

## HISTORY of NORWICH AMATEUR BICYCLE CLUB - Founded 1879

At 7.30pm on Tuesday evening 30th September 1879 a group of cycling enthusiasts started out from the Volunteer Stores Public House, Chapelfield, Norwich, thus commencing the first club run of the newly formed Norwich Amateur Bicycle Club. Although they probably did not realise it, they were entering upon over a 130 years of continued cycling club history. This makes the Amateurs one of the oldest cycling clubs in the country.

Unfortunately there is little on record of those first years of the club. It is conceivable that the Norwich Amateurs were established following the demise of an even older club, the Norfolk and Norwich Bicycle Club, whose racing and other activities on roads around Norwich were regularly reported in the newspapers of that time. However, there is more evidence about the club from the early years of the 20th century. Handbooks and contemporary histories make reference to the successes of club racing members and also to the number of prominent Norwich and Norfolk people who were presidents, vice presidents and officials - Sir Samuel Hoare, Sir Frederick Low, Harvey, Copeman, Colman, Patteson, Bullard, Eade, Paul, Morse, Bignold, White, Chamberlin, Rumsey Wells and Wilmott. The list reads like a Norwich "who's who". (See the lists below.)

Membership in the early years numbered around 60. To start with this was an exclusively male membership and in 1909 the then secretary was quoted as saying, "Dame Fortune is the only lady member we desire." Not until 1936 were ladies admitted to membership. The annual subscription in 1890 was 5/-. In 1938 it had risen only slightly to 6/-.

The aims of the club were, in brief:

- i. the encouragement by protection of the cyclist in the aim of producing speed
- ii. the protection, by organising cycling in numbers, as a means of protection from physical abuse

It seems that some members of the public could be quite violent towards cyclists in the 19th century.

Despite the fact that the first president was a parson, the Rev. J.J. Gurney, the club's headquarters were usually in licensed premises. After being founded at The Volunteer Stores, it moved in 1880 to the Grapes in St. Giles, to the Norfolk Hotel, also in St. Giles, in 1883, the Shirehall Hotel in 1900 and eventually to the Black Horse, again in St. Giles. There it remained until the building was destroyed by bombs in the Second World War. For many years subsequent to that the club was based at the Wagon and Horses, Tombland, followed by some time at the Youth Centre on Duke Street and The Mischief on Fye Bridge. The ecclesiastical connection has been re-established with committee meetings now taking place in the Christ Church centre at the bottom of Constitution Hill.

In 1911 the club seemed to be at a very low ebb, to such an extent that the menu and programme for the annual dinner of that year was set out as a 'Funeral Feast -In Memory of the Club', including chief

mourners, muted and suitable lamentations! However, it cheated the grave on that occasion and made a good recovery.

The club was always to the fore in racing matters and in the first 40 years of its existence names such as Davy Cutmore, Herbert Golden, the Sawyer Brothers and Herbert Kett brought fame to the amateurs. Between the wars prominence in racing matters continued with the Horn brothers Dennis and Cyril on the track. Dennis became the National Sprint Champion of England and represented his country in the World Championships. Also prominent on the track were such riders as Bert Alexander, Bob MacMeekin, Freddie Jackson and Bill Cooper, not forgetting the club's previous chairman, Les Lawrence. The Amateurs were also well represented at the many track meetings throughout East Anglia during this period and on several occasions won the National Cyclists Union Track Team Shield. On the road the club often headed the time trial result sheets, with Les Lawrence, Freddie Jackson and Lennie Woods being prominent names. Indeed Lennie Woods was one of the fastest time triallists of the early 30s, being almost the equal of the great Frank Southall in 25 mile events. Woods is remembered yearly through the presentation of the Lennie Woods Memorial Trophy for the fastest rider in the club evening 10 mile time trial series. Mention must also be made of the late Jimmy Nudds, probably the club's best all rounder racing man of the thirties, also remembered through the presentation of the A. J. Nudds Trophy for the fastest 100 of the season.

