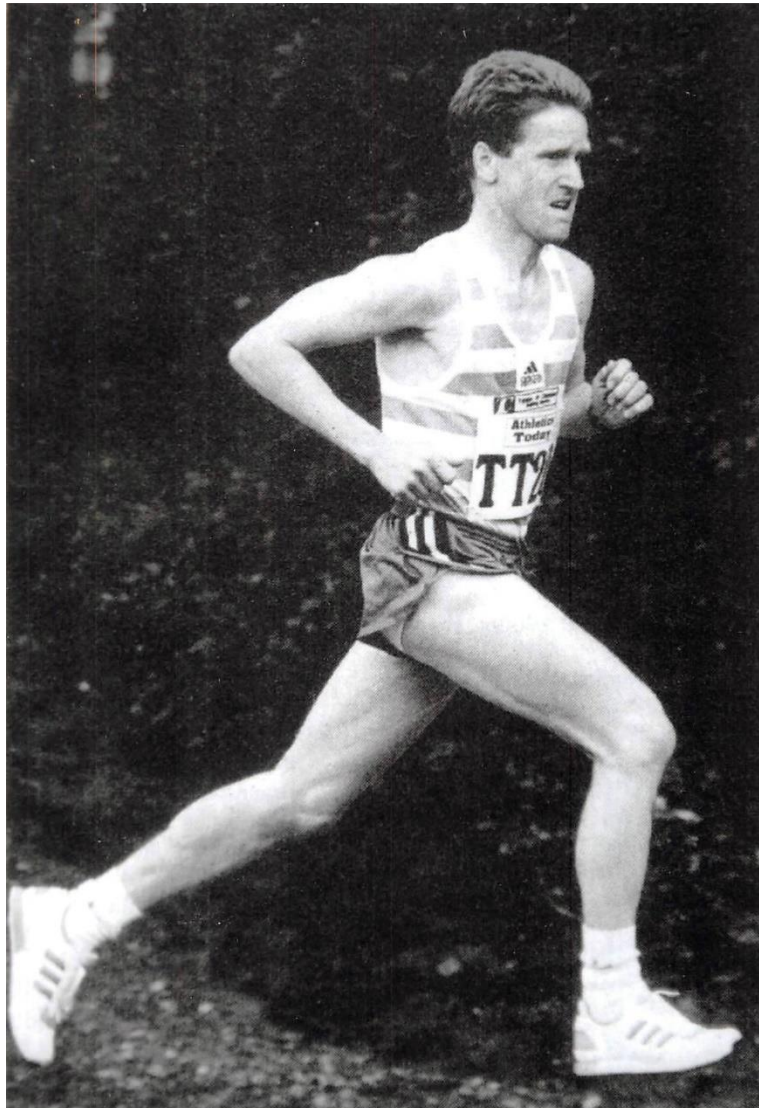


John Wheway

The club were saddened to hear of the passing of John Wheway on 11/05/2022. John had battled a dreadful condition for the past few years.



John was born in Coventry on the 8<sup>th</sup> August 1951. He was educated at Bablake Grammar School where he first experienced athletics in the early 1960's.

He was not the first talent in his family as his brother Robert was the one running for the school, and running well too. It was Robert who suggested to John that he try running for the school. He rocked up at an event with Robert and they let him run in the "C" team with a hastily borrowed vest. Robert won the race but young John was third and the "C" team beat the "B"!

In these formative years he was coached by Geoff Green. His lack of raw speed caused him to focus on the steeplechase and this proved a great success. In 1968 John ran some very fast times for his age and set AAA Junior Records for the 2000m S/C yet was ranked only 2<sup>nd</sup> over the year. He was featured in AW in early 1969 as being one to watch.

Coventry had a strong athletics culture & competitive structure at both school and club level. In time he joined Coventry Godiva Harriers where he was exposed to a great number of experienced and quality "Harrier" runners. These included the likes of Colin Kirkham, Bill Adcocks, Richard & Juan Taylor, Basil Heatley and a young Dave Moorcroft.

John was an exceptional athlete for his age and generation particularly excelling at the steeplechase. He set a world age best for the 3000m S/C at 16 years with 9m 06s. This event was his forte and he gained many records and representative invitations into the early 1970's. Success came early to this talented lad.

Whilst at school, and representing Warwickshire, he won the English Schools XC Championships in 1970 at Blackburn.

