

## Ed Whitlock - Obituary

Members of Ranelagh Harriers were shocked and saddened by the news of Ed Whitlock's untimely death from prostate cancer on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> March, one week after his 86<sup>th</sup> birthday. Ed's extraordinary feats as a masters runner have been well documented, including a 2:54.49 marathon at the age of 73 and most recently a 3:56 marathon at the age of 85 in last October's Toronto Waterfront Marathon. Ed held literally dozens of age group world records on the track and on the roads, and equally well documented have been his modesty and generosity. He always had time to speak to his many admirers, even when they pursued him for an interview just as he crossed the line in a marathon. Here's Ben Kaplan from *iRun*: "He didn't carry himself like the belle of the ball—he carried himself like he was happy to be invited to the party."

He famously took the simplest approach to his running. *Runner's World* quotes Ed talking to Alan Brookes, Race Director of the Toronto Waterfront Marathon: "I don't have a coach. I don't have a manager or an agent. I don't have any commercial endorsements. I don't really have a training program. I just like to go out to run." And run he did, lap after lap of a short loop inside his local cemetery, for up to three hours or more when preparing for a marathon.

Ed's connection with Ranelagh Harriers dates back to 1948, when as a schoolboy he recorded the first of two consecutive victories in the Ranelagh Cup Schools Race in Richmond Park. At the time Ranelagh was struggling to rebuild after the second World War and although Ed turned out in a few races for the club it was felt that a young man of such obvious talent would be better served by being directed to Walton AC, at the time one of the strongest clubs in the London area. Ed ran with some success for Walton but his running career more or less ground to a halt when he emigrated to Canada in his early 20s. In the next two or three decades there was some track running and a 2:31 marathon at the age of 48, but it was not until he retired from work in his early sixties that he began to train seriously on the roads again. His target was to become the first over 70 to run a marathon inside three hours and this he achieved in 2003 at the age of 72.

Meanwhile Ed regularly visited the UK to see family, and in 1998 he realised that his visit would coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his first Ranelagh Schools race victory. He contacted the club requesting that he might run as a guest, and duly lined up with a hundred boys who must have been wondering who this "old man" with a shock of white hair was, especially as he went on to beat half of them! It would have been appropriate if he had managed to finish 50<sup>th</sup> but alas in the finishing straight he was pushed back to 51<sup>st</sup>.

Ed maintained his links with Ranelagh over the ensuing years, often visiting the club when he was in the UK. His last visit was in December 2016 when he turned out for the club in their annual "mob match" against South London Harriers. He hadn't run off-road since that Schools race in 1998 and found it hard going but finished 96<sup>th</sup> out of

**109 finishers in a time of 70.37 for the 7.67 miles. Sadly this turned out to be his last race. That evening at a local hostelry Ed spoke without notes for over an hour to fifty or more fellow club members about his life and running career, including plans for the future – now sadly never to be realised.**

**Ranelagh's Peter Fordham writes: "Ed ran alongside me for nearly all the December mob match bar the final 200 metres of the match. His fitness, health and running style was remarkable to witness at close quarters, and that is perhaps why it is such a shock for this to happen so soon afterwards. I know many of us will forever remember the privilege of listening and chatting to him on that afternoon and evening."**