

## Billy McMinnis 1915-2013

St Helens-Sutton A C regret to announce the death of club president R W 'Billy' McMinnis who passed away on Saturday 21 September 2013, aged 98. Billy started running at the age of 21 in the 1936/37 cross country season and quickly made his mark by anchoring Sutton Harriers to the Northern cross country title at Worsley. In 1939 Billy was again in the team which won the title and when cross country resumed in 1946/47 was in the team which won five consecutive Northern titles and four National titles (they finished second to Belgrave in 1948). Between 1947 and 1953 the team was unbeatable in the West Lancs Championships Billy capping their 1953 victory by winning the individual title at West Kirby.

Billy's stamina came from two sources. When he started running all athletes received a massage after training and Billy didn't like the cold hands of the club's masseur so a team-mate advised him to stay out longer and miss the massage. The other was the fact that Billy's job was as a P E instructor in the RAF and he would run each morning from his home to the RAF station at Padgate, spent the entire day teaching and demonstrating PE before running home in the evening, a round trip of 14 miles a day, followed by a race on Saturdays. During the summer fitness was maintained by participating in the popular two mile track team races, especially against local but friendly rivals Pembroke.

Billy moved on to longer distances winning the Liverpool, Polytechnic and AAA Marathons, making a dramatic entrance into veterans' athletics by winning world titles at 5000m and 10000m. He always looked resplendent in his blazer and never lost that military bearing which he acquired during his time in the RAF. Our thoughts are with his wife Doreen and daughter Elizabeth and other members of the McMinnis family. The funeral will take place at St Helens Crematorium on Monday 30 September at 2.30.p.m.



Sutton Harriers 1937

(Back) Bill Brough (Trainer) Jackie Meadows, Tommy Lee. Arthur Williams, Alf Tyrer, Gordon Edgar, Walter Massey.

(Front) Bill Burrows Bill McMinnis

## Comments

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I'm old enough to remember seeing Bill McMinnis run as well as other members of the fabulous Sutton team that dominated local cross country running either side of World War 2. Four National titles says it all, particularly at a time when there was a lot of formidable opposition around. I recall the club was relatively small with many members connected to Sutton Colliery which was used as base for cross country. The spirit was amazing in this club and the local community treated them as sporting heroes, which indeed they were. The pre-war battles in two mile team races are the stuff of legends, largely between Sutton and the Pembroke and served to bring the two clubs to mutual respect and admiration. It's fashionable to say that 'things are not what they used to be' but in the case of Bill McMinnis and those of his era they truly were. Somewhere there are a lot of departed old guys reminiscing. I wish I could listen in! Charles Gains

By **Charles Gains**

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