

## WITHINGTON WHEELERS HISTORY



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## WITHINGTON WHEELERS HISTORY

Jim Forbes made a start on the club history some years ago and he wrote the following, typed out on that ancient typewriter of his, the notepaper heavy with tippex, a Foreword and then the first few lines of his history of the club.

Typical of Jim, he starts with a Foreword that throws a spanner in the works right from the off, declaring that the first club dinner wasn't at the Hough End Hotel but the Sharston Tea Rooms;

*"Foreword:-*

*The 60<sup>th</sup> Annual Dinner of the Withington Wheelers took place at the Hough End Hotel, Chorlton in 1991. The menu declared that the First Dinner was held at the Swan Hotel, Holmes Chapel. This is not correct as the very first Dinner was held at the Sharston Tea Rooms where the two sisters who owned the place laid out the tables with snow-white cloths. The attendance was good at the pocket-breaking price of two shillings (10p in today's currency). There were however many absentees who could not attend because of the price!*

*The dinner was presided over by the self-appointed President of the Club.... one Bernard Taylor. At some point in the proceedings he stood up to make his opening speech. The assembly were in no mood to listen to his 'words of wisdom' and amidst the hullabaloo he took umbrage and departed conveniently forgetting to pay for his meal.*

*The Withington Wheelers sprang to life in early 1931. Much thought had gone into the formation of the club and on a certain day in 1931 it was decided to start a cycling club on official lines. The NCU (National Cyclists Union) were approached by letter and Charlie Hawksworth (the NCU Treasurer at the time) wrote in return. Charlie handwrote a 4-page letter on 'how to form a Cycling Club' .... this letter is still in the possession of the Club.*

*A meeting was called at Jim Forbes's house at 12, Moorfield Street, Withington, and so great was the attendance (approximately 70) that the only way to make progress was to adjourn to the local park where a Mr Leeming of the NCU presided. There was no BC (British Cycling) or RTTC (now the CTT) at that time and all cycling matters were handled by the NCU.*

*The cost of joining an existing cycling club was prohibitive in those days. The YMCA, the EAC and the Manchester Wheelers were expensive to the young lads concerned, pennies were hard to come by and it was decided that the only way was to form a Club on a weekly subscription basis. However this method was found to have difficulties in collection and eventually the club went ahead with a nominal subscription of 3/6 per annum (i.e. three shillings and sixpence, some 17½ pence in today's money). This was deemed to be within the pocket of members and by the summer of that 1931 there were 45 active members.*

*Charlie Hawksworth (in his letter) suggested we approached a businessman named Harry Wilson to be President of the Club. He resided at 119 College Road, Withington and a deputation of two members, Colin Wright and Jim Forbes, kept an appointment and presented themselves at his house finding the 'one and only' Tommy Barlow present. Mr Wilson accepted the presidency, proving to be a very generous man.... allowing the club to use his factory premises at 18, London Road for Committee Meetings. One year we*

were unfortunate to have a club treasurer who absconded with the all the money held in the club funds, Mr Wilson reimbursed us.

During the first meeting Tommy Barlow was elected Vice President, he was a member of the Manchester Wheelers and served on the National Committee of the Road Records Association.

In those days many youths were 'unattached' ie they did not belong to a cycling club and as such were pur Novices and we saw an opportunity to enlarge our membership by promoting an Open Novices 25 and a hill climb. On hearing this Tommy Barlow remarked, "Angels step in where fools fear to tread". We would learn over the coming years that such maxims were part of Tommy's make-up.

So under the guidance of these two seasoned cyclists the Open Novices 25 was launched in April 1932 and the Open Hill Climb in October 1933. The move paid off, the first club handbook was printed in 1933 showing 45 members, all male, as it wasn't until 1936 that females were admitted.

A winged wheel was chosen as the Club's badge but was almost immediately disregarded in favour of the Lancashire Red Rose. This too was thrown out in favour of the current White Lion, the name of the hotel in the centre of Withington where the Club used to start it's Sunday runs.

It is worthy of note that in response to a speech at a club dinner, Tommy Barlow commented "I always thought the rampant lion was in some way connected with the Crusades and I must say it was something of a disappointment to learn it was the motif of a local pub!

