MARATHON RUNNING

IN

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

CENTENARY   21 August 1920–2020

RE-ENACTMENT of the FIRST EVENT

Notice No. 5   **Wednesday 22 July 2020**

Our numbers are steadily growing and we now have thirteen participants registered. We also welcome a couple of supporters well known to the running community, Grenville Wood and Matt Evans, to the mailing list. Grenville is the state record holder with a time of 2:12:50 in the 1982 Melbourne Marathon and Matt is the president of the Southern Athletic Club. Both Grenville and Matt have expressed an interest in the re-enactment and may run part of the course on the 21st of August. With the next notice featuring the history of the 1970s the start of Grenville's long marathon career will be covered. Matt has run marathons under three hours (2:55:42 at Gold Coast in 2015) and for a few years ran a web site called runSArun, which was very informative and helpful in 2017 when I was asked to assist a colleague from England who wanted to get a handle on the participation in 5km and 10km events (other than Parkrun) in Australia.

This week's featured runners are Bill James (left) and Ian Wheeler (right) who both set new state residential records in the 1960s and went on to a podium finish in the National Championships with third placings, Wheeler in 1968 and James in 1970. Both had similar careers and made comebacks during the boom years of the 1980s.

Awards

Last week I mentioned awards to be given for the re-enactment. Although it is a social event the occasion warrants the recognition of achievement for a marathon run in unusual circumstances, not the least being the negotiation of the entire course on the footpath, always a hazardous experience. Each runner who completes the course will receive a finisher medal and the lady and gentleman (to use 1920 customary speech) with the fastest times will receive a trophy appropriate for the occasion. First, second and third placegetters will also receive a special medal. Two certificates will be available for downloading, each featuring the history of male and female marathoning in South Australia.

There will also be some special awards for which anyone finishing the course will be eligible. While the finisher medal and certificates will be available to everyone regardless of *when* they completed the marathon, only participants who finish on Friday, 21st August will be eligible for all other awards.

Please note that the finisher medals *may* not be delivered before the marathon because of the short time-frame caused by the events of this year. We were unavoidably affected by the changing dates of the Adelaide Marathon. The order was sent by email today after a week of designing to-and-fro by a few of us. However we believe the medal will be worth the wait. The design will be revealed in a later notice.

The Course

Start in Victoria Square
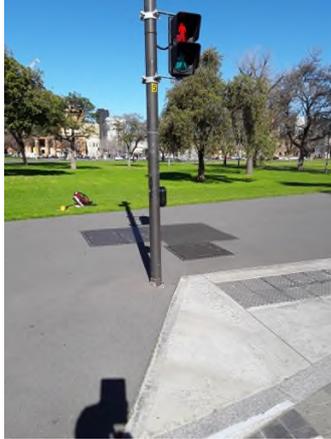
The photo on the left is the Kingston Statue where the marathon started in 1920, possibly in a slightly different spot. Victoria Square has had some facelifts since then! Note the drinking fountain in the foreground. For our purposes the location on the eastern side of the square is ideal. Across the road from the statue is the traffic signal numbered 5 which serves as the starting post. The right photo shows the course straight down Grote Street to West Tce.

Anzac Highway/South Road Intersection

This intersection needs to be negotiated carefully because vehicles not using the South Road tunnel can do a wide U-turn with the help of the traffic lights. Once across the tunnel runners need to look left to make sure a car is not turning right. Enlarging the photo will show people standing at the far lights where care needs to be taken.

Something old

In keeping with the occasion participants may like to consider what they will be wearing for the marathon. Modern kit is of course entirely appropriate but there is also the opportunity to celebrate in some way the customary uniform of the era from 1920 right up to end of the 1970s.

I will be wearing the first Adelaide Harriers singlet I was given in 1981 which was still the same design as that from the early 1930s! I will also pin on the cloth number from one of my 1980s state marathon runs. I have about a dozen other cloth numbers which I can lend to participants.

An old cap or large handkerchief tied around the neck or even worn knotted on the head could be other options. I kid you not – next week I'll produce a photo of that! Further suggestions are welcome.

History of the marathon in SA – 1960s

The 1960s was the first decade where there was a marathon every year and in fact there were eleven because the Australian National Marathon Championships were held here for the first time, in 1967. The fastest time run in SA at the start of the decade was 2:35:36 by Frank Tuchener from Victoria in 1958 and by the end of the decade this time had been lowered by nearly fourteen minutes to 2:21:58 by Derek Clayton, also from Victoria in the 1967 Australian Championships.

