



History of the St George District Athletic Club

Compiled by Michael Gentle

Albert "Albie" Thomas O.A.M.

Life Member (Deceased)



Club President: 1996 to 2013

World Records:	3 Miles	9 Jul 1958	13:10.8
	2 Miles	7 Aug 1958	8:32
	4x 1 Miles	22 Mar 1959	16:25.6
	3 Miles Indoor	24 Jan 1964	13:26.4

C'wealth Record:	2 Miles	4 Dec 1963	8:33
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Olympic Games: 1956, 1960, 1964

Empire Games: 1958, 1962

Before my introduction to athletics, I had played Rugby League, and as a small size person, I soon found out it was not my sport. It was in late 1951 that Dennis Wilson encouraged me to join St George to enjoy athletics. We competed every Tuesday night during the Track & Field season at club events at Hurstville oval, and there were many athletes competing. The circuit track was 5 1/3 laps per mile, so roughly 300 metres per lap and grass. Interclub meetings were very big meetings, unlike now, with many grades and heats in the one event. I competed bare footed in those days until Erskineville Oval where there were just too many "prickles" on the grass track, so purchased a second hand pair of spikes.

Training shoes were Dunlop Volley OC's, which were heavy, but strengthened the legs. My first cross-country was 1952 at our Scarborough Park base, which was rather different when comparing the change facilities, with an outside dunny. The course was also a little different as the side of the creek was more restricted with basically a single track, and there was an actual creek crossing where the playground at Tonbridge Street is.

In 1953, when I travelled to Percy Cerutti's training camp at Portsea, it was very basic facilities, with accommodation in a rather small shed with about 4 double bunks. Breakfast was the original muesli made from all natural ingredients, rolled oats, walnut pieces, raisins, banana, but rarely any milk. But did we enjoy the training over sand bush roads and the super big sand dunes, with a couple of sessions per day. So when I returned home, I started training on the Wanda dunes, which was a vast area in those days. I was told I was mad training on the dunes as it would ruin me, so just check the results, and those remaining dunes are used by many sports.

Then on Sunday mornings I started to run with the Randwick Botany distance runners as they had a strong team and many other athletes joined them on a Sunday morning. We changed at the lakeside in Centennial Park, left all of our gear on a seat, went training and it was all still

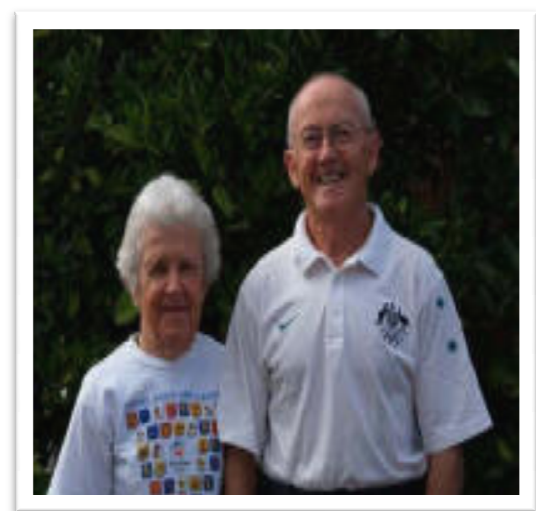
there when we returned. Now it would be gone before you were out of sight.

I did my National Service of 6 months in the RAAF, based at Uranquinty near Wagga Wagga. It was only a small base, which carried out pilot training. This was a great experience and taught you discipline, which you certainly need in athletics.

My first employment was with an industrial engraving company, then I joined a manufacturing company and progressed through many job functions. I joined Qantas Airways in 1966 and retired from the company in 1993, which included 2 years based in New York. During that time, I was given honorary membership with New York Athletic Club, which enabled me to use their change facilities for training runs in Central Park. As I got fitter, I started to compete in their cross-country races, including national cross-country, being in one winning team.

My smartest decision was asking Nola to marry me in 1958. We have 2 daughters Robyn and Patricia and 4 grandsons, Thomas, Mark, Liam and Mathew.

In the 1950's and 1960's our club had a very good nucleus of middle distance runners and excellent performers over every discipline. When possible some of us distance runners would meet for training runs and we all benefited from those runs. It has always been a very good club, which produced many outstanding members. We had 2 members in a 4 x 1 mile relay team, which set a World Record, Dennis Wilson and myself.



