

The idea for a road race came to Cyril Leason while he was out for an early morning run. It struck him that a run from Pilsley village to Hardwick Hall would make a good distance and that the run would bring competitors from around the country as well as from the village, and provide publicity for the Hall and the National Trust.

The chosen route dictated the distance of 6 miles, 285 yards - but locally the race was known as the 6 mile road run.

In Cyril's younger days he ran in many races, including marathons and half marathons, as well as shorter distances. He trained almost every day and has been a member of Alfreton Athletics Club, Chesterfield Harriers and Rotherham Harriers. Cyril told his friend Tom Hulatt of Tibshelf (who competed in the race where Roger Bannister broke the 4-minute mile) about his idea when they both attended a Slim Whitman concert at Sheffield City Hall. Tom thought it was a brilliant idea and agreed with Cyril that they would ask Slim to be Patron of the race, after the show. Slim agreed to this and has been associated with the race ever since. In fact the last race, in 2013, was billed as a tribute to the great country and western singer, who had recently passed away.

The first race, with 32 entrants, took place on Tuesday 3rd June 1981. The race was won by Bob Forster of Nottingham Athletics Club. A crowd of over 200 people came to watch and cheer on the runners. The race grew with each passing year, regularly attracting over 100 runners, and the event itself also grew in stature, with entertainment provided for the crowd in the form of singers and various marching bands, cheerleaders and, from 1997, a mystery runner - who carried a torch from the gateway of Hardwick Hall to the village, lighting beacons at several places along the way.

The idea of a mystery runner was taken from the Nos Galan midnight run in Wales, an event which Cyril had attended. The first mystery runner was John Whetton, former European 1500 m champion. Since then, mystery runners have included Ricky Soos, Barrie Moss, Jane Potter, Carl Thackery (who came second in the road race in 2010) and Nicky Lees, who won the race 7 times between 1982 and 1991, and was the final mystery runner in 2013.

The race was held every year between 1981 and 2013, with breaks only in 2001, because of the foot and mouth outbreak and 2004 when not enough sponsorship was obtained. The event has not taken place for the last 2 years due to Cyril having health problems. The Pilsley parish Council have now stepped in to revive this village tradition and help Cyril to put on the race this year.