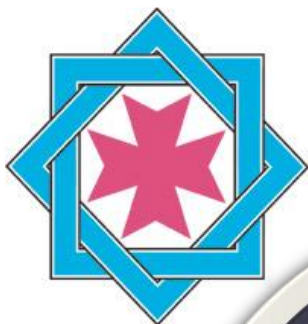


The History of the Nicholls Cup



This Commemorative booklet celebrates the 100th cross country race between South London Harriers and Blackheath & Bromley Harriers

Saturday 12th March 2011

The History of the Nicholls Cup



No-one knows the date of the earliest inter-club run between Blackheath & Bromley Harriers AC, or Peckham AAC as they were then known, and South London Harriers. With Blackheath tracing their roots to 1869, and SLH forming a breakaway from them in December 1871, possibly as a result of a dispute over handicapping, (a vital part of early athletics competition), there is evidence suggesting these two clubs, then both based in Peckham, encouraged members from the other club to their weekend training runs as early as the autumn of 1872. The Blackheath history reports the first official run between the Clubs was December 1873, whilst the SLH later reported it was on November 14th 1874. The latter event was from SLH headquarters, then not in Coulsdon, and ‘the number of runners was the largest that had ever turned out for a cross-country run’, so the home side’s Gazette reported in 1912. Perhaps the first year, it was training, and the following year it turned competitive....

In the summer of 1878, Peckham AAC moved a few miles north east and re-invented themselves as Blackheath Harriers; a move that saved the club from potential obscurity and led to significant growth in both membership and success.

In 1896, EF Nicholls, Blackheath’s Hon Secretary, who was also a member of SLH, presented a cup, to be contested annually between Blackheath and South London. The race was to be held over the neutral ground of West Wickham. In the minutes of the Blackheath committee, from their meeting on 8 February 1896, the conditions were laid out. ‘Rule 1: The Cup should be the sole property of the club.’ Some members of SLH might want to take issue with that! The first runner to finish was WH Sanders of SLH.

However, the mystery of the first race between our clubs deepens. A Blackheath Gazette from 1921 completely confuses the situation, saying the first race was in 1894, and that there were four races pre-Nicholls Cup, thanks to the organisational skills of one Arthur Cook of The Heathens. But this doesn’t add up, if Nicholls presented his cup in 1896, unless there were two races each year. Clearly the picture was confused, this far back. Later Blackheath Gazettes added two additional races to the total of races held, rather than four, without indicating who might have won the first two. Subsequently, both clubs reported purely on ‘Nicholls Cup’ scores and all the results in this document relate to these events.

Neutral ground was maintained until 1923, when the current home and away format first started, with a race in Coulsdon. West Wickham might seem to be on Blackheath turf to modern runners, but back then the Heathens were based where their name suggested. Part of the current Blackheath course, Layhams Farm, was often used in the early West Wickham trails.

Changing in the early years at W Wickham was at The Swan pub, in either crowded outhouses or stable buildings. There were no showers, just hip baths, sometimes in the open air.

Races have been held every season since 1896, with the exceptions of the war years, apart from 1899, because of fog or frost (depending on which record one reads); 1906, because of a dispute over terms of the contest; and 2001, due to foot and mouth disease. The 1906 dispute is intriguing. There is no reference to it in the SLH Gazettes of the time, though it was reported as close to the event as October that it 'will probably be held on November 3rd'. It wasn't!



The Trail Layers outside the Swan, West Wickham, prior to the 1904 Mob Match against SLH.

There was a race in 1911, but it was declared a no contest, as most of the runners lost the trail 'in atrocious conditions' of 'rain, slush and inky blackness', Blackheath reported. It seems that the races started at a much later hour in the earlier years, as many runners worked on Saturday mornings. The SLH Gazette had a full page account from 'Arden', who declared that without the mishap it would have been a 'sound victory' for the Irrepressibles, as South London had been christened in the previous century. But whatever, the race was run, so was last year really the hundredth running? The re-arranged race, three months later, went to 'The Heath.'

From the first race in 1896, it was open to as many runners as available from our two Clubs to participate, but until 1926 it was simply the first ten home from each team who scored. However, the principle of high finishing non scorers pushing back the points of the other team's scorers behind existed from the off.

These races always had social events afterwards. For example, in 1898, a high tea was attended by fifty from each club, and followed by skittles and a 'smoking concert'. These social occasions seemed almost as important as the race, and long descriptions appear in the Gazettes of both clubs, detailing who sang or played what, as well as some of the antics travelling home. From these events a more formal supper derived, and this continued until the last ten years or so.