There were many highlights in my career, but some stand out, with the first being selected and competing in the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne. My first overseas trip was with the 1958 Commonwealth Games to Cardiff in Wales. Some of us were invited to compete in Ireland before the Games. I had a major result, which was unexpected, when I set the world record over 3 miles on 9 July 1958 at Santry Stadium in Dublin, Eire. A month later, after the Games, we were back to race in Dublin. On 6 August, I was the pacemaker in a 1 mile, when Herb Elliott set a new world record, when I ran my first sub-4 minute in 5th place in 3:58.6. In those days a sub-4 minute mile was a rarity. The next night I ran a 2 mile race and set a world record with Elliott in the lead for 4 laps.

Back in those years, we competed under very strict amateur rules, with no advertisements on your uniforms or shoes, and no sponsorships. We were also restricted to any competition out of Australia for only 28 days per year, excluding those days with a national team. Also you could only set an Australian record in Australia, or a Commonwealth record in a Commonwealth country. So, neither my world records, nor Herb's world records were recognised as Australian or Commonwealth records as they were set in the Republic of Ireland. It was a bit different than now.



Above: 3 Mile World Record, 9 Jul 1958

Right: At 1 Mile, 2 Mile World Record, 7 Aug 1958



Over many years, I encouraged club middle distance runners to have training runs with me. It was a way of passing on my experience and to teach them better running technique. I still have some young club members getting advice and mentoring. This has been very rewarding to see young athletes improve and enjoy their running.

I have also been fortunate to have met some of the great runners from earlier days, such as Paavo Nurmi of Finland, Emil Zatopek of Czechoslovakia, Sir Roger Bannister of England, Alain Mimoun of France and Vladimir Kuts of Russia, just to name a few. Know the two "gentlemen" of miling, John Landy and Ronnie Delaney. Also raced against Ron Clarke who set an amazing 11 world records in 1965.

I have also been fortunate to have competed in teams with some fantastic athletes from other sports and to have seen them in action for Australia.



Left:
Order of Australia Medal
23 August 2013

Albie & Nola with Her Excellency
Professor Marie Bashir

Awards

- Order of Australia Medal, 2013
- Australian Sports Medal, 2000
- Centenary Medal, 2000
- The Leader Tynan Sport Star Hall of Fame, 1999
- St. George District Athletic Club Life Member, 1983
- NSW Government Hall of Champions, 1979
- St. George District Athletic Club Merit Award, 1975
- Richard Coombes Memorial Medal, 1963/64
- Richard Coombes Memorial Medal, 1962/63
- Richard Coombes Memorial Medal, 1958/59
- Richard Coombes Memorial Medal, 1957/58
- Athletics NSW, Merit Award
- Hurstville City Council, Heritage Walk
- Path of Champions at Betty Cuthbert Stadium, Homebush
- Runner, Melbourne Commonwealth Games Queens Baton Relay, 25 Jan 2006 at Liverpool
- Torchbearer, Sydney 2000 Olympic Games Torch Relay, 12 Sep 2000 at Hurstville



Above: Sydney 2000 Olympic Games Torch Relay

Left: Olympian Dinner: Eileen Wearne (1932), Albie, Basil Dickinson (1936), Nola Thomas

Committee Positions

- President 1995-2012
- Senior Vice President 1979-1994
- Vice President 1969-1978
- Executive 1976; 1981-2012
- Captain (Distance) 1956-1957; 1959
- Uniform & Trophy Steward 2008-2012
- Delegate to Management Council 1995-1996
- Delegate to Athletics NSW Meetings 1997-2007
- Vice Captain (Distance) 1961-1963
- Vice Captain (Track) 1955
- Costume Steward 1954-1956
- Publicity Officer 1995-1998; 2002-2012
- Coach 1974-1998; 2003-2012