After school he was set on becoming a teacher and headed to Madeley College near Stoke On Trent in to qualify. There too he ran for the college.

He continued to represent Godiva and through these years and often raced Tipton Harriers in local events and grew to know many of our athletes and friendships were formed.

Upon qualification around December 1974 he began his teaching career in Wolverhampton where he joined the local club, Wolverhampton & Bilston AC. His contribution aided that club through one of their best competitive periods.

He was a regular in their British & Midland League track & field teams. He was also a regular in the Birmingham & District Invitation Cross Country League placing highly in a number of races.

Representative honours over the country continued coming his way with vests for the MCAA and his new county Staffordshire.

Steeplechasing was a real focus for Tipton Harriers' athletes around this time with the likes of Andy Holden, Pete Griffiths & John Davies all excelling. John was involved in many races with these runners.

As the 1970's evolved John tried other endurance events experimenting with 10Km on the track and also the roads. He was one of the "dark horse" entrants in the first Tipton 10 staged in November 1977. which he won in 47m 09s beating the likes of Ian Stewart; Brian Cole and Andy Holden.

1978 saw an international vest over the country with a race in Belfast. 1978 also saw him place 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Midland XC Championships at Great Barr. ECCU representative opportunities continued.

1981 saw him win the Staffordshire XC Championships at West Bromwich. Cross country racing took him to Spain in 1981. It was in this year that John ran his first marathon in the inaugural London Marathon with a time of 2h 21m 00s for 26<sup>th</sup> spot.

1982 saw a change in direction for John. One of his philosophies was to refresh his challenges and this he did by beginning to focus more on the marathon. He also changed clubs and moved to Tipton Harriers in June of 1982. He was still competing in steeplechase events and in May 1982 was in action in France.

At this stage in his career he teamed up with Bud Baldaro, the mercurial and successful coach to athletes of all abilities in the Midlands and Nationally. John used Bud as a sounding board and advice was given when necessary. At the time John felt Bud "provides continuity to his training".

On joining Tipton Harriers he was to become one of their most respected and regular main team members and activists. His name was often one of the first on the team sheet.

The marathon continued to absorb him and gradually he reduced his PB down to 2h 12m 13s in 1988 and 9<sup>th</sup> place in London. This was the third time he had set a PB in London. This was an age best for a UK 36 year old. On the way he gained a Great Britain vest over the distance in 1986 winning that event in 2h 22m 53s

An educated and well spoken man with what many regarded as a quiet disposition. He was sociable and a student of the sport. He was elected team captain of the Tipton Senior Men's squad in 1987.

Not a big athlete in physical stature, standing at 5' 5", but he was one of the most balanced and determined to witness with a super style. His "old school" racing & training attitude was admired by old and young.

An example of John the "thinker" can be illustrated in March 1987 when, after the National XC at Luton, he penned a detailed letter with his thoughts on the start of the event and the allocation of peg/pens to clubs and the effect on the race result. He came up with some interesting proposals.

As the 1980's progressed so to did John's enthusiasm for the sport continue. In April 1989 he was quoted as saying "coolness under stress is very important. Age presents interesting factors, including the ability to use your head. I was pleased with my 25m 53s for a 5.4 mile leg of the road relay championship last weekend. It was a respectable time in difficult conditions, run solo."

In 1991 another change was to occur with John, now 40, becoming a "veteran". This aspect of the sport was really taking off in a big way and John enjoyed success. In many ways it recharged his energy for the sport.

Outside of athletics around this time John was working in Moseley Park School, Bilston as a special needs teacher.

He won the veteran category of the London Marathon in 1992 with 2h 18m 47s. 1992 saw him also help Tipton to their greatest season ever. During that season they won the following titles and John played a key part in that achievement. He led the team home in the AAA's Marathon Championship held in London.



He inspired many people young and old and brought joy to many with his performances. Mike Hager was one to really appreciate John's supreme racing craft in the 1994 National Veterans Road Relay Championship staged in May in Aldershot where John took over 66 seconds down on Swansea and turned in a race winning performance. "To see John Wheway take the lead in the last 400m really made the day special."

His last recorded major performance for Tipton Harriers was in 1998 where he was 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Staffordshire XC Championships held at Roe Lane, Newcastle Under Lyme, Staffordshire.

Sadly a rare brain condition was to cause John long term problems which dogged him throughout the rest of his life.

Our thoughts are with his family and friends at this time.