*Jim Forbes*

#### The formation of the club and early years ~ 'a hapless failure'

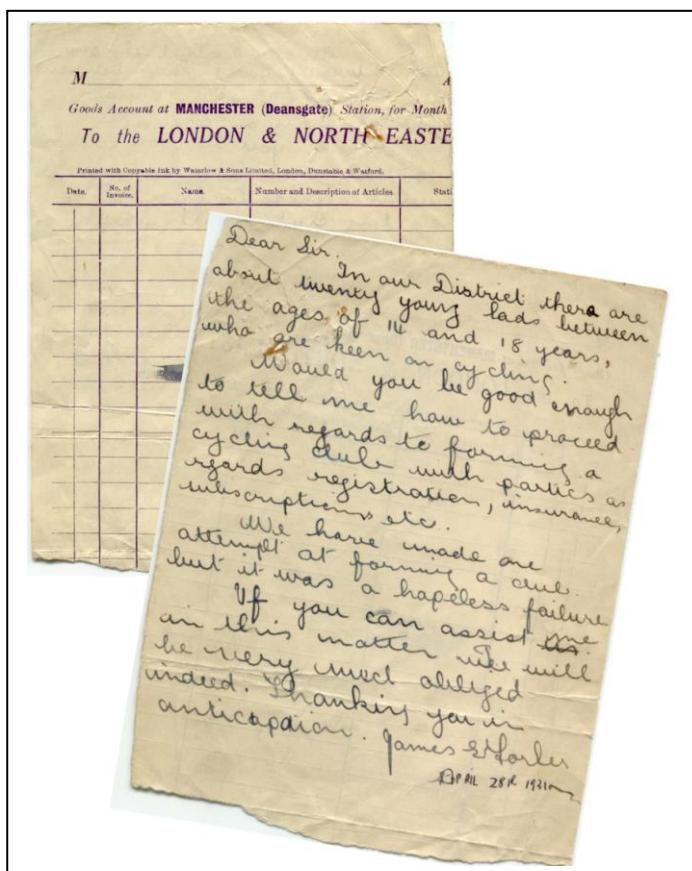
Well that's a good start. The first significant event in the club's history and we're not actually sure when it took place. It seems to have been generally accepted however that the first 'official' club dinner was held at the Swan Hotel, Holmes Chapel on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1932 so without wishing to rock the boat anymore, we'll accept that that was the first club dinner. There had clearly been an 'event' the previous year at the Sharston Tea Rooms but from Jim's brief account of the goings-on however perhaps it's best left out of the official history anyway.

A lot of water has passed under the bridge since those early years and it's hardly surprising that people's memories are a bit hazy. The only reliable source of information is documentary evidence and we are blessed that various people in the club had the foresight to see that they were in at the start of something that just might last a long time. Charles Haines had the inspiration to publish a monthly club journal and Arnold Pennill started a club photograph album that dates back to 1931. In addition, all the journals and nearly every start sheet issued by the club survive.

The first official document in the Withington Wheeler 'archives' is a start sheet from the first race held by the club, over 12 miles to Ringway and back, held on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1931. Unfortunately we don't have the result but we know that it was during this phase that Jim Forbes was attempting to get the club established on a stable foundation. In April 1931, Jim had written to Charles Hawksworth of the N.C.U. for advice and this race was run on his guidelines.

No.	Name.	H' cap.
1.	H. Pemberton.	mine. Ser.
2.	J. Forbes.	Ser.
3.	G. Wright.	Ser.
4.	B. Martin.	½.
5.	H. Reffern.	1.
6.	P. Bell.	1.
7.	J. Lawton.	1.
8.	B. GOODCHILD.	1.
9.	J. Harper.	1.
10.	J. Ingham.	2.
11.	A. Moran.	2.
12.	V. Russell.	3½.
13.	H. Leech.	3½.
14.	B. COOPER.	3½.
RESULTS.....	1st.	
	2nd.	
	3rd.	
	Time.	

Clearly 1931 was a steep learning curve for the fledgling Withington Wheelers, Jim Forbes's letter refers to the original attempt at forming the club in 1931 as a "hapeless (*sic*) failure". This early attempt was just a group of lads with a common interest. Bernard Taylor, who took umbrage at the Sharston club dinner mentioned in the foreword, was some years older than the rest and in their eyes something of a hero. He had ridden a bicycle to North Wales and back and when he had anything to say on cycling matters he was always assured of a ready and attentive audience. When he said the club should elect a President it was only fitting that this hero should be unanimously voted. The overwhelming vote in his favour was due no doubt due to his adventure into the wilds of Wales or equally probably because he was the owner of a brand new Riding's Reliance machine, 'mottled brown' in colour and costing the princely sum of £2.19s.11d.



It was in April 1931 that Jim Forbes penned his appeal for help to Charles Hawksworth (see aside). Jim at the time was working at the Great Northern Goods Warehouse on Deansgate and his note is written on the back of a 'Goods Account' docket.

The reply from Charles Hawksworth, as Jim says in the Foreword, it is still in the possession of the club but unfortunately the letter is too large to be reproduced here. The letter is a work of art, hand-written on 4 pages of National Cyclists Union headed notepaper. Page 2 of the letter not only lists the seven salient points that the fledgling Withington Wheelers had to follow but also outlines eleven club rules that were to form the basis of the club. The last rule in the list, number 11 reads; "Members must not pass the captain or acting captain on any club run, without his permission to do so. Any member disobeying this rule renders themselves to be expelled from the club". Charles Hawksworth even suggested in his

letter that the club take one of the following names, and I quote; "Withington Wheelers, Fallowfield Cycling Club, Didsbury Wheelers or South Manchester Wheelers".

Through this letter the club were introduced to a prominent Manchester businessman, Harry Wilson, and he was invited to be our President (our hero had resigned the office). Harry accepted, and his great generosity in every way was of tremendous benefit to the young club in those early critical days. For good measure he brought along a close friend who at that time served on the National Committee of the Road Records Association. This was of course the one and only Tommy Barlow who led the club in an advisory capacity for many years.