Courses varied from year to year, and were laid in traditional 'paper chase' fashion by 'trail-layers'. In 1900 these individuals got carried away and the planned seven and a half miles was reckoned to be nearer nine and it was 'quite dark when the men finished'. The following year, a heavy frost resulted in a shortened six mile course. Paper trails continued until after the Second World War



The 1913 race, as recorded by SLH, was the first race for the club by AP (Albany Percy) Featherstonhaugh. He finished 13th. He was one of several members of both clubs to lose their lives in World War 1, and he is remembered on the brass plaque in the Club's HQ in Coulsdon. Featherstonhaugh served as a Sergeant in the 1st/5th battalion London Regiment (London Rifle Brigade) and was killed on 3rd May 1915, during the 2nd Battle of Ypres, aged 32. Unfortunately, he has no known grave and his name can be found on the Menin Gate memorial to the missing, in Ypres. That race was to be the last 'Nicholls' for six years.

The 1920 race saw the biggest winning margin so far, and the biggest field so far with 85, and the first time the name Pirie was to appear, though this was not the famous Gordon, but his father, Alec. However, this margin was surpassed the following year, by which time Blackheath had moved into their new HQ, the Railway Hotel. The 1923 race, for the first time in Coulsdon from the SLH Clubhouse, again attracted a higher number of starters. The visitors' Gazette noting how many Irrepressibles wore spikes whilst the Heathens were less inclined to.

The way fixtures fell meant that there was no race in 1925, and the event held in January 1926 clashed with a re-arranged Kent Championship. It was notable for another reason. For the first time it wasn't just the first ten from each team who scored, but the current method of having three non scorers from the number of starters of the smaller team. We now had a 'mob match'.

The following year, 1927, saw Blackheath in their new headquarters at Hayes, and with it came a new course, though it incorporated parts of the traditional Wickham route. The return race in 1928 saw another record number of starters, 181, but this was surpassed the following year when the home team started 113, and the visiting SLH had 112. This remains the record field. Strangely, the race was started on the road outside the Hayes clubhouse, and it was a close result, with honours even up to forty two finishers, with each side having twenty one home.

The race in 1929 should have started at 3pm, but was delayed by thirty minutes, meaning it was close to 5pm by the time the stragglers returned. Quite how dark it was we can guess, but there were grumbings...

By 1932, it was twenty years since Blackheath had last won the Nicholls, but that run was ended as they turned out another record club entry, 117, against 91 from SLH. The tide was reversed the following year at Coulsdon, when for the first time, Blackheath, as visitors, outnumbered the home side. 1934 saw the home side triumph again, but by the narrow margin of just 21 points. At the post race concert was EF Nicholls, himself, in Blackheath President's badge and an SLH tie from around 1900!



A new Blackheath record was set at Hayes, in 1938, when 126 started. SLH mustered 73. It was the last Nicholls Cup for eight years.

After the Second World War, the first meeting of the old enemies was in November 1946. The race marked a new course in Coulsdon, though paper was still being used to mark parts of the course. First home was Nunns of Blackheath, the first Heathen to win the race since 1926.

However, Blackheath had the most successful period of victories by either side, over this period, when SLH failed to lift the trophy from 1933 until November 1956.

In 1967, the course was switched, last minute, to Sparrows Den, due to an outbreak of foot and mouth. The race lost much of its traditional charm, and included four laps of the football pitches. Apparently there was much cutting of corners. Presumably this was down the field, not at the front, as a Blackheath man led the race home for only the fourth time in forty years. Individual victories have been quite one-sided, with the first home runner coming from Blackheath on just 26 occasions, from eighteen different members.

November 1980 saw a return to a neutral venue, this time Richmond Park. The reason was Ranelagh Harriers' centenary celebrations, which was being held on the traditional mob match date. Therefore there was a four way mob match which also included Orion Harriers, and a two way mob for the Nicholls Cup.

The following year saw a break with tradition, when SLH decided to move away from their traditional plain white vest, and replaced it with the now familiar maroon stripe. Blackheath would later modify their vest, after their merger with Bromley Ladies.

In 1982, SLH took the decision to open its ranks to women members, and two years later the Nicholls Cup became a 'mixed' event when Caroline Letchford and Anne Roden competed. Blackheath followed suit some years later, and their first women joined in 1992. Their first competitor in this event was the following year, when Cath Messent participated.

