

# Derby Mercury RC – The First 80 Years

## Introduction

The Derby Mercury RC was formed 80 years ago in 1938. It is a testament to the club that it has been able to change with the times and continues to thrive. The changes that have taken place since the 1930s are remarkable, both in terms of developments related directly to cycling and cycle sport and also in terms of external influences. When the Mercury was formed, outdoor activities and social events promoted by the club were very popular but there were fewer distractions competing for people's time. Television hardly existed - the first broadcasts, to a limited audience around London, only took place a couple of years before and for many years it was a far cry from the multitude of choices available today. Computers, the internet and video games could not even be imagined. Road conditions were also much more conducive to cycling back then. By today's standards there was very little traffic to contend with.

Over the same period, technological developments have transformed cycling itself. Sturdy steel machines with few gears have developed into

super, lightweight steeds made from aluminium, titanium or carbon composites with a variety of geometries suited to specific disciplines and sporting a huge range of gears. Computer technology provides the rider with instant readings of speed, distance travelled, cadence, heart-rate etc. - even location anywhere on the planet! And such equipment is not restricted to international athletes with financial backing but is well within the reach of amateur enthusiasts whether they are racing or touring.

It is therefore not surprising that, in light of all these changes, not to mention a World War, the fortunes of the club have waxed and waned and different activities have gone in and out of favour over the years. Eighty years on, the club is on the up and the future looks bright.

The following pages attempt to chart the progress of the club, noting some of the characters and events that have defined it. It is far from comprehensive but may be updated as further information becomes available.

## In The Beginning...

In 1936 there existed in Derby a youth group known as the Co-operative Youth Group, open to all young people between the ages of 16 and 25. The group was run by the local Co-op society and held meetings in the Merchant Hall (now part of a shop in East Street) on Friday evenings. The group held political meetings but there was also a leisure side which, among other activities, included a cycle ride on Sundays. The turn-out was a motley crowd of people sporting a variety of dress, some in shorts and some in 'flannels' and riding an equally varied mix of cycles including 'sit up and beg' bikes and drop handlebar machines with single speed fixed wheels or three speed gears.

The group always headed off to one of a number of destinations for tea and after a while it was noticed that a second group of cyclists always seemed to arrive at the same tea stop. Eventually, at a stop at Robin Hood Stride, near Winster, the two groups got together and it turned out that the second group were from the Derby Technical College Cycling Club. A decision was taken to join forces and before long the Sunday rides were getting turn-outs of 40 people. All of the Co-op lads went to the Technical College and so were eligible to belong to that club. At this point, the cycling club and its Sunday rides were all-male affairs. However, one week, two ladies, Joan and Nora (secretaries from Mack's furniture store on the corner of Leopold Street and Osmaston Road) decided to turn out. There was some opposition from the faster lads but, since Joan and Nora attended the Technical College and were therefore entitled to join the club, they were accepted and were very enthusiastic. When news of this got round, two other ladies, Bessie and Ivy, from the Co-op group also decided to join. Bessie and Ivy were also very enthusiastic and popular. However, they did not attend the Technical College and were not members of the student's union and so were not eligible to join the club. The group soon included other riders from local shops, Rolls

Royce etc. who were in a similar position. Some of the girls were even wearing shorts for heaven's sake! When the College Principal heard of this an ultimatum was issued; either eject these outsiders from the club or disband the club.

During a break on one of the Sunday runs, a group including Doug Whewell, Jock Jardine, Don Simms and Ray Dyke among others discussed the situation at length and Doug suggested that maybe they should form their own club. The idea was enthusiastically adopted and the discussion turned to the question of what to call the club. It was Don Simms who suggested the 'Mercury Cycling Club', inspired by the logo on a nearby National Benzole petrol station.

And so, after opposition and threats from the College Principal, which evaporated after a letter was sent from a friendly solicitor, on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1938 a meeting was called at the Arboretum Hotel on Osmaston Road and a unanimous decision was taken to form a new club to be known as the Derby Mercury Cycling Club. One member of the club, Len Holmes, a reporter with the Derby Advertiser, was knowledgeable about emblems and crests and was given the task of designing a badge and getting it registered in all the right places.



