



Name: Lynne Fox (nee Wightman)

College: Lady Margaret Hall

Degree: Geography

Years of Study: 1974-1977



Lynne, the first ever Women's Captain of OUCCC, marks the beginning of a long and flourishing journey for OUCCC Women. In the year 1920 women were, for the first time, officially admitted as fully matriculated students to the University of Oxford. Since then, the number of women studying at the university grew. In 1959 the five women's colleges were given equal status to the men's, and in 1974, the first of the men's colleges opened their doors to women, for the first time becoming mixed gendered. It soon came to follow that the female students of the university wanted to participate in the thriving sports culture, and, specifically, in the our beloved sport of running. Among these students was keen sportswoman Lynne Wightman (now Fox), who paved the way as one of the first women to join OUCCC, and go on to become the first female leadership figure in our running club.

So where did Lynne's story start? Lynne was a talented and keen sports woman long before joining University. Already in school she was able to participate in a variety of sports including netball, hockey and rounders, alongside the all-important cross country and athletics. *"Sport was a BIG part of my life"*. With all-around talent, her athletic events included not just distance, but also sprints and long jump. Of course, all this sporting participation came hand in hand with a love for spectating too. Lynne would travel with her family to watch the professionals of the time- seeing the likes of David Hemery, Lyn Davies and Mary Peters at RAF Cosford National Indoor Athletics Arena as athletic inspirations.



Left: Lynne and Julie Wilson (née Halfpenny) competing in the 800m. Right: Lynne on the brand new synthetic track, laid by Chevron, at Iffley Road.

Matriculating at Oxford in 1974, Lynne was keen to continue her sporting involvement. At the time, Women's Hockey was already established at Oxford, and Lynne immediately got involved, captaining the Women's II's team and going on as reserve for the Oxford Cambridge Varsity match in 1975. In OUCCC however, there was no such Women's team.... yet! As a fresher, Lynne visited the OUAC/OUCCC Fresher's Fair stand, where she expressed an interest in running and was welcomed by a team of men who were very keen to get women involved. It all went from there. At a time without emails and mobile phones, communication and organisation all occurred face to face, or, through the time-withstanding method of leaving notes in pigeon holes. As it might be expected, Lynne was not the only woman in the university who had developed a passion for running. She was joined by fellow runner Julie Wilson (Nee Halfpenny), with whom she would often train: *"We were great training buddies"*. Together, but without a formal training regime, they would run through their favourite routes around Oxford, including various parks, the hills of Shotover and the iconic Port meadow.

As the women's OUCCC membership became further established, Lynne was joined by more and more athletes who wanted to get involved. *"Once the women's side became established, we had some formal coaching sessions down at Iffley Road, with a coach called Captain Mac"*. Soon, the women were off on training camps, travelling to destinations such as Lilleshall, Merthyr Mawr and Crystal Palace. OUCCC became a vibrant mix of both men and women, training and socialising together much like it is today.

"The majority of my friends were fellow runners/athletes. I would often be invaded by a group of men at the end of their training- come round for tea and goodies (they always seemed to know when my mother had delivered a batch of home-made biscuits!). We had discos down at Iffley road and were always visiting each other's colleges/digs for meals. We had a lot of fun together."



At the time, the small collection of Women in OUCCC, meant that the teams of OUCCC and OUAC had significant overlap. *“There was only a small group of us involved in cross country/athletics. Therefore, if you ran cross country you also ran on the track.”* The summer of 1975 marked the first occasion in which a Women’s team participated in the Athletics Varsity Match. Whilst this first match was won by C*mbriage overall, the field of runners in Oxford was strong. In the Winter of 1975, Oxford hosted the first ‘unofficial’ Cross Country Varsity Match, taking place in Shotover, alongside the men’s II-IVs match. It was a small affair, but Oxford showed their prowess, with Cathy Meunier (St Hugh’s) finishing first, and Lynne finishing just behind in 2nd place. This was not the only race captained by Lynne, who also raced in the three-mile University competition against Birmingham.

