

THE 71st ALUMNI RACE held on Saturday 16th September 2023 at Roehampton.

It was a damp foggy cool start to the day as I got to Shrewsbury Station at 7.10 am, but by the time the train arrived at Euston, the warmth of the sun was taking affect, so the jacket came off well before exiting Putney Bridge Tube Station. Across the road from there is my usual stop for brunch at The River Café. Sadly, no members of The OSH joined me this year. At 12.30 I went across the road to catch the No.85 Double-Decker for an interesting 40-minute ride on the front seat of the top deck down to Roehampton Vale and then a 5 minute walk down to the Pavilion of The Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields, which is a vast expanse of about 17 grass pitches that border the south-west corner of Wimbledon Common. Thames Hare & Hounds Running Club have their headquarters there and have hosted The Alumni Race since 1953, when members Ian Fraser (Ch.1944-49 & Whip) and Nigel Miller (S. 47-52 & Whip) set up the race for old boys of schools.

It wasn't long before I was able to welcome the arrival of our Team Members and eventually distribute their bib numbers, which decorated the front of their Green & Gold OSH Running Vests. Once the team photos were taken there was just time to get assembled in the adjacent field and form a very wide start line of some 200 competitors from 38 teams of schools' alumni. Just after 3 pm, supporter Sam Western (S. 15-20 & Huntsman) and I saw the line of runners charge forward, noticing that Ed Mallett (S. 08-13 & H') was already taking a forward position, before the pack ran into the next field and out of sight, going into the undergrowth of The Common at the beginning of this varied and testing 5-mile Cross-Country course.

It was then a tense 26 minutes before a cheer was heard, as the first man, Edward Chuck of Kings Canterbury, came into view, followed by our Ed, just 30 seconds later. In the bright hot sunshine, we suddenly realised that Oscar Dickins (R. 11-16 & H') was sprinting into an excellent 4th place. We saw sweating runners collapse at the end of the finish funnel and after three minutes we were able to cheer in Michael Schutzer-Weissmann (PH. & S. 12-17), who excelled in his first visit to the Alumni Race, being the 19th finisher. It was only another minute before Charlie Ockleston (O. 14-19 & H') became our fourth counter at 31st place. Then, another first timer, Will Sawyer (PH. 13-18), was cheered in by his brother Sean (PH. 09-14 & Whip) and us at 46th place, followed by our OSH Hon. Sec. Liv Papaioannou (EDH. 14-16 & H') at 63rd. It was great to welcome Passy Goddard (G. 11-16) into the Team this year, who ran an impressive 38 minutes, to finish 93rd. The eighth important member of The OSH Team was Michael Johnson (S. 55-60) who, despite a forced "warm-up" run from Putney, due to a breakdown of his car, arrived in time to start the race. Unfortunately, Michael had a fall, over half-way into the course and was helped back to the TH&H Clubhouse, where he received medical attention and recovery by his wife and a very nice AA Man in tow ! I have heard from Michael and, after a check-up, he is doing well.

Standing beside the Pavilion, some time went by, as we chatted and waited for any results. Eventually, organiser David Jenkins came out to announce that Shrewsbury had won The Henry VIII Trophy for The Open Race, scoring 56 points, which was 23 points ahead of Bishops Capetown and also Sedbergh in 3rd place. This hard earned success created an emotional and jubilant reaction, especially as it has taken several years to gradually claw our way up the finishers list, thanks to the endeavours of our OSH Team members. Even though we won the "Virtual Race" of Covid year 2020, this was the first time that a Shrewsbury Team had won the actual race, which just happens to be in the 70th Anniversary Year of The OSH, founded by Ian Fraser, Nigel Miller and Adrian Struvé (Master-in-Charge of The RSSH at the time). Tiredness and perspiration was forgotten during the excitement and it was decided that, for those that could, we should go to celebrate at The Kings Head Pub, in Roehampton High Street, which just happens to be the old HQ of TH&H (... and yet again The Chairman recalled the changing room, with its hip baths, of The Stables block next to the pub, back in 1973 !). Much beer was consumed to quench the thirsts of hot runners and supporters, including Artur Sarsenov (SH. 15-20), who helped us celebrate the historic win.

A few photos were taken of the day, and the full album can be seen on our OSH Facebook page, which can also be accessed through the link on our OSH Website page. At this time, all provisional results are being updated, but check the OpenTrack website page to see results, as follows

<https://data.opentrack.run/en-gb/x/2023/GBR/thhar23> , where, on examination, it can be seen that our two OSH Ladies achieved 2nd place in that category, but with just two more in their team, they would have won the Old Johnian Cup. In addition, we also took 2nd place in the Age-Graded “Shrewsbury Cup” category.

I, for one, can't wait to see what happens in next year's Alumni Race, especially if this notorious win attracts more Salopians to join in the fun ... while the devil takes the hindmost !

Peter Birch. OSH Chairman. (Dayboys Hall 1966-71 & Huntsman.)