The fastest time by a South Australian resident at the beginning of the 1960s was 2:42:39 by Les Trigg when he placed third to Tuchener and Geoff Watt in 1958. During the decade this time was progressively lowered to 2:39:04 by Peter Brownrigg in 1964, 2:37:52 by Alan Gibson in 1965 and 2:27:34 by Ian Wheeler in 1967. Wheeler held the overall state record for five weeks from August 5th 1967 before Clayton smashed it on September 9th 1967. In 1968 Bill James lowered the residential record to 2:26:20.

One fascinating fact to take away from the 1960s record of finishers in the eleven marathons is that the *slowest* time was recorded by City-Bay founder Robert (Bob) Clarke with 3:38:49 in the 1967 national championship. There was a good reason for this – anyone who ran slower than 3:30 in the state championships was not officially recognised and did not receive a certificate, thereby providing no incentive for stragglers to finish. The national championship did not appear to have this rule. What makes this even more remarkable is that *another* Robert Clarke, from NSW, finished 11th in 2:38:49, exactly one hour faster than his namesake!

South Australia finished second to Victoria in the teams championship with good performances by Amor Newell (2:33:21, 6th), Ian Wheeler (2:37:09, 7th) and Bill James (2:40:18, 12th). Victoria took 1st, 2nd and 4th places and NSW was third.

Apart from Clayton's victory in the nationals in 1967, interstate competitors won the state championship in 1961 (Alf O'Connor from Victoria in a remarkable 2:47:40 at age 55), 1963 (Dennis Vinall from Victoria in 2:43:37) and 1966 (Rex Foulkes from NSW in 2:43:25).

SA State Championship winners were:

1960: Ron Ford	1st	2:49:07	Adelaide Harriers
1961: Max Hammond	2nd	2:58:35	Port Lincoln
1962: Anthony Short	1st	2:46:21	Wattle Park Teachers College
1963: Tom Robertson	3rd	2:54:47	Western Districts
1964: Peter Brownrigg	1st	2:39:04	Pulteney Grammar Old Scholars
1965: Alan Gibson	1st	2:37:52	Western Districts
1966: Jim Bell	2nd	2:48:53	Wattle Park Teachers College
1967: Ian Wheeler	1st	2:27:34	St Peters College
1968: Bill James	1st	2:26:20	Adelaide Harriers
1969: Bill James	1st	2:26:36	Adelaide Harriers

The course until 1962 was the same (or similar) to that used in the 1950s. In 1963 the marathon inexplicably started just north of the railway crossing at the abattoirs on Main North Road and proceeded to Smithfield where it returned to the start. In 1964 it moved to the Balhannah – Mount Torrens road, starting near the Oakbank racecourse and following a 13 mile out and back course.

The four State Marathons in which residential records were broken are examined in more detail:

1964 State Marathon

Peter Brownrigg was not mentioned in the preview in *The Advertiser* of September 11, 1964 but won the marathon and was the first South Australian to run under 2 hours and 40 minutes.

SA MARATHON RECORD BROKEN

P. Brownrigg won the SA marathon today in the fastest time yet recorded by a South Australian, and broke a nine-year-old residential record held by L. Trigg.

Brownrigg's time of 2 hr. 39 min. 4 sec. bettered Trigg's time by 4 min. 3 sec.

In drizzling rain the field of 16 set off on the 26 mile 385 yards run at Oakbank.

Two Victorians were included in the field. Ron Ford, from Box Hill, retired at the 15-mile mark but the other, 58-year-old Alf O'Connor, of Preston, finished fifth.

A. Henderson (AH), the early leader, reached the 13-mile mark in 1 15.15, 5.15 ahead of Brownrigg.

On the return trip from Mount Torrens the judgment shown by Brownrigg in his earlier pacing paid off, and he took the lead with 10 miles to go and was not challenged.

The first six to finish all recorded times under three hours.

P. Brownrigg (PGS), 2 hr. 39 min. 4 sec.; G. Inward (AH), 2 45.14; J. Blackett (WD), 2 47.55; W. James (AH), 2 49.24; A. O'Connor (Preston), 2 53.6; T. Robertson (WD), 2 58.17.

Sunday Mail, September 12, 1964

The report in Monday's *Advertiser* further states that Brownrigg had problems at 10 miles:

> *After developing sore feet, Brownrigg changed his shoes at 10 miles, called to spectators at the half-way mark "I'll sprint home" and covered the second half 2 min faster than the first.*

The report also mentions "a highlight was the sterling run into third place by 19-year-old John Blackett (WD)".

