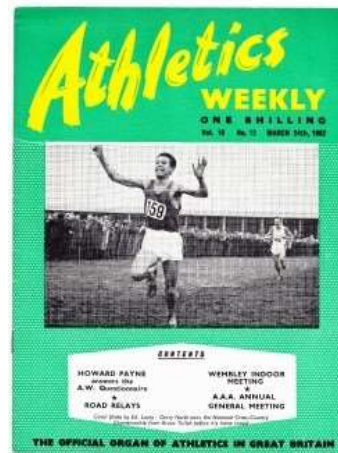


Lancashire Cross Country History Part 3

January 6th 1962 saw the Lancashire Cross Country Championships held in Blackburn for the first time and was the month that Brian Epstein would become manager of probably the most famous pop group of all time, the Beatles. The hosting of the county event was the beginning of an era when Witton Park would see area, national and international races staged there and in 2016 the Northerns will be here again.



Athletes in the 1962 county race

Gerry North wins the National

For the 1962 race a pre-race inspection was conducted in readiness for its first big test and Charles Rice the Lancashire County Athletics secretary said it was both an interesting and varied course but the most testing to have been used for some time. The course including the notorious saucer, which we still run on today, was planned by George Kirby who is the Blackburn Club President now at the age of 92 and a former Lancashire County President. On the day itself in 1962 Gerry North of Blackpool won the title from Ron Hill with Mike Freary in third, both of Bolton. Gerry would go on to win the Inter Counties in Leicester, with Lancashire retaining the team title, as well as winning the National held in Blackpool in early March beating the great Bruce Tulloh.



George Kirby 2015

It is interesting to note that there had been a luncheon held for a number of invited dignitaries prior to the Lancashire race at the White Bull Hotel in Blackburn. Speeches by local councillors announced that a stand at Witton could become a reality. As it turned out it was over fifty years before that dream came true this year when George Kirby was honoured by having it named after him.

In the snowy winter of 1963 Sherdley Park St Helens was the next venue for the Lancashire Championships and Ron Hill would win his first senior county title there from Colin Robinson of Rochdale. Lancashire went on again to convincingly win the Inter Counties in Reading with all Lancashire counters in by 17th place with 51 points. Ron would miss out on the Northern title to his Liverpool rival Mike Turner that winter here at Witton in treacherous conditions where hammers had to be used to crack the ice at the start for the runners to run through it. Let's hope conditions today are better for our athletes.