

Extract from the Time Standard¹ of September, 1933

In 1892, the second year of our existence, cycling touring was no new thing, but it was an unknown quantity with us. Therefore, at the beginning of the season, when a tour was mooted, we were all agog with excitement and many weird and wonderful schemes were suggested. Amongst others was the idea that we should spend Whitsun in Birmingham (Ye Gods! Birmingham!). However, wiser counsels prevailed and eventually it was decided to ride to Weston on the morning of Whit Saturday and remain there until Monday morning, and then come home via Bath. (No Sunday riding in those days, my maties)

Well, at 6 a.m. on the appointed day, ten of us set off, an early start being deemed advisable in view of the distance. At Bristol a halt was called for breakfast. The Sub-Captain who had ridden down the last declivity with his legs over the handles of his G.O.O.² was suddenly shot forward and alighted on his hands and toes. The machine righted itself and ran on till it struck a curb. I mention this incident to illustrate the state of the traffic, or rather lack of traffic, at that time.

After breakfast the journey resumed and about noon we were entering Weston, the bugler sounded a fan fare and all in single file we processioned down Regent Street. Weston had not then attained its present popularity and when without previous booking we applied for accommodation at the restaurant kept by one, Kift by name, we were welcomed at once.

Eight of us occupied a large room containing four double beds, the other two being accommodated in a smaller room with one double bed. Saturday afternoon was spent in seeing the sights and watching the tide come in.

On returning to rest, someone suggested that "Jim"³ should give a recitation. Jim obliged with "The Bridgekeeper's Story"⁴. As he proceeded with the tale his voice got fainter and fainter and at last stopped altogether. Jim was asleep, but not for long. A well directed pillow soon put an end to his slumbers. Then the fun began. For most of the night the battle raged and was resumed with daylight in the morning.

Soon after 6 a.m. we were all out en route for a swim at Knightstone Baths⁵. After breakfast an argument ensued as to whether we should attend church or chapel. As we were about equally divided, the church party offered to accompany the others to the chapel in the evening if they would agree to all go to church in the morning. Agreed! It was done. We were all very good boys in those days.

¹ The Time Standard was the name of the Club's newsletter, first published in 1933

² Good Old Ordinary, commonly known as a Penny Farthing. It's notable that by the time of the Club's group photo (above) the following year all sixteen of the riders pictured had safety bicycles. The G.O.O. had had its day!

³ "Jim" was probably J. Smith who is seen in the photograph above

⁴ An inspirational story in which a father is faced with the horrifying choice between saving his son's life at the cost of many or watching his son die as his inaction saves others.

⁵ The Knightstone Baths are still open. Advertised in 1845 as offering "every kind of Bath". Ladies' and gentleman's baths were apart, each having their dressing room and toilette. There were also hot and cold shower baths, dry hot and vapour baths, medicated with sulphur, iodine, chlorine or otherwise, with apparatus for the administration of the douche. It was sold in 1882 to a Mr Griffiths who enlarged the open air men's swimming pool and built a covered pool for ladies which (extended) is still in use to-day as the teaching pool. In 2008 Redrow Homes won an award for restoration work on three grade II-listed buildings on the island – the Pavilion Theatre, Dr Fox's Bath House and the historic swimming baths.

After chapel some excitement was caused by the arrival of another member. This youth was a keen member of the Gloucester Volunteer Rifles (the forerunner of the Territorial Army) and as there was a Military Church Parade in the morning he had attended that first and then set out for Weston.

Our host was equal to the occasion and a single bed was promptly rigged up in the large room. This was, as you may imagine, a good excuse for further bolster fights and I remember distinctly that my bed-fellow and I had to make our bed four times that night.

Monday morning about 10 a.m. we set out for Bath, and as we knew no other way we retraced our tracks to Bristol. This being Bank Holiday, all Bristol's factory workers were journeying by four-horse rakes to the sea. They were a thirsty crowd, judging by the congestion outside the pubs, and the welkin⁶ rang with the refrain of "Maggy Murphy's Home"⁷, then the popular song of the day.

Bath was reached in time for tea. Here we were informed that there was a fête in progress at the Sydney Gardens⁸. Nothing would do but that we must go. Stay for the fireworks? What do you think? Never mind the journey home!