He enlisted the help of a young designer from Rolls Royce and between them the figure of 'Mercury' over a cycle wheel was chosen. By early 1940 this was available as an enamel badge to buy (see photo).

Doug Whewell, being slightly older than the others, was elected Secretary and Treasurer and Ray Dyke was the Club Captain (Cycling Captain). A couple of years later, at the AGM at Conksbury Youth Hostel, Jock Jardine was elected as the first Club Chairman.

The annual subscription for membership was 2/6d (12.5p). Money was in short supply (a 16-17 year old apprentice got about £1.50 per week) but there was plenty of dedication and enthusiasm. At first, the club was, as the name suggested, just a cycling club. In fact, when Ted Upton and Jack Page decided to go walking on one occasion, they were admonished for it. However, walking, and then other outdoor activities, were soon embraced by the club and became very popular.

As early as 1939 there was a full programme of weekend club-runs with planned destinations being published a month or so in advance in a newsletter. As Cycling Captain, Ray Dyke was responsible for arranging the club-runs. He also had the task of carrying the heavy club repair kit which included a hammer, pliers, cottar pins for the cranks, puncture repair kit and other items able to cope with most eventualities. Ray rode in front and had a whistle which he would blow when the group arrived at a hill that might prove too steep for the weaker riders. At this signal, everyone would dismount and walk to the top of the climb before continuing.

There were shorter rides on Tuesday and/or Wednesday evenings through the summer months and more ambitious tours were also organised, with North Wales being the most popular destination. These trips were based around Youth Hostels. Cycle Hostelling was a major part of the club's activities and would remain so for

many years. There was a close association with the local YHA group.

For the racing enthusiasts there was a programme of time trials throughout the country - in 1938 the Road Time Trials Council (RTTC) was born out of the old Road Racing Council (RRC) and there was a national programme of 429 open time trial events. These events were run very early in the morning and riders had to wear inconspicuous attire. A rider could be disqualified for wearing light coloured ankle socks! The local events were advertised in the club newsletter. In 1939 the Mercury organised its first Open 25 mile time trial which attracted 92 entries.

Massed start races on the roads were prohibited by both the RTTC and the NCU (National Cyclists Union) with those that did take place being run on small, closed circuits, airfields for example. There were other competitive challenges however; Jack Page and Doug Whewell set up one such challenge to others by doing Derby to Boston and back (150 miles) in 8hrs 15 mins riding time on a tandem and suggested setting up similar records for Derby - Ashbourne and back and Derby - Llangollen and back. Quite a few people did these rides and times would be claimed. However, they were unofficial and not properly controlled or verified.

The first clubroom was above Copestake's grocery store in Friargate. The rent was minimal since the Copestakes were more interested in having someone on the premises in the evenings and at weekends. What's more, there was a £20 per year donation from the Derby Borough Council, an allowance of tea, sugar etc. from the Ministry of Food and the first gas and electric bills paid for by Frederick Burrows (Jock Jardine's employer at the time). With an old gas stove and some 'borrowed' utensils, a canteen was set up serving tea, cheese on toast etc. - what more could anyone want?

## The War Years

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, 1939, war was declared. Within hours of the announcement on the radio a meeting was held and it was decided that the club would continue with its club-run programme and other activities. The club secretary, Doug Whewell was instrumental in keeping the club activities going at this time. It is easy to forget that, in spite of the difficulties and restrictions, life did go on throughout this period. Throughout the war, the Mercury Road and Rambling Club (as it was then named) continued to function, as did many other clubs, but there were certain restrictions. Many club members were either too young to join the forces or were in reserved occupations. Long hours were worked and those who did shorter hours did Home Guard, Auxiliary Fire Service, Air Raid Precautions or Special Police work. Junior members volunteered to be cycle messengers, taking messages from Command Posts to the Police, First Aid, Ambulance and Fire Stations. However, the importance of recreational activities was recognized. In fact, outdoor pursuits such as cycling and walking were encouraged by the government as a means to combat the industrial fatigue that could result from the long hours that everyone was having to work. Cycle accessories were even free of purchase tax.

