowners that it has today and that since many areas were being used for the first time, there were inevitably teething troubles. Nevertheless, 1968 and 1969 appear to have been busy years for the fledgling club, the latter also seeing the first annual dinner, held at the Cat in Enville, and the first Club Championships, held at Kinver Million. Colin Maynard was the inaugural winner.

By the end of 1969 the predominantly male membership had risen to about 35, and this mounted to 46 the following year. To improve communication with the members, the first newsletter, consisting of two sides of typed A4, appeared in April 1970. This was somewhat unimaginatively called "The Harlequins Newsletter", the title of Ad Hoc being still many years in the future. The names of Tony Jones and Ken Broad crop up for the first time around now and other active members going into the early 1970's included Roger Smith (who wrote a long series of extensive and informative "Rambles" in the club magazine), Alan Mason (who always had something he was trying to sell), Mike Griffin, Pat Pay, Walter Cullis and Roger and Debbie Wilkinson. Events continued during 1970 on OS 1:25000 maps but in November the first mention of a HOC redrawn map appears. This was produced by Peter Parker for a club event at Ribbesford and was officially classified by BOF as a Class 2 Partially Corrected map. By early 1971 mapping was clearly starting to take priority; the newsletter has an increasing number of references to the need for club mapping effort. Once it became no longer acceptable to stage events on OS maps



(round about 1971), the need for improved standards started to put a lot of pressure on the club. With a small

*Peter Parker's 1970 redrawn map of Ribbesford was a major step forward for the club, but the pressures of surveying became an increasing problem as the 1970's progressed*

membership and little mapping experience, the number of HOC events started to fall, a problem that took many years to resolve. Apart from Peter Parker, Roger Wilkinson was one of the club's primary surveyors, producing a map of Dimmingsdale in 1971, but he moved on to DVO shortly afterwards. The arrival of Dave Gittus in early 1973 was a boost to the mapping campaign and one of his major efforts was to map The Wrekin. However, at the start of 1975 another new club appeared in the region, namely Wrekin. This had the damaging effect (to HOC) of not only taking away a proportion of the northern membership (Gittus and Broad included) but also maps and areas. If any point in the club's history could be described as a crisis, then this was it. Some major events had been staged (for example the 1973 Midlands Championships on Brown Clee Hill) but they were few and far between and both Club and Badge events were drying up too. Pat Pay had been newly elected to Secretary in May 1975, and as he recorded in the newsletter a year later, he had been despondent at that point about the club's future. His response was to issue a rallying call to the members, urging them not to continue down the slippery slope to becoming a club in name only, and to attend future meetings. By this stage the active membership had risen, somewhat slowly, to around 30-40, but what seemed to keep the club going more than its own orienteering events was its range of social events. In 1976, only two events of any status were held, but it seemed that the

corner may have been turned. Meetings, restricted to once every two months, started to attract more attendees and some new faces appeared. Richard Pay became the club's first British Champion, and the juniors had team success at both the British and the JK. Arguably the most important newcomer at this point was Dr Paul Graetz, who was instrumental in getting mapping activity moving again, starting with Brand Wood.

HOC's primary founder, Harry Price, who had served as Secretary and Vice Chairman throughout first few years, effectively finished his active involvement with the club in 1973 as his job took him away from Kinver. Following Tony Pardoe's spell as Chairman from 1968 to 1971, Colin Maynard took over, to be followed by Mike Griffin. By the start of 1977 the roll of officers was as follows: President - Harry Price, Chairman - Mike Griffin, Vice Chairman - Dave Cashmore, Treasurer - Brian Hickman, Secretary - Pat Pay, Social Secretary - Pat Maynard, Publicity Officer - Alan Mason, Equipment Officer - Martin Evans, Mapping Officer - Peter Parker. Of members active in 2008, only Dennis Mews and Bob Scott had joined the club by this time. The Newsletter was upbeat about prospects for the New Year, noting that there seemed to be a new spirit in the club of late, and at last the fixture list seemed to be picking up, with both club events and a badge event lined up in the next few months. With a good deal of publicity for the sport having been generated by the recent World Championships, now was the time for Harlequins to put its recent troubled adolescence behind it and step forward towards maturity.