This first chapter will look briefly at various aspects of the club that were introduced in the 1930s including the Club Journals, the Novices 25, the Withington Wheelers BAR & Club Champions, the Open Hill Climb and the ‘Blue Riband’ 25 record. Each of these aspects will be covered fully in later chapters.

During 1931 the club was sufficiently established to promote a number of reliability rides, the most popular of these being to cover 100 miles in 8 hours, the course taking the riders down to Shropshire and back. These events were well supported and as a result the club received numerous applications for membership.

The club gathered strength throughout 1931 but it wasn’t until the following year, 1932 that the club got involved in the Manchester racing scene. Under the guidance of the two experienced enthusiasts, Harry Wilson and Tommy Barlow, the club launched an Open Novices 25 miles time trial in April of that year, which attracted a field of 48 entries. During the remainder of 1932 the club promoted club events at 25 and 50 miles and further Reliability Rides.

### The Club Journals

It had clearly been a busy year and the first journal was published in November 1932, right at the end of the first racing season. The Withington Wheelers club journal has been the mainstay of the club for the past seventy-odd years and it is to this first journal that we look to for a description of this first year. There is an impression of the first journal, Volume 1 Number 1, over the page and it makes interesting reading. Besides the racing calendar the club runs, or Fixtures, are listed. The journal describes the runs as a “very enjoyable feature of the club’s programme”. Runs to such places as Edale, Glossop, Monsall Dale, Peak Forest are planned, the usual places that generations of club runs have headed to for decades. Although the first journal only lists the lunch stop, future journals would also list the tea stop for the ride home. Looking at the first journal perhaps we should show our appreciation of the Editors who served the club so well. The first Editor was Charles (Chas) Haines who joined the club in 1932 and remained a one-club man until his dying day. It was his own idea that the club should have a journal, and what a gem of an idea it was too. Here perhaps we could dwell on the observations of Herbert Burton who took office in 1951, as the club was about to ‘come of age’ at 21 years, and made the following comments about his predecessors.....

#### *“From the Editors Chair*

*In taking over the job of Editor there are so many things I would like to say to you. Most of them must wait. In this issue, my first..... and the last before the club reaches full maturity, I would like to pay tribute to some of the people who have made this milestone possible....Your Editors, who have done more than the men who have supplied us with the news, who have recorded our history, have given us all a common link and above all have inspired us to greater efforts. It is therefore with pride I pledge to do my best to continue the good work and to present to you My Roll of Meritorious Achievement....*

CHARLES D. HAINES (November 1932 to January 1941), to him we owe a great deal. He created the journal, from the first humble sheet in 1932 he steadily enlarged to a multi-page journal of a quality unsurpassed since. When the call of war-service came Chas. left behind a brilliant chapter of Club history.

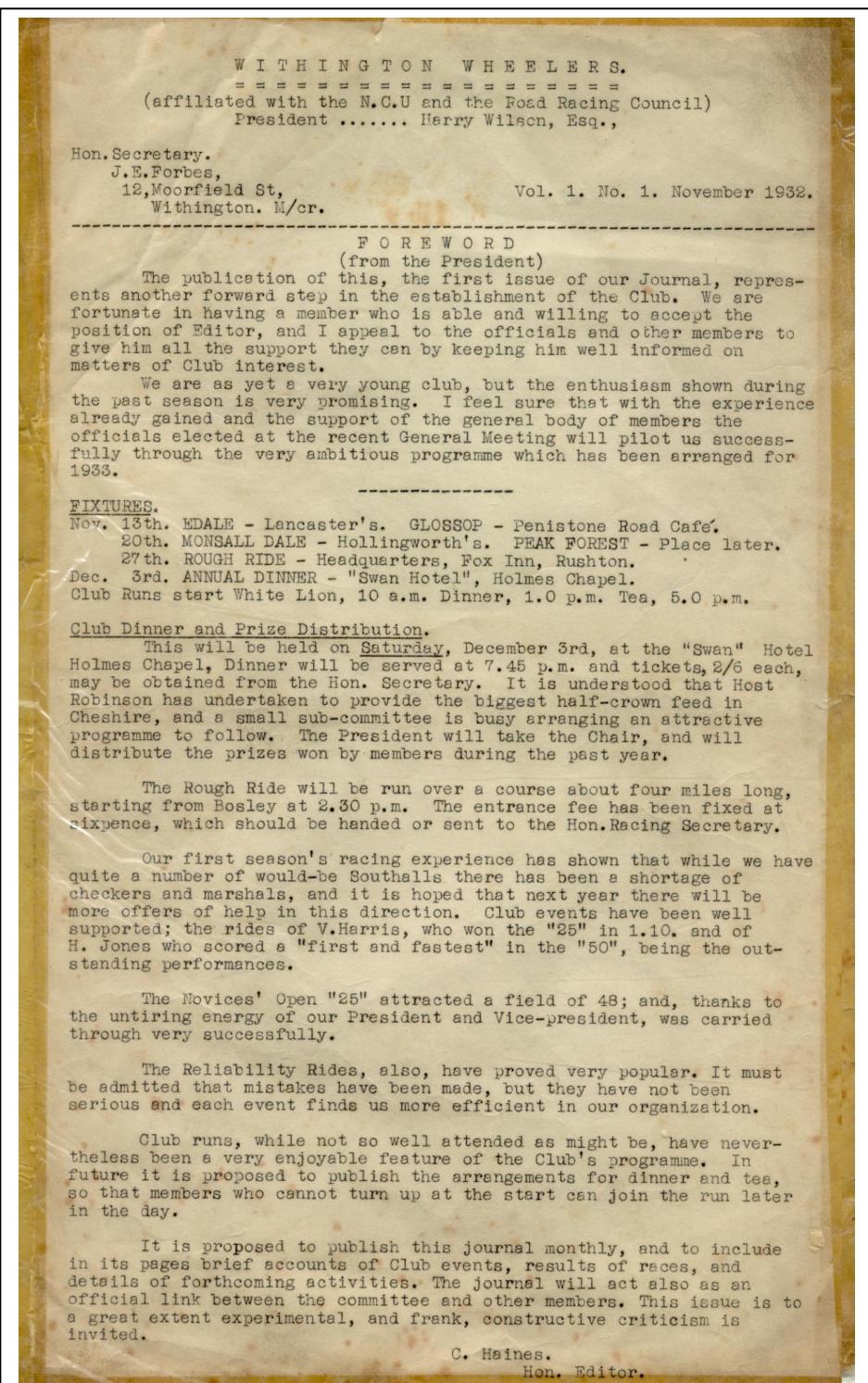
To ALAN A BATES (June 1941 to May 1946), for keeping the journal (and the club, alive when all but a handful of members were scattered to the four corners of the earth. He gathered news from the Med. to Murmansk, from England to Egypt, from Canada to Calcutta, from Africa to Australia, from soldiers, sailors and airmen to the workers at home. He kept us all in touch.