Note – at that time the Sunday Mail used Saturday's date.

1965 State Marathon

The *Sunday Mail* of September 11, 1965 ran the headline "**GIBSON TAKES SA MARATHON**". Writer Jess Jarver penned the sub-heading "**Western District runner Alan Gibson whipped the field to win the South Australian marathon championship at Oakbank today.**"

"The 26-year-old television technician, who arrived from England just before last Christmas, covered the 26 miles 385 yards in 2 hr. 37 min. 52 sec."

"His effort broke Peter Brownrigg's course record by 1 min. 12 sec."

He whipped the field all right. Runner-up Bill Kirkwood (AH) finished more than nine minutes behind Gibson in a time of 2:47:13 and third was Gordon Inwood in 2:49:43.

Jarver noted that 18-year-old Alan Besley from Western Districts broke the "highly valued" three hour barrier. His time was 2:59:57.

Of the 14 runners who started only seven finished.

1967 State Marathon

In 1967 the Friday preview predicted the winner correctly. The clippings tell the story.

Wheeler Should Win Marathon

From the 5,000 metres to his recent 20-mile victory Ian Wheeler has gone from strength to strength during the winter season and must start a firm favorite for the SA marathon title at Oakbank tomorrow.

The field of 21 will start from the 20A mile post, just below the Oakbank Hotel at 1.30 p.m. and follow the road to the 33A mile post between Mt. Torrens and Birdwood and return to the hotel.

Two weeks ago Wheeler ran 20 miles at the Sandy Creek course averaging 5 min. 15 sec. for each mile, so fit, and fresh, for tomorrow he should have no difficulty in maintaining this pace for another 30 minutes when he could register a world class time.

With Amor Nowell, Bill James, Gordon Inwood and Alan Gibson all in good form and several others of proved ability the result, as in any Marathon, is still wide open.

Walkers will compete over 20 miles at Oakbank at noon in a State championship event, the first to be held in SA over the Commonwealth Games distance.

After his win last week Gavin Balharry will be hard to defeat over this distance, but strong opposition should come from Len Hart and Frank Leonard.

WIN IN SA MARATHON

By JESS JARVER

Ian Wheeler (SPC), running the greatest race of his career, scored a brilliant victory in the South Australian marathon championship at Oakbank today.

The 26-year-old Adelaide optician whipped a strong field of marathon specialists to take the coveted title in an international class in 2 hr. 27 min. 34 sec.

Former Victorian Amor Nowell (Western District) finished second in his best time of 2 hr. 31 min. 8 sec. and Bill James (Adelaide Harriers) was third in 2 37.41.

Wheeler's effort, considering that he was competing in his first marathon and suffered from severe cramp after the 20-mile mark, was incredible.

FALTERING

His time was the best ever by a South Australian and sliced more than nine minutes off Alan Gibson's course record, set in 1965.

Wheeler, who ran the whole 26 miles 385 yards virtually on his own, began dictating the pace right from the start.

Covering the first six miles in an amazing 31 min. 12 sec., he was four minutes ahead of Nowell.

At the half-way mark Wheeler was nearly eight minutes ahead of the widely split field and well inside his planned schedule.

But the early fast pace began to tell and when he passed the 20-mile feeding station he began to falter.

Suffering from cramp, he was forced to slow down considerably.

Only his fighting spirit and determination forced him over the final mile to a well-deserved victory.

Wheeler who looked exceptionally fresh after the drama-packed finish, was disappointed when his time was announced.

"I felt fresh but the cramps made a faster time impossible," he said. "I hope to run much better next month in the national title."

SA Marathon Championship. — I. Wheeler (SPC), 2 27.34; A. Nowell (WD), 2 31.08; W. James (AH), 2 37.18; G. Inwood (WD), 2 43.41; A. Gibson (WD), 2 49.19; B. Chapman (ATC), 2 47.32.
SA 20-Mile Walk Championship. — R. Carman (AH), 2 53.19; G. Balharry (SPC), 2 56.00; R. Mee (AH), 3 02.52; L. Hart (AH), 3 11.04; B. Horton (U), 3 21.44.

56—SUNDAY MAIL, August 5, 1967

● Ian Wheeler, SA's main hope to win the national marathon title tomorrow.

