

History of the Milocarian Athletic Club

Early Days

Before the world war of 1914-18, the important athletic event of the Service Colleges was the annual match between the Royal Military College Sandhurst and The Royal Military Academy Woolwich. On the formation of The Air Force College Cranwell, the match became a triangular contest and was first held as such in 1927.

It was after this contest in 1930 when Woolwich won by 2 points from Sandhurst, who in turn were second, by 2 points from Cranwell, that the Milocarian Athletic Club was formed. Major the Hon W S P Alexander, DSO, of the Irish Guards, and Captain I E F Campbell, of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, had for some time past hoped for such a club to be formed in order to encourage cadets to continue with athletics after they had joined their Regiments, and it was on 10th May 1930 that the officers i/c Athletics of the three Service Colleges met in the South West Wing, RMA Woolwich, and decided to form the Club.

The Club when formed was open for membership to Blues and half Blues from the three Services Colleges. From its formation it was always hoped to open the Club to the Royal Navy, but at that time it was not possible to incorporate the Royal Naval College Dartmouth, owing to the difference of the age of the cadets.

The Club

The name of the Club is derived from a combination of MILO and ICARUS. Milo was a strong man from Croton in Southern Italy in the 6th century BC. His prowess at wrestling, running, long jumping, throwing the discobolus and javelin made him winner of the ancient Olympic games no less than six times. He could hold a pomegranate in his hand so tightly that no one could wrest it from him yet so lightly that it was not crushed. Icarus was the son of Daedalus and according to classical mythology fled with his father out of Crete to avoid the wrath of King Minos. They escaped by attaching wings to their bodies. Unfortunately for Icarus, he ignored his father's warning not to fly too close to the sun with the result that the wax used to attach his wings melted and he plunged to his death into the Icarian sea, which was also named after him.

The Club Colours - dark blue for the Royal Navy, red for Sandhurst, yellow for Woolwich, and light blue for Cranwell, were designed by Capt R H B Longland, RE.

Halcyon Days

The first match that took place was a cross country race against the Royal Military College at Sandhurst over a five and half mile course early in 1931. On the occasions the Club suffered its first defeat. The race was started by Mr W H Roberts, OBE, MC the senior mathematical professor at Woolwich. He was the first Hon Member of the Club, and was elected for his enthusiasm and interest in athletics over a period of many years.

Between, 1931 and 1939 the Club won many successes on the track, notably in the AAA Championships, the Kinnaird trophy, and the 'News of the World' Whit-Monday Games, besides having representatives in the Olympic Games of 1932 and 1936.

During the war 1939-1945 over a hundred Milocarians were killed in action. In 1946 the Milocarian Trophy was purchased and presented by the Club to the Amateur Athletic Association, for competition among schools as a memorial to the Milocarian fallen.

Mixed Fortunes

For obvious reasons a purely Services Club such as the Milocarians was unable to function during the war. It was not until 1948 that the Club found itself in a position to embark on a full track season programme. Owing to lack of recruiting during the war years the number of active athletes was limited. However, no less than five Milocarians represented Great Britain in the Olympic Games in 1948.

Between 1948 and 1962 the troubled state of the world greatly handicapped the revival of the club, and our successes did not reach pre-war standards. The maintenance at Strength of overseas garrisons and the constant movements of units about the world meant that a large percentage of our active athletes were serving abroad. However, branches of the Club were formed overseas and members were often prominent among winners of events in all overseas stations.

The Demise of Track and Field

In 1960 a re-formed Committee set about the task of rebuilding the Club. This proved to be an arduous and difficult task and it was not until 1964 that the Club showed signs of returning to its former strength. In that year after a successful cross country season, the club won eight of its matches, including the Gosport Trophy and lost only one, thanks to good support from all three Services and sound organisation.

The dominant feature of the late sixties and early seventies was the effect the Northern Ireland commitments had on the availability of Army strength. This led to the Club being unable to field balanced teams of a reasonable size. The result was that our performance in the athletics arena was badly hit, despite membership of the club being made available to all members of the three Services and to MOD civilians. The advent of the league system in English Athletics led to the eventual demise of the Milocarian track and field effort, but the Milocarian flag was kept flying in cross country running by a small number of dedicated members.