Normal working hours were 48 hours per week and this meant that leisure time started after 12 noon on Saturdays at best. The committee arranged a programme that listed a Youth Hostel weekend with a Sunday run for those who could not make a full weekend. Group sizes varied greatly, often because of work commitments. There could be 8 to 10 or as many as 25. They would meet up with the Hostellers at a pre-arranged lunch stop. On the programme a leader volunteered to do the bookings, collect the cash and map out the routes. Both cycling and walking sections would liaise, sometimes to do joint bookings so that the club kept a close camaraderie. Later, with increased interest in climbing, caving and camping this

arrangement was expanded, with many members participating in all the activities.

The clubroom on Friargate was in a rambling old property previously used by the Derby Scouts Association. Three of the ten rooms were leased and the plan was to have one room for games, one quiet room, a room for cycle repairs and also a small kitchen. Work parties were set up to get the place in shape and during the club's time at these premises quite a bit of work was done on decoration and repairs. In 1941 an agreement was drawn up with the Derby Town Group of the YHA to run the clubrooms at 16 Friargate jointly. It was known as the Outdoor Clubs Centre. Club nights were on Thursdays and, during the winter, the clubroom was also open after the cycling runs on Sundays. The clubroom was a focus of social activities with music and games such as darts and table tennis. The club had a catering licence and served hot drinks, beans on toast and cheese sandwiches. A club photo album was started (sadly lost) and a clubroom library was also set up, mainly to provide maps for loan.

An article in the club magazine by a new member on his first visit to the clubroom in Friargate provides a clue as to what the clubroom was like: He enters to the smell of toast and baked beans and finds a crowd of young people "looking like Buffalo Bill" with fur caps, rucksacks etc. (the rambling contingent) eating as much as they could. Then a mob of perspiring cyclists arrive demanding food. They've just come from Matlock. He goes to the common room upstairs where boys and girls of all ages are playing darts, table tennis etc. Someone is playing the piano. Others are listening to the wireless. People are hauled off to do the washing up in the kitchen below.

Games nights, lantern shows and film shows were put on at the clubroom, even a community night complete with pianist. Games at the clubroom were very popular and prizes were awarded each month for darts and table tennis. In 1943 a

“Statuette” was produced and was presented to the best darts and table tennis players in the monthly contests over the winter period.

However, by the end of 1941, the club was at a low ebb with dwindling interest in outdoor activities and the clubroom losing money. The importance of relaxation when everyone was working so hard was emphasised and, although many people were away and everything was in short supply, a Christmas party was held anyway - a soup, sausage and mash supper. Things did pick up when the better weather arrived and continued to improve with an influx of new members over the next couple of years. Ken Broadhurst joined the club in January 1943 (aged 14) and, as the youngest member of the club, was encouraged by Doug Whewell to try to recruit as many friends as possible. By contact with people at YH weekends, school and work there were soon 42 members under 17 years of age. Ken became the first Junior Section Captain. Turnouts were great, not just for cycling but for walking, climbing and, later, camping, caving and canoeing. Many started work at 14. Those in workshops during the war had to work 48 hours on night shift as soon as they were 16. This meant that to go out Hostelling with the club it was necessary to work all Friday night, get about 3 hours sleep on Saturday morning and meet the lads at 2pm (at the clubroom in Friargate) for the weekend ride. The Youth Hostels at Wirksworth, Ilam, Shining Cliff, Barrowhill, Hartington, Elton, Ravenstor, Whitmeadows, Dimmingsdale and Bennistone were all popular venues.

In the early 1940s the cycling activity was kept going by a nucleus of people including Doug Whewell, Ron Naylor, Ted Upton and John Welbourn (who also liked to use the name Wdvorn to indicate his Norwegian connections) among others. Throughout the duration of the war the programme of weekend club-runs was maintained, visiting a wide range of destinations, mainly within the Peak District but sometimes further afield and

based around Youth Hostels. These were advertised in the club magazine and were for both cyclists and walkers, usually meeting up at the same destination. Those unable to get away for the full weekend would ride out on Sunday to join the group.

