

## MAUREEN BONANNO SMITH

10 July 1935 – 16 August 2022

To mark International Women's Day the Worshipful Company of Bakers would like to present a brief tribute to the first woman to be admitted to the Livery of the Company by Redemption – Mrs Maureen Bonanno Smith – who sadly died last summer.

A staunch supporter of WCB, Maureen was elected a Court Steward in 2016 and many of us will remember her smiling face at numerous Company events, often accompanied by her long term partner and fellow Liveryman, the late Eric Nash. She was admitted to the Livery in April 2006 and played a very active part in City life for many years being a tour guide at St Pauls, the Social Secretary and Past Master of Tower Ward Club, and a member of the City Livery Club, the Guild of Freeman, the United Wards Club, Portsoken Ward Club, Langbourn Ward Club, the Royal Society of St George (City Branch) and the Honourable Society of the Knights of the Round Table – to name but a few.

What perhaps is less well known to us is Maureen's renown in her youth as a middle distance runner of great distinction and, in her later years, as a pioneer for women's athletics in the UK and a top athletics referee.

Maureen was a county netball player, playing for Middlesex, when aged 17 she joined the relay team for the Midland Bank Sports Day. She was spotted at a training session by the Highgate Harriers coach, and netball was soon displaced. She was persuaded to join the Highgate club and ran her first race for them in 1952 at Victoria Park in Hackney. The following year she came second in the Victoria Park Cross Country event leading a winning Highgate Senior team home, having won the County, Area and National Junior Cross Country titles in between. She went on to compete at middle distance track, cross country and road running, taking individual and team titles at county, area, national and international level in all three disciplines and gained international selection for track and cross country.

Her greatest achievement probably came in July 1957 when, in front of tens of thousands of spectators at the White City Stadium, Maureen became the second fastest female miler in the world. She came second to her team-mate Diane Leather – and it marked the first time that two women had gone sub 5 minutes

in the same race. The following year she won the national mile title herself. Their mile times stood as first and second fastest in the Women's World rankings for almost 20 years. In 1963 she became a founder member of the British Mile Club where she acted as Vice President to Roger Bannister, its first President.

In fact Maureen was a truly gifted all round amateur athlete. She not only ran, competing at a variety of distances, but also competed at shot, discus and javelin. In the late 1950's women's athletics was much more restricted than now, and she pioneered ways to open it up, especially in the fields of steeplechase and the heptathlon.

In 1957 she married a fellow runner and member of Highgate Harriers, David Smith. His work took them abroad to Singapore, where she continued her involvement in athletics. She joined the Singapore Swifts and competed for Singapore in the First Malaysian Games. When they returned to the UK she became a track official and eventually a top referee. She was chosen to officiate at the 1982 Commonwealth Games in Brisbane as the only English Women's track, field and photo-finish referee. The same year she was part of the management team of the famous Ekiden Marathon Road Relay in Yokoyama.

I am sure that it will be no surprise to learn that she was just as active in her engagement with the various athletics clubs she joined as she was with the City. She was sometime President, Secretary and Treasurer of many local, regional, and national running and athletics clubs. Her crowning glory came in 2008 when she was elected as the President of the English Cross Country Association – a club she had initially joined in the 1950s when it was the Women's Cross Country, Road Running and Walking Association.

Her longstanding commitment to sport was recognised when she was awarded both the London Federation of Sports and Recreation Gold Award and the South of England Long Service Award in recognition of 50 years of voluntary service to Athletics.

I am sure that not many of us were aware that Maureen had been such an influential figure in UK Amateur Athletics. Sadly lockdown forced the cancellation of The Livery Society talk she and Eric had planned to give telling us about their lifetime in Athletics. It was indeed a life rich with success in Athletics and the City – she is a much missed presence at Company events.