## HOC history: Part Three – To the Summit

Between 1977 and 1990 the sport of orienteering in Britain did not undergo any transformations as dramatic as the mapping revolution that preceded this period and the technology revolution that followed it. It was an era of steady growth and development; going to an event in the late 1980s was a similar experience to going to one a decade before. Everything just got bigger. Membership went up, participation went up, there were more events. The kit might have got a bit flashier (e.g. lycra) although the specialist metal studded shoe was yet to appear. The biannual Scottish 6-day event was established as were other multi-day events including the region's own Springtime in Shropshire. The JK, which had first seen 1000 competitors in 1974 broke through 2000, and then 3000, with the British Championships in close attendance. University clubs flourished and the M/W21 classes were packed to overflowing, entailing Elite, A, B and even C classes to accommodate the hundreds at large events. In 1990 BOF membership peaked at over 12400. In hindsight, this may well have been the Golden Age of Orienteering.

At international level, it took a long time for Britain to make a serious mark on the world stage. Gradually a more professional approach was adopted towards organising the National Squad and foreign tours. Carol McNeill's seventh place at the 1979 World Championships in Finland raised hopes but it was only when the top runners realised that in order to reach the summit of the sport it was necessary to spend significantly more time training and competing in Scandinavia that any real progress was made. To some this also meant living and working abroad. Chris Hirst was the best British male orienteer of the early 1980s but the emergence of Steve Hale in the late eighties took things to a higher level. He was arguably Britain's first real world class orienteer, capable of winning medals at the highest level and one of a remarkable clutch of WCH juniors to have developed under Peter Palmer. As it was, the nation had to wait until the 1990's before medals started to come at the World Championships.

On the domestic scene, the appearance of Ned Paul's Compass Sport magazine in 1980 was significant, not the least for its eventual bringing about of the demise of the by-then woeful "Orienteer", but also for the introduction of the Compass Sport Cup in 1983. This era also saw the introduction of Colour Coded courses at the beginning of the 1980s, allowing greater consistency at Club (now District) events. National Events replaced and expanded the old Regional Championship structure, although the regional championships survived, incorporated into lower standard events. Sponsorship fluctuated wildly (e.g. Rank Xerox, Paper Sacks, Peter Dominic) and computers began to be used for calculating and compiling



*The Fox at Stourton was the venue for many club dinners including the tenth anniversary event (and will also hold the forthcoming 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner)*

results, but were not reliable or portable enough to be used in real time at events. However, electronic finish clocks were used from the mid 70s onwards; these had paper outputs. And as numbers escalated, environmental and access problems started to become more of an issue. Many large (and even small) events were restricted to an upper limit of competitors.

In 1977 the West Midlands hosted the British Orienteering Championships on Cannock Chase. This was one of the first of its type – Junior and Senior Championships combined. The newsletter does not record any outstanding HOC success but 1978 appears to have been a much more eventful year. The 9th April saw a ten year anniversary badge event at Kinver Edge. Entry, at 60p/40p, entry was on the day and 650 turned up. Also that year were the tenth club dinner (at the Fox in Stourton) and the tenth club championships. Alan Mason, still selling all manner of 'O' related items in the columns of the newsletter, was appointed to be manager of the GB team for the World Championships in Norway.

By the turn of the decade, under the direction of Mapping Officer Paul Graetz, the number of new maps and areas available to the club was steadily expanding. This began to be reflected in the number of events that the club staged. Areas used for the first time in this period included Hartlebury Common, Breakneck Bank & Sturt, Rock Coppice, Titterstone Clee Hill, and Dudmaston. Between 1978 and 1983 the club was putting on between 10 and 15 events every year. The majority of these were conventional Sunday events with the odd come and try it or training event. It wasn't until 1981 that the first night street event was attempted. Held in Kidderminster and run by Richard Andrews, it attracted 33 people and clearly showed promise for the future. The first clutch of summer evening events appeared the following year, again attracting good numbers. Night street events continued spasmodically for a few winters until in the 1985-86 season, Iain Moore acted as the first official co-ordinator and the Night Street League was born. The league format was successful, and although numbers were roughly as low as they are today, the competition added some spice. Not surprisingly this was then copied by the summer evening events and the Summer Evening Event League (but for women only at this stage) was started soon after. These two types of event suddenly injected a huge number of extra midweek and informal fixtures into the calendar, and also provided a useful launching pad for aspiring planners and organisers (some of whom were plucked alphabetically from the membership list!) The first summer programme was to say the least ambitious, aiming to put an event on each week from mid April right through to early September, August included. From staging 15 events in 1983 the club put on almost 50 in 1986 (ten years before the total had been a grand 2).