Twelve o'clock, midnight. Eleven tired cyclists scaling the dizzy heights of Lansdown Hill to stop at every cross roads. Which way? Climb up the sign post with your lamp and see what it says!

On again, more cross roads, more climbing up the sign posts. At last dawn appears, and the "Black Horse"⁹ at Tiltups End, above Nailsworth, looms in sight. Here tired nature asserted herself. One fell asleep and off his bike at the same time. Another lay down in the middle of the road and was immediately in the land of nod. After knocking the landlord up most of them decided to rest for an hour or so but three, including the writer, were supposed to be at work that day so we had to go on!

⁶ **Welkin** is an archaic, English term; it refers to the sky, the upper air, the firmament, the heavens or the Celestial sphere

⁷ A song by Harrigan and Braham whose Chorus ran:

"On Sunday night 'tis my delight and pleasure, don't you see,
Meeting all the girls and the boys that work down town with me.
There's an organ in the parlor to give the house a tone,
And you're welcome every evening at Maggie Murphy's home."

You can hear it at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cD_6kC7zRs

⁸ The gardens were constructed in the 1790s opening in 1795 as a commercial pleasure grounds. The original plans included a maze or labyrinth,^[4] grotto, sham castle and an artificial rural scene with moving figures powered by a clockwork mechanism. Around 1810 the Kennet and Avon Canal was built through the gardens, followed in 1840 by the Great Western Railway. In the 1860s a gymnasium and bandstand were constructed and courts laid for tennis, archery and croquet. In 1891 the original 99-year lease expired and it was sold, the site was bought by Bath City Council in 1908 and reopened to the public in 1913.

⁹ Now the Tippetts Inn, after internal alterations in 1976 and a subsequent rebranding.

As we reached the junction with Bristol Road at Hardwicke, the late John Hanman, then Gloucester's fastest rider, dashed by and informed us that T.A. Edge who was attempting the End-to-End record¹⁰ was just behind. At that time pacing was allowed, and when Edge (who had worn out his pacers) appeared, he appealed to us to pace him to Gloucester.

We did not feel much like acting as pace-maker to a record breaker, you may be sure, but we shook up for a final effort and brought him to the Spread Eagle Hotel¹¹, now known as Northgate Mansions.

Need it be said that I fell asleep over my work later on that day, and had to go home to bed?

It must be remembered that we were all very young and very inexperienced. It was a new Club and we had no old hands to point the way. Thus ended the Club's first Tour.

Felix. C. Oehl¹²

¹⁰ He succeeded, after starting from Land's End on a Monday morning at 6 o'clock he covered the distance in four days and 40 minutes. This was 10 hrs and 37 mins. faster than the previous record set by George Pilkington Mills. Mr. Mills had something of a history on this course. His first record, which stands to this day, was set on a solid tyred 53 inch Ordinary was made at the age of 19. Despite poor weather and high winds that even blew him and his pacing companions off their bicycles at one point, he rode the distance in 5 days 1 hour 45 minutes. In 1886 he set a tricycle record. He retook the bicycle record in 1894 (3d 5 h 49m) and then with Mr. Edge set a tandem record of 3d 4h 46m.

Road surfaces in that era were loose, often heavily rutted by horse and carriage traffic, dusty when dry and a quagmire when wet. The bicycles ridden were very much heavier than today. The 1891 record was made on a bicycle weighing about 45 lbs and fitted with low pressure balloon-like pneumatic tyres that suffered numerous punctures. In many ways the 1886 Tricycle record is perhaps the most remarkable, being performed on a heavy solid tyred machine probably weighing about 75 lbs.

¹¹ Northgate Mansions, still stands on Northgate Street by Bruton Way, but was partially demolished in 2011 after The roof and rear wall had already collapsed between Christmas and New Year 2010.

¹² F.C.Oehl was a founder member of the Club and in 1893 was elected Secretary, an office he held until 1897. He went on to serve the Club in one capacity or another until his death in 1946

Footnotes separated and repeated.

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 - b. Meeting all the girls and the boys that work down town with me.
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