To RONALD MACQUEEN (May 1946 to August 1949), for gathering up the ashes in 1946 and rekindling the flame. He steered us to the Club we know today. Last of all to your retiring Ed.

Kenneth, PERRINS (October 1949 to October 1951). His work you all know".

HERBERT BURTON served as Editor from November 1951 to October 1953. A future Editor described him as "a more than conscientious editor whose work was invaluable".

Alan Bates, Ron McQueen, Ken Perrins and all our other Editors will feature in following chapters but for the moment let's concentrate on the 1930's and the priceless publications that Chas Haines published monthly from the winter of 1932.



With the racing season over, the young members wanted to sustain the enthusiasm of their first year and set about the winter of 1932 with a number of innovative ideas. The first Rough Ride took place on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1932 and Chas Haines reported in the journal....

*"The Road Racing Secretary and the Weather Clerk conspired together on the eve of this event, and decided that the Rough Ride would be more worthy of its name:*

- (a) *if about a quarter of a mile of Bosley's most treacherous country were included. and*
- (b) *if the course were covered with about ten inches of mud.*

*In view of the fact that heavy rain fell all morning, the remarkable thing was, not that there were only four riders, but that there were any riders at all. The R.R. Sec, with that combination of enthusiasm and efficiency, which we are beginning to associate with his name, had nailed up wooden arrows at every turning point on the course, and in addition several members acted as checkers. Just after the start George Watson fell and brought down Jim Forbes and Chas Haines thus enabling Phil Jones to get away with a good lead. Some minutes later, however, Phil pulled his wheel over and was overtaken again. Towards the end Forbes got away, finally winning by three minutes from Watson. Haines was third after falling and cutting his knee badly.*

*Times: Forbes 24 mins; Watson 27 mins; Haines 33 mins.*

*Phil Jones was missing at the finish having punctured and packed. Mr. Barlow and the R.R. Sec went a rough-ride in the President's car to look for him, but he turned up later at the "Fox" very little the worse".*

The club's first racing season was wound up by the Club Dinner & Prize Distribution, which took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1932 at the Swan Hotel, Holmes Chapel. The journal records that "If our first Club Dinner is to be taken as an indication of the success of our forthcoming season, then 1933 should be full of good things for us. The right spirit prevailed everywhere, while 'Enthusiasm' was the slogan for the night. Though the evening was wet, there were no damp spirits, for Host Robinson, in fulfilling his promise cheered the hearts of all and sundry by the bountiful spread, which he set before us. The feature of the Prize Distribution, which followed, was that none of the prizewinners had ever before experienced the joy of going up for a prize in the cycling-world. The Concert programme was necessarily a short one, but nevertheless very enjoyable. Y. Harris (cornetist) and D. Barker at the piano gave several musical items and choruses, and Bill Kennedy recited a cleverly written poem of his own on the Rough Ride. The evening passed all too quickly, and as we wended our several ways home we were all agreed, that the Dinner had been a very fitting finale to our first season".

The 1933 season kicked off with another inventive suggestion and a Paper-Chase was held on 29<sup>th</sup> January. This was followed in successive weeks by the Opening Run to Chester and then the '100 in 7' Reliability Ride on 12<sup>th</sup> February.

