

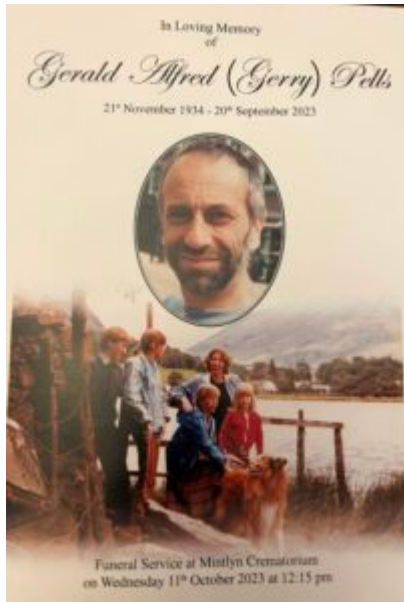


## Gerry Pells – RIP

It is with sadness that we announce the passing of Gerry Pells:-

If you would like to leave a tribute please email: [tributes@ilfordathleticclub.co.uk](mailto:tributes@ilfordathleticclub.co.uk)

### Eulogy



I am really not quite sure when was the first time I met Gerry at our club. At Ilford AC he was just always there, part of the club fabric. I know I am just a few years younger but, meant in the nicest way, Gerry had always looked old. But that had the huge advantage that he never seemed to age.

And of course he was always young at heart and was at every club event, competition and definitely every social function and enjoyed the company of younger club members.

Actually we started as rivals within the club. Gerry got involved in coaching a young upstart, Brian Meadows, who was trying to beat me. Obviously I wasn't having any of that and I think between them they only managed it the once. Despite that Gerry, like his Dad Alf, was a great coach. Whilst never wishing to qualify as an official coach, he was always keen to mentor newcomers to the club and share with them the knowledge he had picked up from all the world-famous distance running coaches whose manuals he studied closely. And as mentioned he played a significant role in nurturing the mercurial talent of the young Brian Meadows and helped him to achieve his potential in the 800 metres as a junior. He was a great motivator and also good at picking you up if you were down after a poor performance with his positivity and enthusiasm.



## Gerry Pells - RIP

Gerry joined Ilford on 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1949 and was a totally dedicated and passionate one-club man and he went on to perform for the club regularly and with distinction for six decades.

Unfortunately, I have little record of Gerry's early sprinting career at the club but he was rightly proud of the fact that he competed in the shortest event 60 yards and the longest event the marathon on the AAA calendar. Initially a sprinter, he was part of the Ilford medley relay team that won a AAA bronze medal in 1965 and 11 years later he won an Essex County over 40 silver medal over 100 metres in a time of 11.9 secs. Gerry by then was already moving into the longer distances and by 1987 achieved the best of his 24 marathon times in the St Albans Marathon clocking 3 hrs 17 minutes at the age of 52.

He was a consistent trainer and racer well into his later years, achieving a National Vets over 60 silver medal in 1997 at the Hastings Half Marathon in an impressive 92 minutes and bowed out on his racing career with a 27min 23sec clocking at the Hyde Park 5k road race in 2008 as a 73 year old. His favourite races were the Offa's Dyke 15 mile fell race, where he led many Ilford raiding parties (13 in total) between 1984 and 1998, and the Windermere Marathon.

In addition to competing Gerry was always involved in all club activities outside of racing. He served on the club committee and was honoured to be elected as our club President on two occasions in 1981 and 2014. Gerry took on the organisation of the club 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion, as he liked nothing more than a trip down memory lane with all the friends and colleagues whom he had encountered across the years.

Gerry was a gifted photographer and enjoyed capturing both the beauty of the Lake District in autumn and in equal measure the grace and power of his track and field subjects and of course his own family. He gifted many athletes wonderful photographic memories of their performances and indeed other special occasions like their weddings. Also there were the terrific photographic records of the many holidays he and Jill enjoyed with Gill & Les Hislop.

Gerry was an avid reader and would always be ready with book recommendations for fellow club members or wanting to hear if we had interesting literature tips for him.

Having been ever present on the Ilford AC social circle for many many years, including all the putting the world to rights sessions at The Cauliflower, The Joker, The Red Cow, The White Horse and lastly The Fairlop Oak and his much loved weekly outings with his longstanding pal Les, Gerry had to step back in order to devote himself fully to the care of Jill. Jill the love of his life whom he had actually first met at the Club, both aged 16, in the 1950. His devotion



## Gerry Pells - RIP

to Jill was truly inspirational and nobody could have done more to help her through her sad decline with dementia.

A gentle man and a true gentleman and much respected Ilford AC member who will be greatly missed.

Andy Catton

### **Tributes:-**



Sad to see the passing of a tremendously loyal Ilford AC member and close friend.

Gerry was a one-club man and performed for the club regularly and with distinction for six decades.

He was rightly proud of the fact that he competed in the shortest (Senior Men 60 yards) and longest (over 50 vets marathon) events on the AAA calendar having qualified by virtue of his times. Initially a sprinter, he was part of the Ilford medley relay team which won a AAA bronze medal in 1965 and 11 years later he won an Essex County Vet 40 silver medal at 100 metres in a time of 11.9 secs. Gerry was already moving into the longer distances and by 1987 achieved the best of his 24 marathon times in the St Albans Marathon clocking 3 hrs 17 min 49 sec at age 52.

He was a consistent trainer and racer well into his later years, achieving a National Vets over



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60 silver medal in 1997 at the Hastings Half Marathon in an impressive 92 min 58sec and bowed out on his racing career with a 27min 23sec clocking at the Hyde Park 5k road race in 2008 as a 73 year old. His favourite races were the Offa's Dyke 15 mile fell race (where he led many Ilford raiding parties between 1984 and 1998) and the Windermere Marathon.