Many of the larger Youth Hostels were commandeered during the war for military use and for evacuees. However, in Derbyshire, some were able to keep going, including Ravenstor, Conksbury, Hartington, Leam Hall, Ilam Hall, Dimmingsdale and Elton which were all popular destinations for the Mercury. Members of the Mercury often formed work parties to help maintain these hostels. At a time when almost everything was in short supply the Youth Hostels benefited from being classed as restaurants for the purpose of food rationing and therefore did relatively well. Nevertheless, the cyclists were asked to take food items with them if they could. In 1940, the new Youth Hostel at Wirksworth was opened and a group of Mercury members rode over there for the occasion. In 1942, the Youth Hostel at the Old Hall, Conksbury closed and the warden, Ted Woodward, a Mercury club member, took over as warden at the Elton YH. The Mercury took part in social events organised with the YHA, for example dances and a challenge weekend at Hartington YH against the Stoke YHA Town Group playing darts and table tennis. In 1941, there was a Youth Rally, held at Homelands, and the Mercury helped at the YHA tent. Activities included displays of YHA kit and literature, fencing, boxing, keep fit, 6-a-side football, 6-a-side cricket, athletics, netball, darts, tennis, tenniquoit, rover scouts building bridges, girl guides country dancing, community singing and a dance.

In 1940 the emphasis was on cycling, but including cycle hostelling etc. and certainly not just racing. Walking / rambling was also a popular club activity almost from the start and in early 1941 the rambling section was growing and soon other activities were also introduced, namely caving,

climbing and even skiing. In 1944 the club purchased climbing ropes, helmets and a couple of tents. The rambling section actually referred to itself as the rambling club in the magazine for a while and there were separate secretaries for the two sections. By the end of 1941 there was some conflict between cycling and rambling sections over the club name among other things. A new constitution was brought in at the February 1942 AGM to try to resolve issues. Once again, Doug Whewell was doing several jobs and generally trying to hold it all together.

In April 1943 the club was affiliated to the CTC, YHA, RTTC and by January 1944, also the Ramblers Association. The Mercury Road Club had members sitting on committees of, or as delegates to the Derbyshire NCU and the RTTC. There was a close association with the YHA with Mercury RC members also serving on local and regional YHA committees such as the Derby Town Group YHA, Conksbury YH House Committee and the Derbyshire Sub-Regional YHA.

Midweek evening rides were made more practical when, as a wartime measure, Double Summertime was introduced, so there were long evenings. Most of these were training runs that took the form of an unofficial road race. Routes varied but included: Derby - Ashbourne - Longcliffe - Cromford - Derby, Derby - Cromford - Middleton - Via Gellia - Newhaven - Ashbourne - Derby and Derby - Ashbourne - Cubley - Sudbury - Derby. Once a week Ted Upton would ride Derby - Ashbourne - Buxton - Bakewell - Derby on his own.

Ted Upton and John Welbourn, both keen climbers as well as cyclists, were able to cycle to Black Rocks at Cromford, accomplish several climbs, then cycle back to Derby carrying 90 feet of full weight climbing rope. Other members became interested and finally this led to a club climbing section. Some Mercury members also became very active in the ORIAD climbing club.

Ted Upton and John Welbourn also pioneered climbing trips to Tryfan, Idwal Slabs and Holly-Tree Wall from Idwal Cottage Youth Hostel, North Wales. They were joined by Ron Naylor, Tony Taylor, George Collis and Syd Borrington on later trips. The itinerary for these trips was impressive:

Starting as soon as possible after work on the Thursday before Good Friday they would cycle overnight to arrive before 8:00 am at Llangollen for a booked breakfast at the CTC café. Then onward to Corwen, Pentrefoelas, Capel Curig to Llyn Ogwen - Milestone Buttress by 2:00 pm Friday. Here they took their ex WD clinker nailed boots and 90 feet of manila rope off the top of the Carradice camper saddle bag and did several of the simpler climbs to limber up for the assault on Tryfan the next day.