Not much was said about the Paper Chase but we can only assume it was a success. The Opening Run was scheduled to lunch at Chester and then head for Holmes Chapel where entertainment had been laid on for tea. Due to 'a boisterous head-wind, a late start and repeated stops', the twelve members failed to reach Chester so Whitegate was chosen as the venue for lunch. The lads then made their way in twos and threes to the Swan at Holmes Chapel where music by Jack Dove constituted, in the opinion of all present, an end to 'a pleasant and perfect day'.

The '100 in 7' Reliability Ride attracted an entry of 128 riders, including six tandems and one tricycle. Withington members who rode were restricted by the fact that many were called upon to act as checkers and marshals. As the journal had pleaded so quaintly the previous month, 'please assure the H.R.S. (*Hon Racing Secretary*) that you and your iron will be at his service on that very busy day'. On the morning, Tommy Barlow, Bert Jones and Chas Haines soon transformed the crowds of starters into orderly groups and by 9.35am Sharston Green was deserted and had once

more assumed its respectable and law-abiding appearance. Good weather prevailed throughout the day but a deceptive wind slowed the riders and fastest took 6 hours exactly. The fastest Withington Wheeler was Herbert Whitbread who took 6 hours 9 minutes. Medals were presented all the finishers who made it back to Sharston Green within the 7 hours. The other Withington members who qualified were G.Quick (6.30), F.Wheeler (6.37), C.Shattock (6.37), A.Ravion (6.42), F.Smith (6.42), and S.Harrison (6.53).

The second Novices and a medium gear 25 passed uneventfully and it with the days lengthening the Withington members were soon taking an interest in the longer distances. The official club run to the Anfield 100 on the May Bank Holiday of 5<sup>th</sup> June was in the nature of a night-ride starting from the White Lion at 10.30pm on the Sunday night.

Another ‘100 in 7’ took place on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1933, a particularly hot day with no likelihood of rain, ‘so many riders discarded guards and other impediments and shorts and socks appeared to be the reigning vogue’. The times were considerably faster than the previous Reliability Ride. The club organised a ‘150 in 12’ Reliability Ride on 27<sup>th</sup> August but a particularly hot day lead to many riders struggling on the way to the turn and made ‘those seventy-five miles something to remember’. Despite these harassing elements not a few riders had sufficient in hand to take full advantage of the run home and make up the arrears.

The club events were in full swing by the summer of 1933. The Withington held Club 50s on 18<sup>th</sup> June and 16<sup>th</sup> July and the Club 100, held in conjunction with the Grosvenor Wheelers, took place on 10<sup>th</sup> September. Twelve Withington Wheelers entered the Club 100 but only six finished, the fastest being A.L.Jones in 5 hours 42 minutes. The second Club 25 was an inter-club with the Irwell Castle CC and was held on 8<sup>th</sup> October. The Withington triumphed with a team made up of A.Smith (1.9.11), P.A.Jones (1.10.50) and Chas Haines (1.11.18).

Thanks to Tommy Barlow the Club managed to run it's own 12 Hour in 1934. The Club invited the Altrincham Ravens to join us. Our entry was 9. In 1935 we ran the event ourselves and 4 took part. In 1937 and 1938 the event was run by the M&DTTA. Our entry in 1937 was 7 and 10 in 1938. The Withington Wheelers are one of the original nine clubs who, in 1937, formed the M&DTTA. The 12 Hour brings us nicely to the question of the BAR and the title of Club Champion that is bestowed on the Best All Rounder.

### The Best All Rounder

The Best All-Rounder Competition was introduced in 1933, using the best average speeds over three distances, 25 miles, 50 miles and 100 miles. The final table looked like this with Phil Jones running out as the first Withington Wheelers Club Champion.

THE BEST ALL-ROUNDER CONTEST, 1933.

In 1934 the Club adopted the National B.A.R. times for it's All-Rounder Competition of 50, 100 and 12 Hours. Phil again took the title with a reduced average of 18.58mph, he also won in 1935 with an average of 19.11mph. In 1936 Harry Lloyd took the title with 19.54mph, in 1937 he again took the honours with a much improved average of 20.11mph and for this performance he received a certificate from "Cycling" recording the feat. In 1938 a newcomer to the Club, Alan Grant, won the "All-Rounder" competition with an average speed of 19.80mph.

Due to the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 the Committee had originally made the following decision regarding the 1939 Club Championship. The October 1939 Club Journal makes the following report;

"At the last meeting of the Committee the question of the club's Best All Rounder competition was discussed at great length and it was finally decided that in view of the fact that the season had been cut off abruptly the contest be declared void. Certificates of Merit are to be awarded as some form of consolation to the riders who have completed the three distances.

Here is the last position;

	<u>50</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>12 Hour</u>	<u>Average</u>
Tom Frith	2.19.49	5.10.40	218½	19.73mph
PA Jones	2.23.29	5.07.50	217	19.49mph
H Whitbread	2.23.57	5.09.03	216	19.42mph
JE Forbes	2.23.51	5.36.48	207	18.94mph"

Tom Frith was subsequently awarded the 1939 Club Championship.

