

Mansfield's Berry Hill Park yet again proved what an excellent venue for international cross country it is when the Home Countries International event took place in the town last weekend.

Despite the heavy rain in the preceding days Pat Carlan expertly prepared a fast, yet challenging, course that tested an array of athletes from across the UK. Teams from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were joined by representative teams from the Midlands, North and South of Scotland along with a Combined Services team.

The Senior Men's race, run over four laps, provided a thrilling finish. Midlands Champion James Walsh, who narrowly missed out on selection for the World Championships after his seventh place finish in the National Championships at Leeds a few weeks ago, led from the start and with less than 800m of the 10km course to go had opened up a clear lead on Notts AC athlete Bruce Raeside.

Raeside, running for Scotland, used his track speed over the last 200 metres to close the gap on Walsh, edging past him with just 70 metres to go to take victory. An excellent race ensued behind these two with another Scot Tom Russell edging past England's Darren Deed to take the bronze medal spot.

With three athletes to count for the team honours and with Ashley Harrell finishing seventh for England and Chris Powner in ninth for Scotland the match was a draw, each country scoring 13 points. The countback rule came in to play meaning that Harrell's higher placed finish gave Gold to England.

Hatti Dean, bronze medallist in the recent National Championships, ran to a convincing win over 8km in the Senior Women's race, leading home the England trio to a convincing team win. Team mate Hannah Whitmore came home in second with U23 international Emma Pallant, representing the South, taking the individual bronze.

Pallant is returning from an injury ridden winter although Whitmore will be pleased to have gained revenge for their performances in the National Championships, where Pallant was eighth and Whitmore twelfth.

England took the team honours in the Junior Men's race although the individual placings had the selectors sweating. Matthew Gillespie was the individual winner for Scotland with Alex Tovey (South) and Andrew Heyes (North) beating in the first England representatives.

Good packing from Billington, Coombs and Peters for England secured Team Gold although again the countback rule came in to play with both England and Scotland scoring 18 points. Had Peters not managed to hold off eighth place finisher Hendry of Scotland, the final gap only being three seconds, the result would have looked very different.

There was no doubt about the winners of the Junior Women's event with England, led home by Exeter's Jo Harvey, taking a clean sweep of the individual medals in a time of 21:30. Naomi Taschimowitz (Taunton) and Laura Parker (Wells City) made it a good day for the South West as they completed the trophy winning trio.

Sutton Harriers Nikita Pembleton received a late call up to the Midlands team, finishing 26th in a time of 26:14.

Prior to the international races a series of junior events were staged, allowing local youngsters to compete on the same course as the international athletes.

Alex Rieley ran to glory in the Y7 Boys race, opening up a commanding lead of over 30 seconds on second placed Peter Mumford, George Eley taking third spot.

Lucy Scholl took Gold in the Y7 Girls race, with Brunts School students Ellie Maddocks and Abbie Binch taking second and third.

The biggest field of the day was in the Y5/6 Girls race where Tilly Birkin came out on top opening up a lead of 29 seconds on nearest rival Laura Herrod, Emily Typholme took third spot.

Nicholas Alexander took Gold in the Y5/6 Boys from Nicholas Hobbs with Robert Towndrow in third.

Track and Field action returns to Berry Hill Park next weekend when Mansfield Harriers stage their spring open track and field meeting. With a day full of action promised spectators are invited to come along and see a range of events.

Action kicks off at 10am with the Hammer event where some of the countries best throwers can be seen and several throws over 60 metres will be expected.

At junior level reigning U15 Schools and National Champion Ashley Gilder will be in action along with U17 Women's Champion, Abbi Carter of hull Achilles who represented GB at the European Youth Olympic Festival in Finland last year.

British U20 record holder Peter Smith from Birchfield Harriers, a finalist at last year's European Junior Championships in Serbia, joins the line up along with GB representative at the European U23 Championships in Lithuania, City Of Sheffield's Matthew Lambley.

The senior ranks are represented by the 2009 seventh ranked male and female throwers – James Bedford from Birchfield and Rachel Gair from Trafford AC.