Blackheath surpassed all previous records in November 1985, with 137 runners answering their call.

The race in 1987 was in doubt, as it was the year of the great storm. With some slight modification to the course, the race went ahead, and it was graced, for the last time, by Gordon Pirie, who happened to be in the country on the day. Tales still abound in the SLH clubroom from those who beat him that day.

A strange occurrence for a cross-country event was recorded in the centenary race, in 1996, when there was a false start at Hayes, apparently by over eager SLH members. Perhaps one of them was Stuart Major, who went on to win. It was his first victory, of nine so far, making him by far the most successful single athlete in the event's history.

The last decade of Nicholls Cup races started inauspiciously, when the event planned for March 2001 was cancelled due to foot & mouth. It was the first cancellation since the Second World War.

And so we reach the hundredth race, the 101st running. The tally of race wins has ebbed and flowed, but currently SLH are in the ascendancy, with fifty two victories to forty seven, though it is Blackheath who are the current holders. Could EF Nicholls ever have thought that, 115 years on, his name would still be remembered and his trophy still contested and we would be awaiting the hundredth winner? How many members have rallied to their club's calling and participated in these races? How many miles have they raced? How much excitement and satisfaction has this competition engendered?

Date	Winner	Club	Points BH	Points SLH	Tally BH SLH	Venue
19 Dec 1896	WH Sanders	SLH	90	120	1~0	W Wickham
8 Jan 1898	CE Haydon	SLH	144	73	1~1	W Wickham
17 Dec 1898	G Hoare	BH	68	145	2~1	W Wickham
16 Dec 1899	<i>cancelled</i>					
08-Dec-00	JH Bessell	SLH	104	122	3~1	W Wickham
21-Dec-01	A Shrubb	SLH	84	144	4~1	W Wickham
13-Dec-02	FA Knott	SLH	87	154	5~1	W Wickham
12-Dec-03	EF Judson	BH	94	119	6~1	W Wickham
05-Nov-04	EF Judson	BH	107	113	7~1	W Wickham
04-Nov-05	PA Connelly FA Knott JA Churchill	SLH SLH SLH	136	83	7~2	W Wickham
1906	<i>not held</i>					
23-Nov-07	FA Knott	SLH	104	112	8~2	W Wickham
28-Nov-08	FA Knott	SLH	111	99	8~3	W Wickham
20-Nov-09	HEJ Southwell	BH	114	97	8~4	W Wickham
26-Nov-10	SF Ayres	SLH	131	84	8~5	W Wickham
18-Nov-11	<i>abandoned</i>					W Wickham
24-Feb-12	SF Ayres	SLH	110	115	9~5	W Wickham
09-Nov-12	CJ Moss	SLH	114	100	9~6	W Wickham
08-Nov-13	RJ Morley	SLH	128	86	9~7	W Wickham
1914 -1918	<i>not held</i>					
08-Nov-19	AC Edwards	BH	120	100	9~8	W Wickham
06-Nov-20	HS Price	SLH	209	63	9~9	W Wickham
05-Nov-21	WH Ashworth	SLH	236	67	9~10	W Wickham
18-Nov-22	AC Telfer	BH	177	73	9~11	W Wickham
10-Nov-23	RD Bell	BH	126	93	9~12	Coulsdon
15-Nov-24	LC Ratcliff	BH	136	86	9~13	W Wickham
09-Jan-26	PH Francis	BH	1,708	1,537	9~14	Coulsdon
15-Jan-27	JG Stubbs	SLH	5,114	5,041	9~15	Hayes
07-Jan-28	JG Stubbs	SLH	7,894	6,991	9~16	Coulsdon