Tom Frith was of course one of the four Withington Wheelers who were killed in the war. After the war, Tom's family presented the club with the Tom Frith Shield which is presented to the winning team in the Open Hill Climb each year.

There was however one more Club Champion before the competition was completely abandoned because of the war. Stan Heeley won the BAR in 1940, this is how Jim Forbes described the sequence of events;

"at this point it would be churlish not to mention Stan Heeley's victory in the 1940 event. This event as usual, was organised by Tommy Barlow, the Headquarters was Bates' in Goostrey and Irene had arranged a sit -down feed covered, and occupying the forecourt of their premises. The riders came and were suitably nourished and sent on their way. (the distance at this point about 130 miles). Our Stan arrived and was duly 'administered' to by the 'helpers' in the persons of Adrian Mayson and Jim Forbes. Only when the next rider was sent on his way was it noticed that he was pushed off in the opposite direction to our Stan. We consulted the 'start-sheet' and to our horror realised we had indeed sent Stan off in the wrong direction. We grabbed the motor-bike on which we were assisting and set off after Stan catching up with him near Goostrey station. We came up alongside him, tapped him on the shoulder and gave him the bad news... the look on his face will forever haunt me as he turned round and proceeded to catch up the lost miles. He won that years Club BAR and shortly afterwards departed these shores for Canada. To say "he deserved" the Championship goes without saying and though his mph was not recorded his effort will surely go down as one of the finest performed".

Stan's mph was subsequently added to the records. His average was 18.55mph.

## The "Grimpeurs" and the Open Hill Climb

The first Open Hill Climb took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1933 with 54 entries, 50 starters and 37 finishers. Entries (postal order only) were 1/6 (one shilling and sixpence), first prize Two Guineas, second One Guinea and third Half-a-Guinea.

Stan Livingston of the Dukinfield CC was fastest with a time of 6 minutes 43 seconds, three seconds faster than W Booth, of the now defunct Peterloo CC, who led his team to victory in the team race. The fastest Withington Wheeler was Jim Forbes in 18<sup>th</sup> place with a time of 8 minutes exactly. The full length of the hill was used in 1933 but in 1934 the traditional shorter course was used, the full length of the hill would not be used again until the Withington had the honour of organising the National Hill Climb in 1964.

**Withington Wheelers Open Hill Climb.**

This event will be held on SUNDAY, OCTOBER 22nd, 1933, over a course approximately one mile in length.

**PERSLOWS HILL, CHAPEL-EN-LE-FRITH,**  
competitors starting at one-minute intervals from 11.01 a.m.

Headquarters: The Jolly Carter Inn, Chapel-en-le-Frith, where dressing accommodation is available.

The event is confined to amateur riders of single bicycles. Entries, accompanied by an entry fee of One Shilling and Sixpence, will be accepted up to 7.30 p.m. on Tuesday, October 17th, and should be addressed to:

THE RACING SECRETARY, Withington Wheelers,  
Third Floor,  
18, London Road, Manchester.

Prizes (to be selected by the winners) will be awarded as follows:

Fastest time ...	value Two Guineas.
Second fastest ...	value One Guinea.
Third fastest ...	value Half-a-guinea.

Team prizes: Three silver and three bronze medals. (The fastest three members of any one Club constitute a team).

Perslows Hill is on the road between Chapel-en-le-Frith and Sparrowpit. The starting point for the climb is immediately behind the "Jolly Carter," a quarter of a mile from Chapel-en-le-Frith in the direction of Buxton and Chesterfield.

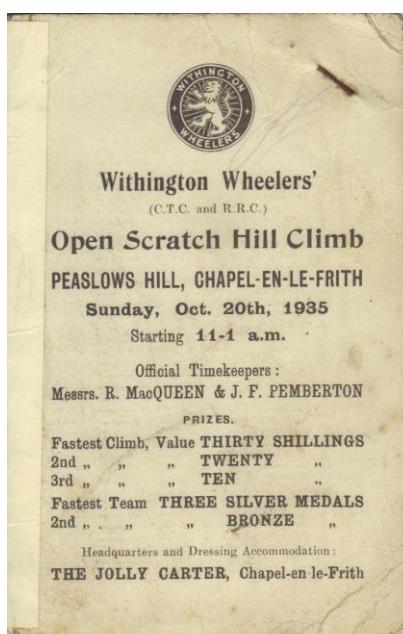
WITHINGTON WHEELERS OPEN HILL CLIMB, 1933.  
**ENTRY FORM.**

To the Racing Secretary, Withington Wheelers, 18, London Road, Manchester.

Dear Sir,  
Please accept my entry for this event. I enclose Postal Order No.....for 1/6, entry fee.

Name.....  
Address to which starting-cheat is to be sent.....  
Club.....

In 1934 there was an entry of 66 riders and to quote from the journal "the length used was only 900 yards – an amendment which proved to be rather popular". An interesting entry was Wilf Higgins, then British Empire Sprint Champion; however he was under-gearied and finished well down the list. The winner was Bert Williams of the Clarion clocking 2mins 52secs to beat Stan Livingstone by 5<sup>1/5</sup> seconds. Stan had the consolation of leading the Dukinfield CC to team award victory. Once more Jim Forbes was fastest of our men with a time of 3mins 26secs.



