

The idea of setting up the Iffley Miles first occurred to me in 2011. The OUAC President had sweet-talked me into being Fixtures Secretary, which turned out to be more work than anticipated, but more interesting too. I learned how to host an athletics meeting (who knew the starter has to have a firearms license, as the starter's pistol is classed as a real gun?) and ended up with plenty of contacts amongst the local athletics officials network.

Armed with these contacts, I realised that we could capitalise on the fame and history of Roger Bannister's record-breaking exploits at Iffley Road. I was also aware that the club needed more money, and thought hosting a new race meeting would be a useful income stream, and a valuable legacy for my generation to pass on to future club members.

Furthermore, I enjoyed running the mile in the Varsity Match and felt there should be more opportunities for athletes to race the distance. Friends and relatives often asked me, a middle distance athlete, what my marathon time was, and I reasoned that if I had a decent mile PB then perhaps a time for that classic distance would earn me some kudos amongst the non-runners that I knew.

I floated the idea of an open meeting of miles races in the summer of 2011, called the Iffley Miles, with then-OUCCC Captain Luke Caldwell, and OUAC President Cat Witcombe. They were both supportive, as were John Sear, my contact in the Oxfordshire Athletics Association, and Helen Hanstock, Sports Federation President. We pencilled in a date and advertised it however we could, through word of mouth, emails and free websites. The BMC were enthusiastic in principle, but felt it was too late for them to become involved that year. They left the door open to participation in a subsequent year.

The first iteration occurred on 3rd August 2011 and was a low-key affair. We cobbled together five track mile races, and allowed on-the-day entries to encourage participation. We were clear from the start that we wanted competitive athletes to be involved at the top end, but also keep the event open to everyone and foster a community spirit. The first, slowest, race, was won 6:00.37; I wonder if the athlete was disappointed to not 'break 6'. The top race was won by Stephen Emery of Coventry/L'boro Uni in 4:15.64, with Cambridge Uni stalwart and future BUCS 10000m silver medallist Chris Bannon in second place.

Buoyed by our success, we planned a bigger event in 2012. BMC Treasurer Pat Fitzgerald led their involvement, and together we held the newly rebranded 'Iffley Festival of Miles' on 28th July 2012.

We were excited as our top entrants included world medallist Craig Mottram, and 3:37 1500m man David Bishop; a four-minute mile was on the cards. In the event, Mottram triumphed in the A race in 4:01.28. Rosie Clark took the women's A race in 4:54.38, and the BMC also held their Peter Coe and Frank Horwill Miles for young athletes. Jake Shelley was the highest placed OUAC/OUCCC athlete, running 4:13.39 to finish eighth in the A race.

A series of open races preceded the BMC event, ensuring the meeting remained open to everyone. We achieved some modest press coverage, including a shout-out on BBC Radio Oxford and an article in the Oxford Mail. The event was growing.

In 2013 the BMC announced that they would like to make the event one of their prestigious Grand Prix meetings. This would raise the profile of the event substantially, and ensure a plethora of high calibre athletes entered. I found myself juggling processing the entries of local school children with liaising with the agents of international athletes who wanted entries.

As the day approached, we started to believe that we could see a four minute mile at Iffley Road for the first time in almost a decade. Leading men's entrant, Richard Peters, had a 3:56 mile to his name, and the leading woman, Racheal Bamford, was aiming for 4:30. We also had top talent turning up the Grand Prix 800m, including Abraham Kiplagat (Kenya, 1:43 800m and Commonwealth Bronze Medallist) and Diane Cummins (Canada, 1:58 800m, two-time world championship finalist).

The big day dawned on 20th July 2013. The BMC used the day to double as their 50th anniversary celebration, adding to the sense of history and occasion.

The meeting began with a series of hotly contested open races, followed by top class performances in the Grand Prix 800m and 5000m. Then, the stadium went quiet as the men's and women's mile A races took place.

The women's race featured a duel between Alison Lundy and Stevie Stockton, with Lundy narrowly taking victory in 4:42.39. Then, the men's race went off at a scintillating pace. Multiple athletes jostled for position right from the gun and the bell was reached in under three minutes. The stadium held its breath. One lap later Richard Peters hurled himself across the line, edging in front of Jonny Mellor by just 7/100ths of a second. The time? 3:58.70

I graduated from Oxford in 2013 and handed over the reins to Rose Penfold and Hugo Flemming, who did a fantastic job organising the 2014 and 2015 meetings, respectively. It was wonderful to see the event flourish, and I am hugely grateful to all the volunteers we have had helping every year. In particular, I take my hat off to Thomas Renshaw and Tom Barrett, the 2024 organisers. Never did I anticipate such a large-scale, prestigious event with legends such as Hicham el Guerrouj, Nouredine Morceli and Steve Cram in attendance, continuing to cater to top end athletes whilst also involving the community.

Sir Roger's spirit certainly lives on. Long may it continue.