Another HOC perennial, the June Jaunter, surfaced in 1983 and was for many years organised by Dick Wells. HOC also put its name to a short distance fell race on Titterstone Clee Hill for a few years in 1980s. Hill running wasn't the only offshoot of conventional orienteering that appeared in the newsletter fixture list. For many years from the mid-seventies onwards, challenge walks were the speciality of a keen minority of members. Peter Parker, Walter Cullis, Joan Cole, Dave and Marjorie Cashmore were often to be found taking on 30, 40, 50 or even 100 mile events. This spread to a wider clientele in the form of the Karrimor Mountain Marathon, a tradition that continues to this day, although in smaller numbers. The next big thing to distract members from orienteering was the rise in popularity of road marathon running in the early eighties, typified by the London Marathon which began in 1981 under orienteers Brasher and Disley. All of these activities generated numerous articles in the newsletter. The June Jaunter ensured that Clent Hills was by far the most used HOC area over these years although Sandwell Valley had its moments – in one two and a half month period in 1985 the fixtures secretary must have had a rush of blood to the head; the area staged five events.

The most prestigious events staged by HOC in this period were National Events in 1982 and 1987, both on Brown Clee Hill and the British Championships of 1985 in the Wyre Forest (the last time the main forest was made available for high volume orienteering). SinS was started in 1983. Initially a two day event centred on the early May bank holiday weekend, it expanded to three days and switched to its regular slot in late May two years later with considerable success.



*Brown Clee Hill staged two National Events in the 1980s (photo: Roger Kidd)*

At the lower end of the scale events of note included fun days at Rock Coppice; exotically named training exercises complete with swimming pool. Much fun was had by all. For several years (77-81) the Sandwell Sports festival was supported by evening come and try it events, mainly held at Haden Hill. Later on, variations on a theme included Bike-O (under Dick Wells), a quadrathlon (triathlon plus orienteering) as well as a number of hashes. Sports day was also held – not orienteering but a

pot pourri of athletic disciplines. The BIMM first saw the light of day (actually this should be the darkness of night) in 1988. Its reputation for providing long challenging courses may initially have been an error on Russ's part – he actually apologised in its first year!

Membership continued to grow steadily. By 1986 it had reached about 400 individuals and three years later was nearer to 500. At this stage there was even some discussion about subdividing the club organisation. Many of today's club stalwarts can trace their roots back to the 1980s. If the dominant personality of the 70s had been Tony Jones (TJ), he was certainly rivalled in the following decade by Eddie Harwood, "dramatically signed" (according to the



*The first Ad Hoc in April 1983 - Dick Wells at the JK featured on the cover*

Newsletter) from Borderliners in 1981. During his stay in HOC throughout most of the 1980s Eddie filled various club roles, most notably as Captain, and as the best orienteer led from the front. Eddie's reputation was as a head banger, never happier than when in a tough green forest. It was during his captaincy, and with Dennis Mews and Robert Vickers as Chairman and Vice Chairman that Harlequins really expanded its portfolio of yearly events. Other Chairman through this period were Paul Graetz, Tony Jones, Colin Southall, Robert Vickers and David Williams. Paul Graetz, who had been such an important figure in mapping activity, left in 1982 to be succeeded by Colin Spears. Other familiar names to appear as the 1980s progressed were those of Nelson, Baggott, Hemsted, Fauset, Keeling, McGowan, Bylett, Pearson, Williams, Chiverton, and Clerici. The club very quickly settled into its annual routine of Compass Sport Cup humiliation, suffering loss after loss until finally reaching the third round in 1987. Predictions that "we should fear no-one" proved ambitious as the club were

dispatched by DVO, the eventual winners. Individual successes are too numerous to list but probably none topped Eddie Harwood's JK and British Championships double in M35L in 1988. Another feature of this period were the numerous HOC Huts which were used as accommodation for many during multi-day events.

In 1977 the Club Newsletter was appearing in A4 format, nominally eleven times a year, and was the responsibility of the then Secretary, Pat Pay. This passed to Alan Evers in 1978 who continued for a year before a separate newsletter editor (Alan Robinson) was appointed. Editors then passed by in fairly rapid succession, Eddie Harwood and Dennis Mews next in line. Production standards varied considerably and the typing was clearly a considerable burden; results appeared in copious quantity, maps and photographs did not. However, without a fanfare or even a comment, in April 1983, the Ad Hoc banner appeared on the front page for the very first time, and there was even a photograph commemorating the club's fifteenth birthday on the front page. In 1985, under Mike Fowler, the magazine went "tabloid" (its current size) and by 1988 even appeared with a coloured cover (just the paper, not the printing).

