

# *Wolverhampton Wheelers Cycling Club*

## **Founded 1891**

### *125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary- A Little bit of History....*

Dear Reader,

The next few lines are intended to give a brief history and a flavour of the last 125 years of this prestigious cycling club. I hope that you find the content interesting, informative and even amusing.

It all started in the Talbot Hotel in Wolverhampton on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 1891 when the club held its inaugural meeting. Records from 1892 show the Honorary Secretary, Henry Haden Kendrick to have been a solicitor from the Oaks, Bradmore Wolverhampton and the Captain to be one T. J. Rochelle.

Initial membership was restricted to 30 and was by invitation only....

At that time many cycling clubs had connections or affiliations to either religious or political groups, but the Wheelers did not declare any such criteria as a condition for membership. In fact to this day our ethics mean that we do not discriminate on the grounds of religious or political beliefs. However, we were somewhat slow to realise the considerable benefit of extending membership beyond 'men only' as it was not until 1936 that the club was opened up to women members...

Some other rules that have long since lapsed, included a fine of one shilling (5p in today's currency) for anyone overtaking the Captain during a ride - Something today's president and chairman think should be re-introduced, at the current value of course!

It should be remembered that in 1891 the 'Safety Cycle' with a chain drive and wheels of equal size was fast making the Ordinary or 'Penny Farthing' obsolete. However, records show that the Molineux grounds were used for cycle races long before it became the home of the Wanderers Football Club including a Wheelers One mile race for 'Penny Farthings'. The Molineux was a venue which drew many famous racing cyclists of the day and attracted enormous crowds. In fact Englishman, James Moore, (resident in Paris) set an early World Hour Record covering 14 miles 880 yards.

Moore was the winner of the very first official bike race at the Parc-de-St-Cloud near Paris on Friday 31<sup>st</sup> May 1868. He went on to win the very first Paris-Rouen a distance of 134 kilometres in just under ten & a half hours.

The club has survived through numerous wars, soon after its founding came the Boer War but it was the First World War that took a tremendous toll on everything, including cycling. It appears that the Wheelers survived pretty much as a small group of friends, although there is evidence to suggest that the first secretary, Henry Haden Kendrick survived the Great War not passing away until 1947 aged 88. Alas, his son Haden Mostyn Kendrick did not, their family grave in a St. Philips churchyard, Penn fields testifies to this.

World War II had a lesser impact upon cycle sport in Britain as it was engaged in its own internal conflict, The BLRC (British League of Racing Cyclists) versus the NCU (National Cyclists Union). It was in June 1942 that Percy Stallard, a former Wheeler, organised the first 'Massed Start' road race in the UK from Llangollen to Wolverhampton. This started a bitter conflict between the NCU's Time Trial based status and the road race rebels of the BLRC fighting to get Continental style, road racing established in the UK.

The Wheelers were originally a NCU club and were banned 'Sine Di' (until death) by that body when we 'defected' and joined the BLRC! It was not until 1959 that the two bodies merged to form the BCF.

Over the years the Wheelers have produced an envious succession of Regional, National, European and even World Champions in various disciplines. Today, the 'Wheelers' are bigger and more financially stable than ever before and are devoted to serving their members both young and old. So, whether you are a teenager or a pensioner there is something for you in this wonderful organisation.

As part of the celebrations, on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> May we will re-enact the very first Wheelers 'Clun Run' out to Boscobel House, near Bishop's Wood. This ride will cater for all ages and abilities so bring the family and be proud to call yourself a 'Wheeler'.

A silver commemorative metal badge bearing the clubs name and set around a 'winged wheel' will be available shortly. This is based on the original badges used by the founding members all those years ago!

Best regards Robin Kyte