After two days of climbing they would mount their bikes for the return ride to Derby. On one occasion, because the weather was good, they diverted from the shortest route at Betws-y-Coed to Llanrwst following the coast then back to Chester and Derby (150 miles approx) arriving at 1:30 am, ready for work at 8:30 am the same day.

In addition to the programme of weekend runs and mid-week rides, there were also bigger outings / tours / holidays organised. In the early years the Easter tour always went to North Wales, additional to the climbing trips. Trips to other destinations followed, eg the Cotswolds, Yorkshire and the Lake District. In 1942 the government announced that all workers should have one week holiday and so the club suggested to its members that they should all try to book the same week so that a club week away could be organised. The records do not show whether this actually materialised or not.

Holiday periods were limited. An annual holiday was 7 days, Christmas and Easter 3 to 4 days. Cycle tours were arranged, usually YH based - Wales, Yorkshire Dales, East Coast, Mid Wales. The walkers and climbers tended to visit the Peak District, usually camping. This was because

transport was almost non-existent during the war, or expensive for younger members.

There was an annual Easter cycling tour to North Wales which would leave Derby on the Thursday evening before Good Friday and head for a B&B in Lichfield. Over the next three days the route took in Shrewsbury, Welshpool, Plynlimon, Devil's Bridge, Newquay, Lampeter, Llanwrtyd Wells, Buith Wells, Knighton and Much Wenlock before returning on the Monday via Wellington and Lichfield to Derby. Dennis Yates always reckoned this was the club's equivalent to the Tour de France.

Right from the start, the club had a group of keen racers and organised events, mainly time trials initially but later including road races or massed start events as they were known at that time. The first Open 25 was run in 1939. In that first event, the Mercury were able to field two three-man teams. In subsequent years similar events were promoted twice or even three times each season, attracting fields of 60 to 100 riders. The earliest events were held on a course at Shardlow, making use of the A6, but soon moved to a new course on the Uttoxeter road (Mickleover – Doveridge) when the bridge at Shardlow was washed away in floods.

The season long series of mid-week evening 10 mile time trials also started very early on (circa 1943) and, with some variations, has continued ever since. These too were held on a course on the A6 between Shardlow and Castle Donnington, initially on a Wednesday. At the evening time trials, riders would arrive with mudguards, remove them for the race, then re-fit them to ride home again. Derek Wilkins made wing nuts (a chain link braised onto a capscrew with a slot cut in it) which made it easier.

The programme of open time trials (RTTC) in the area was published in the club magazine. There were 25, 50 and 100 mile events on the Notts,

Shardlow and Six Hills courses and a Central District Time Trial League. The rules for the TT league stated that: the secretary of each club was to provide and collect entry forms, each club was to provide its own prizes, points would be awarded for placings and the individual champion would be decided on best aggregate times at 25, 50 and 100 miles.

In 1944 the racing lads were trying to get representation on the club's general committee. The committee agreed to award prizes to all club members finishing in the first three in Central District Time Trial League events and there was a proposal to have a BAR trophy (a solid silver cup), competed for annually, based on results in 10s and 25s. Although a BAR competition was held it is not clear if the cup materialized.

The Mercury riders competing regularly in time trials at this time included: Ted Upton, George Barton, Ron Naylor, Jack Robinson, Bill Bennett, Jack Ashworth and Ron Kirk. They took many individual and team prizes over the period with Ted Upton being the most successful. In his first event in 1941, a Derby Road Club promotion over 25 miles, he came second with a 1:06:30, beating Tom Crowther who was one of the local fast lads at the time. In the same event, Ron Naylor did 1:12:13. By 1945, Ted had improved to 1:00:25 (under the hour rides were rare) and was good enough to take second place in the RTTC 25 Mile Open Championship with 1:00:52, behind Jock Allison (Musselburgh RC) - the only rider to beat the hour on a windswept course near Chester.

In addition to the traditional time trials, more innovative events were occasionally set up. In June, 1941, a 'speed judging' competition was organised by Ray Dyke on a course around Swarkstone, Willington, Repton and Ingleby. The object was to estimate one's time over a set course and then try to do it without the aid of a watch. The rider getting closest to his estimated time was the winner. Ted Upton won this one with an

'error' of 40 seconds.