Earlier, in 1984, the region's Solihull Orienteering Society (SOLOS) had disbanded due to lack of members. However on the first day of 1990 another new West Midlands club appeared; WYE. WYE was based in Herefordshire and as such became HOC's near neighbour to the south west. What would be the future for WYE, stepping out as Harlequins had done so some twenty-two years previously? Although not known at the time, this was to prove the summit point for British orienteering in terms of participation and membership. HOC was thriving in 1990 due to years of good leadership and a receptive public. It was going to get gradually harder from now on in. In addition, computer technology was about to blow another wind of change through the sport. How would HOC rise to the challenge?

*Next month: Computers in the forest, electronic punching, the internet, new 'O' formats, British World Champions, aging orienteers and HOC at 40.*

## **HOC History - Part Four: Technology and Maturity**

In 1990 it would have been hard to believe that the days of M/W21 dominated orienteering were drawing to an end and with it the pattern of increasing participation and membership. With 3000 competitors at the JK and British the impending problems were not obvious, but scratching the surface would have revealed an already long-established trend of increasing average age in the sport. To some extent this was encouraging as senior orienteers extended their careers and the top age class moved on ever upwards, increasing from 65 to 70, 75 and 80. But the failure of the junior classes to continue to top up M/W21 from its lower end was sowing the seeds of huge demographic change. This was coupled with a general fall in recruitment across all age classes as the 1990s progressed. In hindsight it is hard to lay all of the blame onto BOF and onto the clubs. It is clear now that other sports suffered the same phenomenon during this period and that much of this was a result of a combination of social factors. Where orienteering may have contributed to its own downfall was ironically through its own success. Firstly, there may have been a touch of complacency, but more tangibly mass participation increasingly raised environmental issues. Land access became a bigger problem, manifesting in much higher land access fees. Coupled with higher BOF levies and capital costs associated with the incoming computer technology, the sport suddenly became a lot more expensive with average entry fees ballooning by 50% in the first half of the 1990's. The sport was no longer the cheap option that it had been.

The 1990s saw the talents of Britain's greatest orienteer to date flourishing at World Championship level. Yvette Baker (nee Hague) had first come to national prominence in 1978 with victory in D12 at the prestigious Swiss 5 day event but in 1993 she finally fulfilled her promise in her seventh WOC by taking Bronze over the Classic distance. Things just got better with two Silvers in 1995 and then a Gold in the short distance event in front of a home crowd in 1999, as Britain staged its second Scottish World Championships. Heather Monro also won a Bronze sprint medal in 2005. On the men's side Steve Hale's miracle last leg in 1993 gave the men's relay team a Silver and Jamie Stevenson emulated Yvette in 2003 by taking Gold in the Sprint Race to which he added a Bronze in 2006. On the domestic club scene, the low point of this whole period was unquestionably the re-emergence of foot-and-mouth disease which brought orienteering to a standstill for several months in the early part of 2001. Both the JK and British Championships fell victim to the epidemic. However, the rescheduled "British Championships" held later in the year allowed runners to experience one of the best areas ever used for orienteering in this country – Newborough Warren on Anglesey.

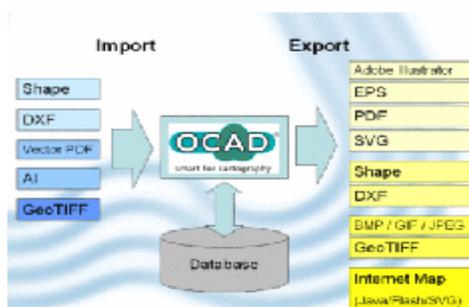


*Taking the sport to a (bemused) public:  
Warwick Town races 2007 (photo Ace)*

Warwick that included access to the castle, leading to some extraordinary route choice problems and unusual errors (e.g. finishing 20m directly above a control). The increasing need for the sport to be seen and given a public image (even if atypical) means that this type of venture will probably only increase into the future.

