

The grey skies of a wet summer briefly parted for last week's 'Stratford Summer 6' at Wilmcote, providing an ideal Saturday evening for runners and spectators alike. Dry, sunny conditions, with a cool air and little wind, greeted the 235 entrants for the 7:30 p.m. start, although the exact position of that start line was subject to a little to-ing and fro-ing amongst the Stratford AC organisers! Even after seemingly endless days of rain the 4<sup>th</sup> running of this annual event was never in doubt, but it did cause an interesting parking dilemma since the field opposite the house was too wet to be used as the usual car park. The Wilmcote residents did not seem greatly perturbed by the slightly more crowded roads, and it was excellent to see a good number of them taking part in the race itself.

The race starts and finishes at Mary Arden's House, by kind permission of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust which cares for the Shakespeare houses, and the accurately measured 6-mile course follows an anti-clockwise route to the edge of Aston Cantlow before looping round and back up the hill to the village, meaning that the last mile is the toughest. The race is also the third fixture in the Warwickshire Road Race League, therefore attracting entrants from various athletic organisations and ensuring an excellent mix of club and non-club runners. From a Stratford AC point of view this race is a somewhat of a WRRL write-off, since all their members are assisting rather than running, but it is a small price to pay to see such a good turn out.

The race itself turned out to be a bit of a classic at the sharp end, with both the men's and ladies' races becoming extremely hard-fought tussles. The Northbrook pair of pre-race favourite Paul Andrew and last year's winner Nathan Holmes constantly swapped positions throughout the race, but a faster finishing sprint by the latter meant that he narrowly retained his title in a time of 31:55 minutes. The women's race was no less exciting; even though winner Clare McKittrick (Charnwood) always had the edge over Myshola Kirkham (Coventry Godiva) she was never allowed to relax for a second, and Clare's time of 36:51 minutes gave her an eventual 11-second margin of victory and 23<sup>rd</sup> place overall. An entertaining awards ceremony saw the women's prize initially awarded to a man – christian names can be so confusing when you're under pressure – but this was swiftly resolved!

The age category prizes also saw some tight results, none more so than the in the male 40-49, with Paul Davies (34:40, 7<sup>th</sup>) just getting the best of a 3-way battle, although they may not have known at the time that they were all in the same age group. As with last year, Dave Edwards (36:37, 18<sup>th</sup>) took the 50-59 honours since the remarkable Garry Payne (33:26, 3<sup>rd</sup>) had got an overall prize, while Bob Statham (38:43, 42<sup>nd</sup>) and Grahame Cooper (46:49, 133<sup>rd</sup>) were just as impressive in the 60-69 and over-70s groups respectively. Onto the women, and Theresa Woolley (37:21, 34<sup>th</sup>) retained her 35-44 title from last year, again since Clare McKittrick was the overall winner, with Monica Williamson (38:06, 39<sup>th</sup>) and Marilyn Maiment (46:43, 130<sup>th</sup>) running strongly to comfortably secure victory in the 45-54 and 55-64 age categories. Gary Compton (36:53, 24<sup>th</sup>) and Suzanne Humphries (49:52, 155<sup>th</sup>) proved that they have been putting their energies into keeping fit rather than moving houses in the last 12 months, as they both repeated their performances as first Wilmcote residents to cross the finishing line.

Stratford Athletic Club would like to thank Atherstone-on-Stour sponsors Simply Run ([www.SimplyRun.co.uk](http://www.SimplyRun.co.uk)), the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Wilmcote residents, Tony Jackson and his race committee, all the club members who marshalled and helped, and all the runners for turning up and hopefully enjoying themselves!

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A fine turnout of 14 Stratford AC runners made the journey north to Hampton-in-Arden Tennis Club for the start of the 'Arden 9-Mile Run'. As usual this summer the weather dominated the pre-race talk, but although the morning was very warm at least the expected surface water had disappeared and there was a bridge over the ford at 2 miles! The 1-lap course to the east of Solihull takes in the picturesque villages of Catherine-de-Barnes, Eastcote, Barston and Bradmocks Marsh, and is basically undulating with one larger hill at about the 8-mile point. Apart from some confusion over whether people should be running on the right or the left, a not unusual issue these days, the event was very smoothly organised.

Mark Francis (60:20, 41<sup>st</sup>) and Kate Wright (60:38, 45<sup>th</sup>) resumed their usual nip and tuck battle, with the born-again John Turner (64:38, 73<sup>rd</sup>) flying along just behind. Allan Coldicott (67:22, 100<sup>th</sup>) is another regaining fitness after an injury lay-off, and he was just ahead of the second great intra-club contest of the day as Emma Bexson (67:53, 109<sup>th</sup>) did well to hold off Dave Maundrell by two seconds and one place. The ever-consistent Michael Oliver (69:30, 123<sup>rd</sup>) was seventh back for the club, with Louise Neill (70:16, 131<sup>st</sup>) and Sarah Odell (70:26, 132<sup>nd</sup>) working together well to both achieve tremendous times, before Louise just pulled away in the latter stages.

The one massive downside of the day was a serious heel injury for Darren License (71:24, 145<sup>th</sup>), and the same courage that he showed in somehow finishing the last two miles will also ensure that he eventually regains the vast improvements that he has made this year. Chris Hall's (72:28, 158<sup>th</sup>) strong run ensured that he finished well up the finishing field of 312, whilst Naomi Whittaker (75:27, 187<sup>th</sup>) and Helen Monk (78:11, 210<sup>th</sup>) should be delighted with their fine performances. With John Butler (89:50, 284<sup>th</sup>) providing his usual, unique race day experience to complete the Stratford set, and Dave Kesterton (49:45) and Sue Harrison (50:47) stealing the overall prizes, everyone dispersed reflecting on a pleasant race that seems to attract a large number of its competitors back each year.