

The Gloucester Half-Marathon was one of the victims of the devastating floods in the area back in July, but not to be defeated it was re-scheduled for the end of summer, still over the original course. The route starts and finishes in Newent, goes through Taynton to Huntley, onto Tibberton, back to Taynton and then returns to the finish, with most of the roads quiet country lanes. The size of the field was undoubtedly affected by this date switch, since it subsequently clashed with a number of other events, but there were two Stratford AC runners present and they both came away richer than when they arrived! A cold morning with a blustery wind greeted the runners, and this combined with the hilly nature of the course to put competitors' times at the lower end of expectations. Kate Wright did superbly well to come 14th overall in a time of 1 hour 31:08, rewarding her with the first lady prize, while John Turner, enjoying a renaissance that the Spice Girls would be proud of, took the male O60s honours as he recorded a more than respectable 1:34:14 and 20th place overall.

Last week's Great North Run is one of the most eagerly awaited highlights on the UK road running scene, with 50,000 entrants taking part in the world's largest half-marathon. Andy Cockerill from Stratford AC was amongst this rumbling mass of humanity making their way from the Tyne Bridge in central Newcastle to South Shields, and he ran so well that he even lowered his personal best for this distance. The emphasis in events of this size is to get away fairly sharpish to escape the crowds, and this is exactly what Andy did. The downside was that he then had to work really hard to hang on over the last few miles, but it worked a treat as he crossed the line in an admirable 1 hour 29:16 minutes. This placed Andy into an excellent 631st slot (and also made him the quickest of the 6 other Cockerills in the race – coming in 16 minutes ahead of Christopher Cockerill!).

John Turner joined fellow Stratford AC member Roger Wilson at the British Masters Athletic Federation Open 10K Championships, which this year was being staged at Newtown in Powys, mid-Wales. For anyone who thinks that only youngsters can run fast, this event is worth watching. It brings together some of the best veteran runners in Britain, and this year it was also the final race from which the England team would be chosen for the forthcoming cross-country home internationals. The race was hosted by Maldwyn Harriers, and on a bright, cold morning the 2-lap, out-and-back course, which was all on road, gave the runners a chance to show their speed with only a hill at 2K / 7K to slow them down. Unfortunately Roger, who has endured a highly frustrating year after making his international debut last winter, suffered a hamstring problem and had to drop out after one lap. John, in contrast, flew round in 40:54 minutes and came away with a new PB by over a minute – his seventh PB this year! Just to highlight the quality that was on show, this gave him 'only' 91st out of 149 finishers, and 15th out of the 18 in his male 60-64 age category. Daniel Moore of Bristol & West (45-49) recorded 32:20 minutes in a tight finish to cross the line first, Cheralyn Evans of Telford AC (45-49) was the first lady back in 36:49, while Harry Matthews of Elswick Harriers topped John's age group with a time of 36:24. John moves up into Roger's 65-69 age category next year – he would have been fourth this year in that group – and the club are certainly very fortunate to be blessed with two such speedy old codgers!

With this year's Warwickshire Road Race League starting to move towards its climax, now is maybe a good time to look at a couple of the races in the latter half of the summer. The midweek 'Rowheath 5K' over in deepest Birmingham is the shortest of the nine races that make up the series, and there were half a dozen Stratford runners competing over the undulating 2-lap course. With 209 finishers on a warm Thursday evening, the six did well to work their way up the quality field: Phil Howell (18:23,68th), John Turner (19:33,97th), Luke Watkins (20:58,127th), Michael Oliver (22:02,153rd), John Butler (27:29,199th), Natasha Watkins (29:10,206th). On the night this put Stratford at 9th amongst both the male and female teams, out of a total of 15, and in 7th place in the male veterans' teams.

Coventry Godiva then took everyone on a jolly 5-mile jaunt around the Memorial Park with their 'Autumnal 5' race, staged as usual on a Friday night. With a smaller overall entry (135) and a larger Stratford contingent (10) this therefore helped give the club some excellent team results – magnificent 4th places from the women, veteran women and veteran men, and 8th place from the senior men. Those doing the business on the night were: Phil Howell (30:14,21st), Andy Cockerill (31:45,36th), John Turner (32:22,42nd), Roger Wilson (34:20,61st), Lesley Kirk (35:28,75th), Dave Maundrell (37:53,92nd), Michael Oliver (37:59,93rd), Naomi Whittaker (39:28,104th), Allan Coldicott (39:28,105th), Jane Mason (48:43,133rd). After this fifth race in the league the highest Stratford individual was John Turner, sitting pretty in a fine 19th place in the senior men's table and 12th in the veterans', and this race again showed how well the club does when it can just get the numbers out there competing in these events.