Gerry was always involved in club activities outside of racing too. He served in various committee roles and took on the organisation of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion, as he liked nothing more than a trip down memory lane with all the colleagues whom he had encountered across the years.

Whilst not a qualified coach, he was always keen to mentor newcomers to the club and share with them the knowledge he had picked up from all the world-famous distance running coaches whose manuals he studied closely. He played a significant role in nurturing the mercurial talent of a young Brian Meadows and helped him to achieve his potential in the 800 metres as a junior. He would pick you up if you were down after a poor performance - I have rarely met a more positive and enthusiastic man.

He was a gifted photographer and enjoyed capturing the beauty of the Lake District in autumn in equal measure to the grace and power of his track and field subjects. My most prized wedding gift remains the three informal photo albums which he compiled as a guest on my big day.

Gerry was an avid reader and would always be ready with a recommendation for me in our regular telephone chats in later years. He was a spiritual man and in more recent times immersed himself in the study of Zen Buddhism which provided him with great comfort.

Having been ever present in the Ilford AC social circle for so many years (The Joker and The Cauliflower and later on The White Horse, Chadwell Heath and The Fairlop Oak) Gerry had to step back in order to devote himself fully to the care of Jill - the love of his life whom he had actually first met at the Club in the sixties - who had succumbed to the ravages of vascular dementia on top of type 1 diabetes. His devotion to Jill was truly inspirational and nobody could have done more to alleviate her sad decline. Gerry never really got over Jill's loss and the removal of the rigid structure he had put in place to manage Jill's healthcare seemed to leave him in limbo. He himself was diagnosed with vascular dementia and Alzheimer's in the summer of 2022 and a rapid deterioration culminated in his death following a severe sepsis infection.

A gentle man and a true gentleman.



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Proud and optimistic.

Ilford through and through.

John Mackenzie

He served 2 separate terms Ilford President and for a decades was an outstanding photographer with work published in, and acknowledged by, Athletics Weekly and other respected publications. He was one of race walking's greatest friends – indeed he attended Ilford's 2014 Walkers' Luncheon at "The Harrow" which recognised 40 years since Roger Mills earned a European 20K bronze medal at Rome and since the first time Ilford AC closed home a full team of 3 (Dave Neagle/Alan Barber/Dave Ainsworth) in a 100 miles' race (1974 Leicester-to-Skegness). On that occasion Gerry (as President) presented a souvenir programme of the last ever London-to-Brighton Walk to Centurion Steve King. His health wasn't good in recent times – which was sad for one so long involved in athletics. Widower Gerry, 89, was one of the most active members Ilford AC ever had and came from a family who also strongly contributed to Ilford AC's success. Dave Ainsworth

Another stalwart lost. Don't know if you ever met his dad Alf. The double for Lionel Jeffries. Ex military PTI, perfect gentleman, terrific Sprint Coach and wonderful sense of humour. Like his son, dedicated to Ilford Athletic Club. The club have be fortunate to have had the benefit of genuinely good people. Best. Roger Mills.

So sorry to hear of Ilford's sad news. Although I'd heard of him, I didn't know him, but an athletics stalwart as he clearly was, is a truly great loss to a Club. June Cork (Former Essex County AA President)

Very sad news and such a stalwart and much respected athlete and admired reporter of Ilford A.C. activities Gerry was. A great loss indeed. May he Rest in Peace. Sincere condolences to his family and so many friends.

Bill Sutherland BEM (Past Ilford President).

It has taken a bit of time for this sad news to sink in and for me to try and pay a fitting tribute to my old mate, drinking buddy and fellow competitor Gerry.

I loved my conversations with Gerry, especially in the Joker, White Horse and Fairlop Oak, usually following a really tough training session or race or at the Annual Club President's



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### Dinner and Dance

Not many people realise that Gerry was a great film buff and as a fellow film lover we had many great debates and quizzes about our favourite films and actors.

Mind you Gerry was one of the most knowledgeable people that I ever met and could hold conversations on many many subjects. I witnessed many "fairly heated" conversations between Gerry, Mick Herring, Frank Heaney, Barry and Les, mostly based on political subjects that were beyond me, but they were highly entertaining with great comical content. Absolutely priceless memories.

Gerry was a fierce competitor on road and country and we enjoyed many great running occasions together, most notably The Great North run (8 times I believe), Glasgow Marathon and the infamous Offas Dyke 15m Fell run. I never forgave Gerry for persuading me to run it, although it turned out to be the hardest race that I ever did I regard it as one of my best ever performances.

Great memories of Gerry dancing around a load of handbags in a Newcastle nightclub, great debates in the pub with his many friends, his unwavering support through my own personal challenges and his great love of Ilford AC and clean athletics.

Ilford AC owes Gerry a great debt for chronicling much of its history via his camera but mostly for his contribution to its history both on the track, road and Country, but mostly for being such a great friend to athletics in all its forms.

We were blessed to have Gerry in our lives for so long and he will always hold a very special place in our hearts.

Everyone who knew Gerry will miss him greatly.

Rest in Peace my friend

### Ernie and family

As a youth athlete in the late 60s, who progressed into Race Walking, Gerry and his father were always very supportive to us as a group and always had a cheery encouraging word for me at events or at training. Every time I met up with him in those intervening years, his bright character always shone through.

He was one of those guys who brought a pleasant face to the club.

My sincere condolences to his family at this sad time.



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Len Ruddock