Is this the same club? A quote from 'The Rover' No. 1740 - November 1st, 1958.

"The race had aroused such wide interest that teams were coming from all over Great Britain. There were two local entries. The Greystone Hall Athletics Centre, founded for the improvement of British athletics, had entered a very strong team. Greystone Harriers would have ten men running under the leadership of Len Eldon. The seal had been set on the event when it was announced that the Royal Milocarians were entering a team. The Royal Milocarians were to running what the M.C.C. was to cricket. It was not a club in the ordinary sense of the word. The coveted membership was by invitation only. Thus their team would consist of crack athletes from all parts of the country".

Today and Tomorrow.....

The reduction in service presence in London and the south east, during the first decade of the new millennium drained the club's recruiting pool radically and had a particular impact on what had hitherto been a strong RAF element. Nevertheless, a core of long-serving members formed the foundation of a revival, aided by contacts established with London University OTC, RMA Sandhurst and the Army's cross-country team.

The most significant sign of a resurgence was the re-establishment of the home match, held at Sandhurst, in 2014, after a gap of 7 years. The co-operation of the academy staff allowed the race to be held in conjunction with the cadets' inter-company competition which made for a large, competitive field and competitor clubs turned out strong teams. The Milos embarked on a run of 5 victories in the annual event which only a determined challenge by Thames Hare & Hounds brought to a halt. Milocarian medals were inaugurated for presentation to the leading male and female cadets in the inter-company race each year.

The club has continued to turn out against its established competitor clubs, around London, trying to race once a month throughout the season. Results have reflected the steady growth in membership and a marked lowering of the average age of the club's runners, boosted by the ability occasionally to turn out service stars, such as Hannah Jarvis, Fraser Alexander, Lauren Hall and Ady Whitwam who can be relied upon to lead the field. The club has grown accustomed to being in contention wherever it fields a team. It has won Ranelagh's Ellis Trophy and the Runnymede Relays on several occasions, teams for the latter event requiring a strong female component to challenge effectively.

Milocarian AC still suffers from the peripatetic nature of its membership, it being hostage to military contingencies and overseas commitments, but the club now has a sufficient core of runners to field full sides of competitive quality regularly and members' commitment means that at virtually every race an unexpected face will appear to lift the numbers and the spirits.

To acknowledge and encourage the increased numbers running for the club, individual trophies have been introduced for the leading male and female runners, based on their performances throughout the season. They have been closely contested and widely shared, no runner having achieved a lasting dominance.

During its long history the club has acquired some historic silverware, most prominent of which is the Milocarian Trophy, a Georgian silver urn, made by Garrards in 1804 which was originally pledged to the AAA as a trophy for a national school athletics competition. The original format eventually lapsed, but the trophy was then adopted by the Youth Sports Trust as the track and field team trophy for the Schools' Games, an inter-regional, multi-sports championships. The cup's new role was initiated at the Olympic Stadium, in 2012 when the southern region were the first winners and it has subsequently been presented by the club's chairman at Sheffield's Don Valley stadium, just before it was demolished, at the Etihad Stadium, in Manchester and at Loughborough.

Meanwhile, the Milocarian Cup, a very distinctive piece of silver, looking for all the world like a large model spaceship, was put at the disposal of the annual Achilles schools' relays and awarded for the best performance at the meeting by a girls' relay team. The standard of the successive winners has been remarkable, and the teams have more than measured up to the club's hopes when the cup was offered to the organisers. The relays take place at the Sir Roger Bannister track, in Oxford, where the great man broke the 4 minute mile and the club's cup shares the trophy table with others dedicated to Sir Christopher Chataway and Lord Burghley, so it keeps good company.

The club is now at its strongest and most competitive for quite a while, with a core of young, strong runners supported by experienced, wily veterans. The home match has become a popular event, combining a challenging race with an epic tea in splendid surroundings; clubs are keen to take part. Members have registered significant performances in marathons worldwide, even as far

afield as Bhutan – sub-3 hour times are infrequent there, but most Milos are will turn in times below three hours elsewhere.

Ninety years on from the club's formation, there is still scope for growth, best achieved by re-establishing the club's links with the RAF and Navy; at the moment the foundation of the club is preponderantly Army, but it will be at its most stable if it can rest on the three legs of its tri-service origins, rather than balancing on one.