Date	Winner	Club	Points BH	Points SLH	Tally BH SLH	Venue
17-Nov-28	LH Weatherill	SLH	12,245	11,626	9~17	Hayes
23-Nov-29	6 in dead heat	All SLH	9,267.50	7,096.50	9~18	Coulsdon
22-Nov-30	LH Weatherill	SLH	10,775	9,778	9~19	Hayes
21-Nov-31	AWV Tebbutt	SLH	8,147.50	6,199.50	9~20	Coulsdon
19-Nov-32	AW Tebbutt LF Humphris	SLH	7,466	8,398	10~20	Hayes
18-Nov-33	LH Weatherill	SLH	7,549	7360	10~21	Coulsdon
17-Nov-34	AEJ Etheridge	SLH	6,460	6,481	11~21	Hayes
16-Nov-35	4 in dead heat	SLH	4,298	5,043	12~21	Coulsdon
28-Nov-36	3 in dead heat	SLH	3,477	5,152	13~21	Hayes
20-Nov-37	LH Weatherill	SLH	5,172	6,538	14~21	Coulsdon
19-Nov-38	KC Lawry	SLH	4,131	6,389	15~21	Hayes
1939 - 1945	<i>not held</i>					
16-Nov-46	HN Nunns	BH	686	1,065	16~21	Coulsdon
15-Nov-47	HN Nunns	BH	1,544	2,515	17~21	Hayes
20-Nov-48	B Bowering	SLH	1,671	2,246	18~21	Coulsdon
19-Nov-49	PJ Pirie	SLH	1,214	2,141	19~21	Hayes
18-Nov-50	DAG Pirie	SLH	1,591	2,201	20~21	Coulsdon
17-Nov-51	DAG Pirie	SLH	2,484	2,949	21~21	Hayes
15-Nov-52	DAG Pirie	SLH	2,970	3,645	22~21	Coulsdon
21-Nov-53	3 in dead heat	SLH	4,030	4,243	23~21	Hayes
20-Nov-54	PJ Pirie	SLH	6,818	7,105	24~21	Coulsdon
19-Nov-55	PB Driver	SLH	6,900	7,098	25~21	Hayes
17-Nov-56	PB Driver	SLH	6,784	6,433	25~22	Coulsdon
16-Nov-57	AJ Weeks- Pearson	BH	4,738	5,678	26~22	Hayes
15-Nov-58	LD Reed	SLH	8,016	6,189	26~23	Coulsdon
21-Nov-59	SR Langridge	SLH	5,887	4,871	26~24	Hayes
19-Nov-60	MW Firth	SLH	4,483	3,886	26~25	Coulsdon
18-Nov-61	RA Roseman	SLH	4,299	3,957	26~26	Hayes
17-Nov-62	R Walsh	SLH	4,576	3,683	26~27	Coulsdon

Date	Winner	Club	Points BH	Points SLH	Tally BH SLH	Venue
16-Nov-63	JH Roberts	SLH	4,887	4,431	26~28	Hayes
21-Nov-64	JH Roberts	SLH	3,250	2,859	26~29	Coulsdon
20-Nov-65	JH Roberts	SLH	3,238	3,465	27~29	Hayes
19-Nov-66	JH Roberts	SLH	4,479	4,590	28~29	Coulsdon
25-Nov-67	R Richardson	BH	3,102	3,557	29~29	Sparrows Den
16-Nov-68	R Richardson	BH	2,148	2,557	30~29	Coulsdon
15-Nov-69	R Richardson	BH	2,100	3,425	31~29	Hayes
21-Nov-70	R Gevers	SLH	2,414	1,912	31~30	Coulsdon
20-Nov-71	J Rix	SLH	2,305	2,553	32~30	Hayes
18-Nov-72	JH Roberts	SLH	2,354	2,497	33~30	Coulsdon
17-Nov-73	JH Roberts	SLH	1,476	1,607	34~30	Hayes
16-Nov-74	R Gevers	SLH	1,502	1,437	34~31	Coulsdon
15-Nov-75	JH Roberts	SLH	1,927	1,994	35~31	Hayes
20-Nov-76	B Attwell	SLH	2,530	2,210	35~32	Coulsdon
19-Nov-77	R Coles	BH	2,925	3,220	36~32	Hayes
18-Nov-78	R Coles	BH	2,776	2,545	36~33	Coulsdon
17-Nov-79	R Coles	BH	2,903	2,672	36~34	Hayes
15-Nov-80	R Coles	BH	3,932	2,766	36~35	Richmond Park
21-Nov-81	WF Upcott	SLH	6, 123	5,533	36~36	Hayes
20-Nov-82	AJ Evans	SLH	7,353	6,633	36~37	Coulsdon
19-Nov-83	AJ Evans	SLH	6,980	5,586	36~38	Hayes
17-Nov-84	R Marriott	SLH	6,219	7,444	37~38	Coulsdon
16-Nov-85	B Attwell	SLH	5,383	7,064	38~38	Hayes
25-Oct-86	AS North	SLH	5,238	5,663	39~38	Coulsdon
21-Oct-87	M Jones	BH	2,051	3,347	40~38	Hayes
19-Nov-88	R Marriott	SLH	6,770	8,027	41~38	Coulsdon
25-Nov-89	PJ Timblick	SLH	5,440	5,082	41~39	Hayes
16-Feb-91	B Attwell	SLH	5,359	3,776	41~40	Coulsdon
08-Feb-92	B Attwell	SLH	5,372	4,801	41~41	Hayes
06-Feb-93	PJ Timblick	SLH	4,502	3,066	41~42	Coulsdon