1935 showed a great improvement in the club's fortunes. From 75 entries Jim Forbes put up second fastest time with 2mins 44s and backed by Alan Grant (3mins 6<sup>1/5</sup> secs) and Arnold Smith (3mins 15<sup>3/5</sup> secs) he led our team to victory. Ernie Atherton of the Yorkshire RC, a crack hill climber with an unbeaten record was winner with 2mins 41<sup>4/5</sup> secs. However Jim was only warming up for the following week when he went to Monsall Head and again ran second to Atherton in the Derby Ivanhoe hill climb, this time by only one second. And then, in the Saddleworth Wheelers climb on Bearda Hill, Dane Bridge, Macclesfield came success. Jim beat Ernie Atherton by 1/5 of a second and thus gained for the Withington

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CYCLING  
AMONG the 75 entries received for the Withington Wheelers open hill climb, which was held on Peaslow Hill, Chapel-en-le-Frith, were the brothers

### THE CAPTAIN'S SPORTING GOSSIP

Gorton and "Ginger" Murray, the well-known path riders.

Notable entrants in the road-racing section were E. Atherton, the Yorkshire Road Club champion; C. C. Lamb, the Manchester Wheelers' champion; and J. E. Carr, the Anfield "100" winner.

#### Caused Their Downfall

APPROXIMATELY 900 yards long, the gradient averages one in seven, and this proved the downfall of the sprinters, whose best man finished sixth.

Atherton made the fastest ascent in the record time of 2min. 41sec., but it was left to J. E. Forbes, of the promoting club, to furnish the surprise of the day by finishing second, only two seconds in arrear. Fifty-eight succeeded in reaching the timekeeper, Mr. R. MacQueen, the slowest competitor being well outside four minutes.

#### Attempt Abandoned

WEATHER conditions were entirely against Smith Parker, and at the last moment he wisely decided to abandon his effort on A. L. Abram's newly made tricycle record between London and Liverpool.

So ends the busiest season the Road Record Association has ever experienced in its 50 years existence.

WHEELERS IT'S very first Open win, meanwhile shattering Atherton's hitherto unbeaten hill climbing record. But Jim wasn't finished and over to Grimsby he went to beat the local champion by three seconds by surmounting Nettleton Hill in record time.

1936 gave us very nearly the same result as 1935, for Jim was again second in our event and once more led the club to team victory, Alan Grant being fourth and the third member Harry Lloyd. Jim Forbes' time of 2mins 41<sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs in our 1936 hill climb stood as the fastest ride by a Withington Wheeler for over 50 years until it was beaten by Neil Byrne in 1991 in a time of 2mins 36.4secs. Atherton was only third, the winner being Benny Clare of the North Manchester Harriers, although amazingly the local press managed to get the winner wrong and reported Atherton the fastest in error (see "The Captain's Sporting Gossip" above). Benny's time was 2mins 40<sup>1</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs which created a new course record for the hill. Several of our lads competed in the Bradford Victoria, Derby Ivanhoe and Saddleworth climbs, but without success and it remained for Jim to travel down to the Catford CC Hill Climb (then the unofficial national championship), on Adrian Mayson's motor bike, borrow a bike and finish ninth of 90 riders - gaining himself a certificate. The last climb of the season was the Whaley Bridge event on Peaslows when Alan Grant was second and Jim fourth. Holmes of massed-start racing fame won this event and beat Clare's record.

The club really went to town in 1937, everybody putting in bags of collective training. As a result there was quite a scrap between the junior members to fill the third place in our team. Alan Grant was now ousting Jim but who cared as long as the club was at the top first? In our own climb Alan Grant was second to Jack Holmes whose 2mins 35<sup>1</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs broke his own course record. Holmes was supported by Jack Fancourt and Joe Aspinall for the Yorkshire RC to take first team award, while Alan Grant, Jim Forbes and Tommy Frith took the second team honours. In the Bradford Victoria event Alan was third, Jim was sixth and Ken Perrins made up a trio which took second team honours.



Alan Grant won the Derby Ivanhoe event with Alan Bates fifth and Jim Forbes ninth, these three taking first team award. On the Saddleworth slippery slopes we again won the team race, Grant being second and well backed by Jim and Kent. Interesting point was that out of 63 starters only 9 managed to keep contact with their machines to the summit! In the final event of the year, the Eagle RC climb up Bearda, Alan Grant was second and with Alan Bates and Tom Frith the club took second team award, earning our fourth set of team medals.