Unofficial Ladies’ Cross-Country Race
Saturday, November 29th 1975, Oxford

1.	C.J.Meunier	St. Hugh’s	Oxford	15:56
2.	L.Wightman*	Lady Margaret Hall	Oxford	16:18
3.	B.C.K.Harrison*	Newnham	Cambridge	17:42
4.	G.J.Halfpenny	St. Hugh’s	Oxford	18:00
5.	S.J.Bull	New Hall	Cambridge	18:36
6.	C.N.Neff	Newnham	Cambridge	19:06
7.	J.P.Hudson	St. Anne’s	Oxford	19:26
8.	F.Mackenzie	St. Hilda’s	Oxford	28:04

Oxford won by 7 points to 14

Within a year it was decided that the Women’s Match would officially be held together with Men’s match, hosted by Thames Hares and Hounds (as it is today), thus marking the beginning of the un-interrupted series of Women’s Matches that has flourished (with the brief exception of the coronavirus pandemic) ever since. Whilst preparation for the match was slightly less formal than it is today, the prospect of racing at Varsity is timeless. Lynne’s parent’s came along to Roehampton to watch her compete in the Blue’s race, where Lynne’s tremendous victory put her name onto the OUCCC history books as the winner of the first official Women’s Varsity Match. Her victory marked Oxford’s dominance that year, as all the team finished ahead of the first Cambridge finisher. As with so many of us runners, Lynne was unfortunate to suffer from injury the following year, where her shin splints prevented her from competing again. This has made no difference to her long-lasting impact on OUCCC however, and her spectacular victory at the first Official Women’s Varsity Match is one that will not be forgotten.

The 1st Ladies’ University Cross-Country Race
Saturday, December 4th 1976, Roehampton
 2¾ miles

1.	L.Wightman	Lady Margaret Hall	Oxford	18:43
2.	J.Grand	St. Hilda’s	Oxford	19:16
3.	G.J.Halfpenny*	St. Hugh’s	Oxford	19:53
4.	N.G.Skrine	St. Hugh’s	Oxford	19:57
5.	F.H.Stead	Somerville	Oxford	20:12
6.	J.P.Hudson	St. Anne’s	Oxford	20:35
7.	A.M.English	Girton	Cambridge	21:00
8.	B.C.K.Harrison*	Newnham	Cambridge	21:50
9.	E.M.England	Hughes Hall	Cambridge	21:58
10.	P.Villa	Newnham	Cambridge	23:49
11.	M.B.Roach	Newnham	Cambridge	23:57
12.	L.F.Coe [†]	Newnham	Cambridge	29:19

Oxford won by 10 points to 34



Left: The results of the Ladies’ Varsity Match in 1976. Right: The Oxford women’s team post victory.

Life After University

Immediately after graduating, Lynne joined the RAF, where she continued her sporting lifestyle through playing hockey and running for the Service. She also continued her role as sports-leader by organising the Women's Hockey and Cross Country teams. Being posted to new locations and jobs every 18 months-3 years, allowed her to gain experiences in many different areas of her profession: Personnel, Leadership and Management, Training, Defence Policy. *"I served full time for 26 years, and then for 4 years as an active Reservist"*. During her career, Lynne travelled widely, including 3 years in Texas on an exchange programme with the USAF (US Air Force). Lynne's love for the outdoors took her on expeditions worldwide, including the Rockies in Canada, and more locally the Lake District and Northern Scotland.

After leaving the RAF, Lynne taught English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and then went on to undertake various different volunteer roles: in the chaplaincy of a prison, with the charity Help For Heroes and as Church Warden for her local church.

Today, Lynne continues to be active. *"I have a love affair with the wilderness areas of the North West, Skye and Cairngorms. Walking and the outdoors are my passion"*. *Inspiring as the natural world can be, Lynne also now spends time developing her sketching skills, whilst continuing to be involved with her local church.*

"I have had a very rich and varied life to date and have been blessed with lots of good friends and unique opportunities. I look back now on my childhood, school days, University time and RAF career with much fondness and thankfulness."

Written by Anika Schwarze-Chintapatla

OUCCC Club Captain 2024-2025

OUCCC Alumni Rep 2025-2026