This is the only photo of Ian Wheeler in the newspapers. He had a remarkable career in marathons, running eleven from 1967 to 1985 and all of them under three hours. He was third in the 1968 National Marathon in a time of 2:20:33 which remained his personal best. Ahead of him were Australian marathon greats Derek Clayton and John Farrington who ran 2:14:48 and 2:16:42 respectively and were selected for the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City.

Wheeler initially retired from marathons in 1972 but returned in 1981 to run another three, including 2:46:10 in the 1981 Melbourne Marathon. His last marathon in 1985 was 2:57:55 at age 45 at South Melbourne.

1968 State Marathon

Bill James from Adelaide Harriers started his marathon career in 1964, placing fourth in the State Marathon in a time of 2:49:24. In 1967 he improved his time to place third in 2:37:18 behind Ian Wheeler and Amor Nowell and ran in the nationals held in SA over the same course five weeks later for a time of 2:40:18 in 12th place. James ran a similar time at Hobart in the May 1968 nationals before breaking through the 2:30 barrier to win the 1968 State Championship in 2:26:20.

The *Sunday Mail* of 7 September 1968 gave a detailed account of his feat. Jess Jarver reported that James ran "the best race of his career" in scoring a brilliant victory at Oakbank. James' time was the best by a South Australian for the course and only four minutes short of world record holder Derek Clayton's time in 1967.

James and runner-up Brain Chapman of Murray Bridge set out at a "hot pace" and covered three miles in 16:19, five miles in 27:23 and ten miles in 54:58. They reached the halfway turn in 1:10:32, over a minute ahead of Clayton's time at the same mark the year before. James made a break on Chapman soon afterwards and opened up a 79 second lead at the top of "Birdwood Hill". He kept on increasing his lead with every stride and reached the 20 mile post in 1:50:35, four minutes ahead of Chapman.

Chapman said after the race that he had no answer for James' sudden burst of speed. But Chapman soldiered on well, reaching 20 miles four minutes faster than his previous best and finishing second with a best time of 2:38:12 in his fourth marathon. Ivan Boggis of Western Districts was third in 2:40:13, also a personal best time. Jarver reported that nine runners beat the three hour barrier, making the championship the best on record.
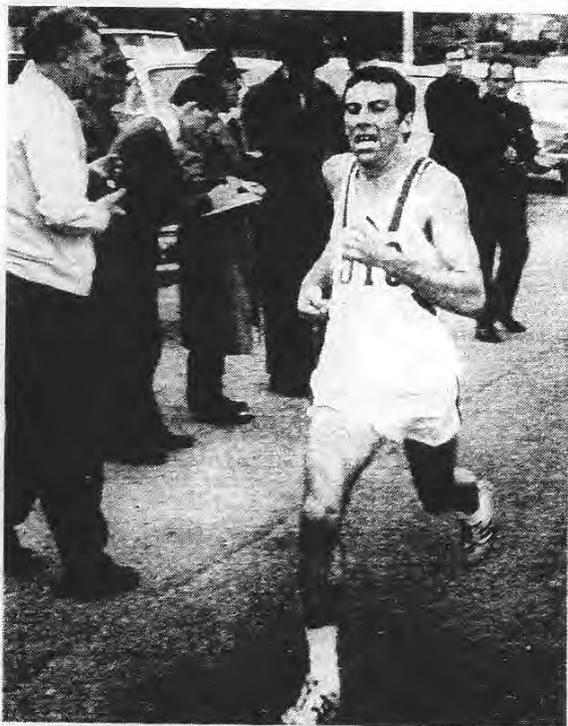
BILL JAMES (Adelaide Harriers) crossing the finishing line to win the South Australian marathon championships at Oakbank today.

Bill James is pictured at left finishing fast with a long stride. He repeated his victory in 1969 in much the same time and Chapman was again second but about a minute faster.

James' breakthrough came in 1970 at the Australian Championships at Werribee, Victoria when he finished third in 2:24:02, behind John Farrington (2:15:37) and Terry Manners (2:19:26). Fourth in a time of 2:26:13 was Trevor Vincent, the 1962 Perth Empire Games gold medallist in the 3000m steeplechase.

James ran another sub 2:25 marathon in the 1971 nationals for seventh place and seemingly retired for many years but made a comeback in the 1979 nationals at Herne Hill, WA. He placed 36th in 2:47:06, a race won by Robert de Castella in 2:13:23. His final marathon was the 1982 State Championship where he finished fifth in 2:33:05, behind winner Steve Guy in 2:28:30.