The conventional pattern of long championship races began to be changed as the 1990s progressed. Various sub-genres began to appear – Sprint-O, Short and Medium distance races, and Park-O. Increasingly the sport was coming out of the forest and into the view of the general public. The logical next step was daytime urban orienteering - City Centre O, orienteering's version of Twenty20 cricket. Even the World Championships Long race in 2007 had a significant urban section as a route choice on a spectacular 3.5 km leg across the whole map. The West Midlands' most recent contribution to this genre was the City event in

HOC entered the 1990s as one of the larger clubs in the country, its membership at the time being based firmly on the West Midlands and northern Worcestershire, with only a handful of members in the Malvern area. To some extent, it bucked the national trend for many years, holding onto members well and keeping above 400 for most of the decade. However, recognising the problem of recruitment, HOC increasingly turned its efforts in a more organised way to grass roots activities. This passed through a series of phases, beginning in 1996 with Come And Try It (CATI) and introductory events aimed primarily at schools. These were run by Peter and Ruth Bylett and by the time they were rebranded and expanded as SMILE events in 1999, attendances were sometimes close to 100. The Byletts successfully passed the baton onto Lester Hartmann and by 2003 Andy White was at the helm. SMILE had been successful but numbers were now dwindling, and club membership had fallen to around 300. It was at this point that Lynden and Lester Hartmann attempted something quite new. The Malvern and District Orienteers (MADO) initiative focused on giving local orienteering a real sense of community identity. Heavily promoted in the Malvern Gazette and with most events within a few miles of Malvern, MADO began with a series of four introductory Saturday events in just over a month. Having established a brand image and softened up the local population, MADO then launched into its league phase, consisting of Yellow, Orange, Green and Blue courses. Previews and reports continued to appear in the local press. The success of this format was reflected by the large number of local families being introduced to the sport and the subsequent rise in club membership. MADO showed what hard work and a bit of vision could achieve and as a result Malvern became a significant centre of grass roots orienteering, pulling club membership further to the south. Time is yet to tell whether the progress MADO has made can be translated into longer term commitment to the sport, especially at the junior level, but as an approach for other clubs, or even other areas of HOC, it seems to have a lot to offer. On the back of manifestly copying the MADO blueprint in the Lancaster area, South Ribble OC became Club of the Year in 2008.



*OCAD – whatever was wrong with letraset and a bit of scribbling?*

addresses appeared; [R.D.Barker@bham.ac.uk](mailto:R.D.Barker@bham.ac.uk) for Ad Hoc, and the less friendly [GB3C5255@ibmmail.com](mailto:GB3C5255@ibmmail.com) for one of the club's leading technophiles, Dave Williams. By July of the following year, courtesy of Dave, the club had its first home page on the internet, although it was chiefly devoted to static information and it was some years before it became formally managed and regularly updated with current news. Electronic punching, pioneered in Scandinavia, was not far behind. On May 11<sup>th</sup> 1997, the first ever UK event to use it was held at Shotover Park, Oxford. The Regnly system was used on that day in what was basically a public demonstration of the capability. Its high cost initially prevented its wider use. By 1999, the WMOA were considering whether the Sport-Ident system would be worth investing in. Circumstances then threw HOC, and Mike Farrington in particular, to the forefront of its wider deployment in the UK. With both a National Event and the British Championships due to be held in HOC/WYE territory in early 2000, and electronic punching having been successfully used at WOC99 in Scotland, there was some urgency that club should gain experience in its use. In November 1999 a badge event at Ribbesford Woods was the venue for HOC's first use of the technology. 50p was charged for dibber hire. This paved the way for its use in the major events the following year, breaking new ground in Britain. By March 2001, aided by profits from the National and British events, the club were in possession of

The effect of computer technology began to gather pace as the nineties progressed. After aiding conventional entry management and results processing (wisely kept out of the forest during the eighties), it next manifested itself in the form of OCAD. HOC began using Version 4 of this software round about 1993 and by the start of 1994 about ten maps had been transferred to the digital format. A whole issue of Ad Hoc was devoted to OCAD; how to use it, the range of its possible applications and various people's experiences with it so far. The superior Version 5 was not far behind and the mapping paradigm was swiftly changed for good. Then, in December 1994, the first email

£4000 worth of SI equipment, sufficient to run a C4 event. Across this period too the birth and growth of the internet revolutionised the way club members communicated with each other (the most recent example being the Forum) and the introduction of WinSplits and RouteGadget has opened up a range of diagnostic capabilities undreamed of before.