In 1938 we contested, in all, eight climbs including a memorable trip to the Catford. Taking our Open first, a point most worthy of note was the full start card of 100 names. Harry Batty of the Dukinfield was fastest in 2mins 47secs, Alan Grant in second place only 2/5 of a second slower and Jim Forbes fourth. Alan Bates now improving steadily recorded 3mins 02<sup>2</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs and these three easily took first place in the team race. In the Potteries event Alan Grant was fourth, Frank Stanfield fifth and Jim, riding all the way with a flat back tyre, was sixth. At Monsall, in the Derby Ivanhoe, Alan

Bates also rode the whole distance on a flat. And then came the mass assault on the Catford. Ten of our lads set fourth in two big Austins – seven to ride, accompanied by Charlie Haines, Freddy Wheeler and Walt Massey who went along to hurl encouragement. Admittedly we took no premier awards, But Alan Grant was seventh with 2mins 24<sup>2</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs; Jim 2mins 36<sup>1</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs (18<sup>th</sup>) and Bertie Burton 2mins 38<sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs (24<sup>th</sup>) taking third team place. Alan Bates did 2mins 40s, Ken Perrins 2mins 51s, Maurice Laverick 3mins 06s and Tommy Frith 3mins 19s. Only the two Alans stayed with their machines in the Saddleworth and in the Eagle, Alan Bates was the best of our lads being fourth and with Alan Grant and Jim Forbes, took second team. In the Rossendale, another freak hill, we were again second team, Alan Grant also tying for second place. Noteworthy, was the Walton climb with five of the club in the first nine. Grant tied for third place, Bates fifth and Bert Burton (6<sup>th</sup>) at last achieved his aim of earning a first team medal.

Come 1939 and the black hand of war. But to the minds of our grimpeurs there sprang a larger tragedy – not one prize did we take in hill climbs. Many events were cancelled but our own promotion received a fine entry of 86. The day was hard and times were slow, our old friend Jack Holmes doing the trick with 3mins 02s. Harold Worthen of the Clarion was second with 3mins 07<sup>1</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs beating Postlethwaite of the Sheffield Phoenix by  $\frac{1}{5}$  second. The Yorkshire Roads took the team award followed by the Dukinfield CC with us in third position, Alan Grant was fifth, 11 seconds behind the winner, in 3mins 13<sup>1</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs. Alan was also fifth in the Walton Paragon with 2mins 04s, our only other riders being Ken Perrins, 2mins 19s and Bert Burton 2mins 20s.

In 1940 the winner was Harold Worthen with 3mins 08<sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs put up on a bad day and beating Postlethwaite, 3mins 12<sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs and Batty 3mins 15<sup>1</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs. The Clarion beat the Duky by ten seconds in the team race. Our only two entrants in a field of 42 were Ken Perrins and Arnold Pennill who were both DNS.

Five years passed by with most of the lads in the services. Four of our best did not return and with the resumption of Club life it was decided to award a shield in honour and memory of Tommy Frith, the only hill-climber who gave his life, to the winning team of the Open promotion. In 1946 the “Tom Frith Memorial trophy” was won by the Altrincham Ravens, though Eric Mitchell of the South Lancs RC made fastest time of 42 entrants. The best placed of our riders was Lance Tulip in a time of 3mins 45<sup>2</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs.

Then 1947 and start of the Clarion avalanche. First three positions were taken by Dick Woore, Don Nield and Harold Worthen in that order. The same three Clarion riders again saved our officials a lot of trouble in finding the first team in both 1948 and 1949. The 1948 result was Woore, Worthen and Nield in that order, Lance Tulip had a go at Jim Forbes’ record but his time was 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs slower than Jim’s.

The Open Hill Climb is still held every year on Peaslows Hill and the full history, including the details of Malcolm Elliott’s record breaking ride on the hill in 1981, can be found in a later chapter.

#### The Blue ribbon - “that 25 Record”

Whilst numerous strong arguments could very easily be made out in respect of the virtues and merits of, say, the 100 and 12 hour competition records it is no secret that more have cast coveting eyes on the 25 than on the more classic distances. The Club 25 record has passed down the years as each generation of Withington Wheelers has lowered the standard.

As far as is possible to tell the first record holder was V. Harris who in 1932 won the very first club 25, the journal simply recording that he won in 1.10. From then on, of course, there was a standard to be beaten and Jim Forbes did the trick with 1.9.47 in the Stretford Wheelers 2<sup>nd</sup> Class event of

July 1933, only to see it beaten the same year by A. Smith in 1.9.11 in an inter club event with the Irwell Castle on 8 October.

This was destined to stand until May 1935 when in another inter club, this time against the Salford Roads, Alan Grant put up fastest time of the day in 1.7.35. Smithy, not to be outdone, came up with 1.6.42 in the Altringham Ravens event in August of the same year. By this time competition was so keen that in the same event Grant was only 2 seconds slower, and yet a third rider, C Shattock, was also inside the old record. Alan Grant had to wait another two years before establishing supremacy with 1.6.14 in the West Pennine. Then, just to make sure, he came up with 1.5.38 in the Ravens only a month later in July 1937, a ride destined to stand for many years; in fact right through to the end of the thirties, through the war and into the 1950s. It was in fact May 1950 when Lance Tulip who had been thwarted on several occasions in the late forties, did 1.5.18 on Brock. Then exactly as Alan Grant had done 13 years earlier, once having found the way, got up in the Ravens and did 1.3.57. Lance's 25 record was to stand for two years but we'll leave the name of the next holder and the tales and events of the fifties to a later chapter.

Here's one of the first group pictures of the club taken in the early 1930s.

