

Stacey Hill Snippets

National Cross Country Races at Stacey Hill Farm

Stacey Hill Farm today houses Milton Keynes Museum, but during its past existence as a farm it was home to many activities - troop manoeuvres in 1913, staging theatrical productions, providing a landing strip for Sir Alan Cobham's Air Circus and most surprisingly of all being the venue for the National Cross Country Championships on three separate occasions.

The first event was held on Saturday 13th March 1926 when the National Cross Country Union held its annual Cross Country Championship for the first time at Stacey Hill Farm. Over 300 runners took part, including International and Olympic Champions as well as Champions from every English County. The runners had to race over ten miles of the course which equated to five circuits, with the competitors in view from the farm at all times.

The event must have generated a lot of interest in the locality and the farm provided an ideal venue with its closeness to the railway and to Wolverton. Naturally the local papers were there to report, but Pathe Newsreel also recorded the event, and this was later shown at cinemas around the country. This footage is still in existence and some short clips can be accessed on the web, with glimpses of the farm buildings in the background.

To mark the event a special pin badge was produced by the National Cross Country Union. It featured the Buckinghamshire crest, NCCU across the top and Wolverton 1926 across the bottom. For the record Eddie Webster from Birchfield Harriers won, with Emie Harper from Hallamshire Harriers as runner up, and A Rodway of Birchfield Harriers in third place. Birchfield Harriers won the team event.

The venue clearly was a success as the National Cross Country Championship returned to Stacey Hill Farm in 1932. However prior to this the farm was the venue for the Women's Fourth Annual Cross Country Championship in 1930. Held on Saturday 15th February, the race took place over three miles and was reported to have been seen by 4000 people. There were 140 runners and the winner was Lilian Styles from Littlehampton Athletics Club. She was an excellent runner who won six of the first eleven women's "national" events.

The 1932 event was to be the last in the locality until 1985 when it was held in the area at Milton Keynes Bowl. There has always had a strong sporting background in the area and the interest these races generated at the time must have been enormous. Many will also remember that the farmland was used for cross country runners from local schools.

For the record, the tenant farmer at the time of the races was Edward Norman – it would interesting to know what his view would have been about the crowds walking all over the fields!