In 1990 HOC may have had just lost its top performer of the 1980's, Eddie Harwood, but a new star was in the ascendancy. Andy Hemsted hit the top of the M40 rankings in 1990 and teaming up with John Pearson and Tim Sands, brought the club multiple success in the M40 Relays at the JK and the British in 1990 and 1991. In 1995 he became British Champion at M45L as well as being part of the British Relay winning team, a feat emulated by the W17 trio of Hannah Wootton, Jenny Edlington and Ruth Hammond. Remarkably, Andy has maintained his "year-for-year" supremacy in the club to the present day, also having had considerable success at night orienteering. However, the achievement of Hannah Wootton in running for Britain in the World Championships at both Junior and Senior levels at the turn of the millennium eclipsed all that had gone before as far as International representation went. Other success was enjoyed by the juniors, especially the boys in the shape of Robert Farrington, Matt Evans, Elliot Clark and Dan Hartmann who between them won British Relays in 1999, 2000 and



2002. Nick Barrable's spell as captain around this time also saw junior success coming out of King Edward School, Edgbaston where he

*Matt Evans, Robert Farrington and Elliot Clark – the victorious British Relay winning team of 1999*

was a member of staff. Richard and Nick Pilsbury both represented British Schools in the 2000 World Schools Championships in Israel, a feat repeated by Robert Farrington (Portugal 2002) and Daniel Hartmann (Belgium 2004). Ed Nicholas, now a director of British Orienteering, was another to rise through the ranks of KESO (whose jackets, incidentally, were the forerunners to the famous HOC ones). Tessa Hill has more recently achieved international recognition at upper junior level. The Compass Sport Cup has continued to be HOC's bogey competition; not once in the last ten years of regional qualifiers has it made it through to the final. During the competition's knockout format the best year was 1992 when following three victorious rounds (SWOC, SBOC and OD) the club was crushed by BOK at the semi-final stage. The most recent victory was over WRE back in 1998.

Once again, Brown Clee Hill provided the venue for the most prestigious events staged by HOC. Both the Individual and Relay races of BOC93 were held there as was the National event in 2000 and a day of the JK in 2005. WYE's first big event was the 1994 JK based on Hereford; HOC organising Day 2 on Garnstone and Foxley. Springtime in Shropshire went from strength to strength and in 1999 WYE was admitted to the SinS team, prompting a suggestion for a change of name to Maytime in the Marches. However, by this stage WYE was starting to struggle due to lack of members and the Herefordshire-based British Championships of 2000 were substantially propped up by HOC. In September 2001 WYE made a proposal for a merger with HOC. Ultimately this was not to be realised and WYE was wound up at the end of 2002, with its remaining funds placed in a trust fund to promote orienteering in Herefordshire. Map stock was offered to clubs wishing to use them for an event.

In 1990 Ad Hoc's editorship passed from Angela Manancourt to Steve Nightingale and thence onto Dave Williams, Ron Barker, Nick Gorst and the Maggie Laycock/Carol Farrington partnership. Improving reproduction capability ensured that at last it became consistently readable. Lynden Hartmann's appointment to editor in 2003 co-incided with the switch to a colour format and a significant rise in the magazine's controversy quotient. As the power of the internet widens, the website's functionality increases and other facilities like the Forum increasingly invade areas traditionally covered by a monthly magazine, it will be interesting to see how Ad Hoc can adapt and position itself in a way that ensures its meaningful survival.

The chairmen over the last 18 years have included Dave Williams, Russ Fauset, Allan Williams, Rollo Rumford, Barry McGowan, Lester Hartmann, Dennis Mews and Mike Farrington. It is interesting to note that in a club with forty percent female membership, there has never been a woman in this post, although there have been lady captains. Under the leadership of the above, the club has continued to provide its members with a varied range of activities beyond straight orienteering. The June Jaunter has continued (Barry Parkinson's 1990 record still stands), social activities are laid on (club presentation dinners are held each year and the role of the social secretary is a busy one), and the après-O at events like SinS continue to scale new heights. The HOC shop is another example of the club's diversity. Originally started by Mark Farrington, it has raised significant funds for junior activities such as the Peter Palmer relay weekends and is now in the hands of the MacKenzies. Many things appear to have been the same in Harlequins for the whole of its history, for example, the difficulty in getting volunteers from beyond a central hard core. Other things change, most notably the demographic cross-section of active members. The average age of the club continues to grow. This one factor may be the main challenge for the future. However, for now let us all raise a glass and celebrate the fact that forty such eventful (pun intended) and varied years have provided so much enjoyment for so many people and have laid the platform for hopefully many more years to come. To HOC!