International Competition

British Empire v USA (1956) Sydney, Australia	1st, 3 Miles	
Games of the XVI Olympiad (1956) Melbourne, Australia	1st, Heat 3, 5000m 5th, Final, 5000m	14:14.41 14:05.03
Clonliffe Harriers Invitational (1958) Dublin, Eire	1st, 3 Miles (WR)	13:10.8
Commonwealth Games (1958) Cardiff, Wales	3rd, Heat 3, 1 Mile 3rd, Final, 1 Mile DNS, 6 Miles	4:10.23 4:02.77
Clonliffe Harriers Invitational (1958) Dublin, Eire	1st, 2 Miles (WR)	8:32
Britain v Commonwealth (1958) London, England	1st, 3 Miles	
Australian Team (1959) Melbourne, Australia	4x 1 Mile Relay (WR)	16:25.6
Games of the XVII Olympiad (1960) Rome, Italy	5th, Heat 2, 1500m 3rd, Heat 3, 5000m 11th, Final, 5000m	3:46.95 14:06.27 14:20.88
Commonwealth Games (1962) Perth, Australia	1st, Heat 1, 1 Mile 5th, Final, 1 Mile 5th, Final, 3 Miles	4:02.33 4:11.19 13:40.64
Games of the XVIII Olympiad (1964) Tokyo, Japan	9th, Heat 1, 1500m 11th, Heat 2, 5000m	3:54.9 14:27.8
Commonwealth v USA (1969) London, England	4th, 3 Miles	



Above: At 800 during 1 mile world record - Santry 1958

Australian Championships

	<u>1st</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>3rd</u>
1 Mile	1962, 1963, 1964, 1965	1960	1959
3 Miles	1957, 1958, 1959, 1960	1961, 1962, 1963, 1965	
10km CC		1959, 1961, 1963	

New South Wales Championships

	<u>1st</u>
1 Mile	1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965
3 Miles	1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1963, 1964, 1965
6 Miles	1957, 1965
10km CC	1959, 1964
Marathon	1963

Other Information

- Ran the first sub-4 minute mile in NSW on the Sydney Sports Ground grass track on 6 January 1960.
- The First athlete to win the Australian 1 mile championship, 4 years in succession.
- In 1965, won the NSW championship for 1 mile, 3 miles and 6 miles at the same championships. A treble that had eluded NSW athletes.
- In February 1963 I ran a sub-4 minute mile, then in June won the NSW marathon.
- Won the 1500m (3-59.5) and the 3000m (8-26.7) at the first World Masters Championships in Toronto, Canada in 1975.
- I was always proud to wear the "red & white" colours of the St George club.
- At various times I have held many club, NSW and Australian records. They are only marks for someone else to beat and improve performances.
- These details are to the best of my records and subject to correction or comment.



Above: Christmas Mile 2002

Left: 1955 NSW 3 Mile Championship

Video

11 Finals: 1500m/1 Mile 1959-1990 Commonwealth/Empire Games

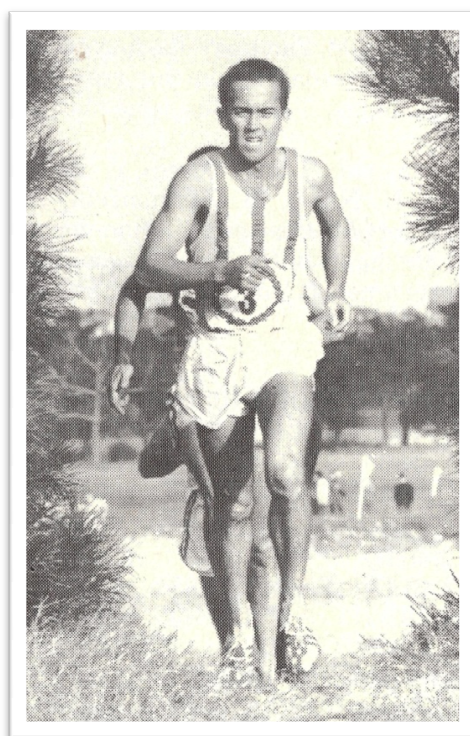
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6d5cBrEeyio>

11 Finals: 5000m/3 Miles 1959-1990 Commonwealth/Empire Games

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2J4FGI26mgA>

Mile WR - Herb Elliott - Dublin 1958

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2QGfgQePY>



1963 NSW 10km Championship

Further Reading

The club website has many documents pertaining to the history of the club available for download in pdf format: <http://www.sgdac.org/?p=Archives>

The club website has detailed results of club events, open handicap events, track & field events, and State, National and International Championship events featuring club athletes from 1921 onwards: <http://www.sgdac.org/?p=Event&page=1>

Summary of Albie Thomas' results: <http://www.sgdac.org/?at=408&page=1>

Please contact the author via webmaster@sgdac.org with feedback, suggestions, additional information, results or resources to help expand and improve these history documents.