Date	Winner	Club	Points BH	Points SLH	Tally BH SLH	Venue
26-Feb-94	D Taylor	BH	3,732	3,777	42~42	Hayes
25-Feb-95	T Dickenson	BH	4,369	3,687	42~43	Coulsdon
24-Feb-96	S Major	SLH	6,465	7,502	43~43	Hayes
15-Feb-97	S Major	SLH	3,517	2,822	43~44	Coulsdon
07-Feb-98	S Major	SLH	3,019	2,662	43~45	Hayes
07-Nov-98	S Major	SLH	2,494	1,986	43~46	Coulsdon
30-Oct-99	S Major	SLH	1,821	1,439	43~47	Hayes
17-Mar-01	<i>no race</i>					Coulsdon
16-Mar-02	R Smith	BH	864	1,000	44~47	Hayes
26-Oct-02	R Smith	BH	1,288	1,062	44~48	Coulsdon
28-Feb-04	S Major	SLH	676	608	44~49	Hayes
26-Feb-05	S Major	SLH	1,291	969	44~50	Coulsdon
18-Feb-06	S Major	SLH	1,989	1,950	44~51	Hayes
24-Feb-07	P Tucker	BBH	923	951	45~51	Coulsdon
08-Mar-08	J Simpson	SLH	1,231	1,634	46~51	Hayes
14-Mar-09	S Major	SLH	1,570	921	46~52	Coulsdon
06-Mar-10	A Bruce- Littlewood	BBH	767	844	47~52	Hayes
12-Mar-11						Coulsdon



Blackheath Harriers.

7 Miles Inter-Club Handicap

WITH THE

SOUTH LONDON HARRIERS,

Saturday, 11th January, 1896

Officials.

Starter and Timekeeper—C. VAL. HUNTER, B.H.

Judges.

GORDON C. INNES, S.L.H., A. J. FOWDEN, S.L.H., R. B. BALDRY, B.H.,
and G. HAMAR JACKSON, B.H.

Referee—J. H. A. REAY, B.H.

Handicapper—ARTHUR COOK, B.H.

HANDICAP.

	min. sec.		min. sec.
1 E. Gavin, S.L.H.	Scratch	19 E. C. Pulbrook, S.L.H....	3 20
2 C. E. Haydon, S.L.H. ..	55	20 B. H. Willis, S.L.H.	3 20
3 A. E. Magill, S.L.H.	1 0	21 S. Lanyon, S.L.H.	3 30
4 B. Lawford, S.L.H.	1 5	22 E. F. Vowles, B.H.	3 45
5 S. H. Yoxall, S.L.H.	1 20	23 W. Yeo, S.L.H.	3 45
6 F. L. Rowles, S.L.H. ..	1 25	24 S. T. Pugh, B.H.	3 45
7 P. Titley, S.L.H.	1 45	25 P. Mouchot, B.H.	3 50
8 H. C. Burrows, B.H.	2 0	26 H. T. Haydon, S.L.H.	4 25
9 J. P. Arkell, S.L.H.	2 10	27 M. Z. Kuttner, S.L.H. ..	4 30
10 F. H. Goodwin, B.H.	2 15	28 E. Knott, S.L.H.	4 35
11 H. W. E. Sercombe, B.H.	2 35	29 W. C. A. Landon, S.L.H.	4 35
12 T. C. Davis, B.H.	2 45	30 F. W. Crimp, S.L.H.	4 45
13 E. F. Moates, S.L.H. ..	2 45	31 F. G. Shortland, S.L.H..	5 0
14 F. Stephens, B.H.	2 50	32 A. V. Morris, B.H.	5 15
15 H. Simpson, B.H.	2 55	33 H. Baillie, B.H.	5 25
16 J. W. Palmer, B.H.	3 0	34 W. T. Colter, B.H.	5 45
17 S. A. Musson, S.L.H. ..	3 15	35 C. F. Warren, B.H.	5 45
18 E. F. Nicholls, B.H.	3 20	36 G. T. Burch, S.L.H.	7 20