The loss of several of the club's top racing men to the newly formed East Anglian Cycling Club in 1921 no doubt affected the racing performance during the following 20 years but at the same time there arose the keen rivalry which has prevailed between the two clubs since that time. Another traumatic period for the club, at a later date, was when in 1949 there was a mass resignation of members during the dispute with the British League of Racing Cyclists which has since been amicably resolved.

Not surprisingly the club went through some lean years during the Second World War. The continued existence of the club was no doubt due to the keenness and devotion of a few remaining

members, notably Ivy Nudds, who rallied round to ensure that something remained for those who would eventually return from the war and hopefully take up the sport and pastime again. So it was that in the late forties and fifties the club was again a force to be reckoned with. Derek Neave was practically unbeatable at short distances and Les Lawrence once more returned to competition, being backed up by such riders as Philip Smith, Billy Rix and Harry Banham. On the local grass tracks Johnny Marr and Peter Farrington were hard to beat. In the mid fifties the club had amongst its members one of the country's fastest 25 milers, Ray Barker, who unofficially broke competition record in 1953 with a "56" in a club event. Other fast contemporaries were Terry Grint, one of the first men to break 2 hours for 50 miles, and Peter Woodhouse, prominent in the National Best All Rounder Competitions.

In the 60s and 70s the club has had its ups and downs racing wise. Geoff Paice and Brian Cushion shared the honours, with Geoff holding the 12 hours record and Brian those at 25, 30, 50 and 100 miles. At the end of the 1970's and into the start of the 1980's Andy Pegg rewrote the record book by taking club records at 25, 30 and 50 miles. Between 1979 and 1980 John Stark also took club records on a tricycle at 10, 25, 30, 50 and 100 miles, whilst at the same time a team of young lady members, Gill Street, Val

Borwell and Yvonne Cooper, set new individual and team time trial records. The club has had over the years a formidable team of veteran riders with Philip Smith, Bob Ward, Eddie Fone and Roy Lemon.

The club has always done its' share of promoting Open Events – both Time Trials and Road Races. For many years it ran the spectacular Norwich City Centre Criteriums around a closed road circuit in the City centre as well as a day of racing on the Lotus Test Track. It has gained, over the years, an eye catching collection of silver trophies, some being allocated to the open events, others to various club championships competed for over the racing season.

It should be stated, however, that, although a prominent racing club throughout its history, other aspects of cycling life have not been neglected by the Amateurs. Club runs were always well supported, summer and winter. It was always the duty of the club captain, an honour much sought after, to lead the runs and indeed plan them beforehand, sometimes with the help of a runs committee. The early club rules incidentally lay down that the captain shall have entire control of runs including the power to compel members to slacken speed or dismount when passing horses, to give orders to ride in single file and give permission to members to fall out of runs. He could also collect a fine of one shilling for any offence of infringing the rules. The club has had a long succession of worthy holders of the captain's post going back to a Mr A Nobbs who served from 1879 to 1892. It is also of interest that the club had a bugler from 1881 to 1897 when the post was abolished. Early photographs of the club show members in uniform, consisting of dark blue military tunic, breeches, peak cap with club badge and white gloves. The bicycle was the old high ordinary and the groups usually include the bugler.

It was during Bert Rump's term as secretary in 1957 that he introduced the club's magazine, "The Amateur", which flourished under the editorship of the late Ivan Jeckell. Since 2007, this has now been replaced by our website [www.norwichabc.co.uk](http://www.norwichabc.co.uk).

Club members have always been to the fore in the administration of the sport and pastime outside the sphere of the club itself. Les Lawrence was chairman of the British Cycling Federation, East Anglian Division for many years, also a long serving former chairman of the East District, Road Time Trials Council. Ken Voisey was secretary and treasurer of the East District since 1956 and Ivan Jeckell Secretary of the Norwich Cycling Association for many years. Previous Chairman, Mike Johnson, continues to act as Courses Secretary for the East District and Derek and Jenny Lusher do much work for the British Cycling.

(This history of the club is adapted from that written by the late Ken Voisey to mark the 100th anniversary of the club's foundation in 1979.)

Last update: 24<sup>th</sup> Feb 2012