Almost from the start there has been a club magazine in some form or other and these offer an insight into the club's activities. At the end of 1939 the club magazine was edited by Len Holmes and Ray Braines who immediately appealed for contributions from members and suggested a variety of topics that people might like to write about. Similar appeals would appear on a regular basis and still do. From November 1939 the magazine was issued monthly. It was paid for separately from the club subscriptions. In 1942 it was 3d per copy or 4/- for the whole year, including delivery. The magazine title reflects the confusion over the name of the club and the conflict between the cycling and rambling sections. Initially, it was just headed "The Mercury Road Club" (although the club was formed as the 'Mercury Cycling Club' and some early newsletters were headed the 'Derby Mercury Roads Cycling Club'). From March 1940 it was called the Signpost, still with the Mercury Road Club heading. In June 1941, the club name as shown on the magazine changed to the "Mercury Road and Rambling Club" but shortly after that the club name disappeared and it was just the Signpost. At the start of 1942 there was a badge on the front showing a crude figure of Mercury inside a circle round which were the words "Mercury Road Club" and the magazine declared itself to be the "Official Organ of the Mercury Road Club". Later that year a box appeared on the cover indicating the club's activities: "Cycling, Rambling, Caving, Climbing, Racing and Hostelling". In April 1943 the Signpost described itself as the "Official Gazette of the Mercury Road and Rambling Club" and this remained until at least April, 1944 after which it reverted to the Mercury Road Club, which appeared to stick for a while. The name 'Derby Mercury RC' appeared in 1948 on a new magazine cover showing the current badge design and has remained ever since.

Among the regular items in the magazine were: the

programme of club-runs for the coming month (for cyclists and walkers), news of members in the forces, either when they came home on leave or from 'airgraphs' (mostly to Doug Whewell). There was also a steady flow of accounts by club members of cycle hostelling and camping weekends including work parties to Derbyshire Youth Hostels, club-runs and other trips and the exploits of the racing lads. General interest articles appeared on a variety of subjects from tobogganing to Youth Hostelling in Russia to the rights of the wayfarer to anecdotes and words to songs sung in the Youth Hostel common rooms.

In the early years of the war the magazine editor changed a number of times, as did other posts, due to people being called up to serve in the armed forces.

In 1944 the editor notes that, "although the war is seldom mentioned in the magazine, it has been difficult to keep going through the 'dark days' with equipment in short supply. The services now wear the rucksacks and boots and use the ropes. Also, transport restrictions mean that cycles are in demand for getting around". In December 1941 the magazine appeared without a cover due to a paper shortage and in August 1942 it was reduced to 4 sides with a bigger quarterly issue because of lack of content.

Some articles appearing in the magazine give an insight into wartime conditions. For example: Cyclists and the Blackout - one advantage was the greatly reduced dazzle from on-coming cars - there were few cars and restricted lights anyway. Cyclists were compelled to carry a red rear light. These were difficult to get and so people improvised by putting a bulb in an old acetylene lamp and connecting to the front battery. But batteries were also in very short supply. A front light fitted with red glass was too bright unless a smaller bulb was fitted. The front light also had to be reduced in brightness by use of a small bulb or slit to comply with blackout lighting restrictions.

One solution was to cut slots in a cocoa tin and bend them back like eyelids so that the light would shine five feet or so ahead onto the road. The tin was a tight fit over the lamp and held on with tape.

Another contributor likened being indoors during the blackout almost to being imprisoned but suggested that, when real trips were not possible a good alternative was to read maps by the fireside, planning trips or just imagining the journey.

When out in the countryside, maps had to be kept

secure and cycles locked when unattended (so as not to aid spies). Also, motorists asking directions had to be sent to the nearest police station or civil defence post.

In spite of all the difficulties, the club survived the war rather well. Membership at the end of 1939 stood at 34, rising to 43 by October 1942 (with 11 members in the services) but by 1945 it had reached about 100.

## The Post War Era

In 1944, the YHA left the clubroom at 16 Friargate. This meant that much of the furniture, which was on loan to the Derby Town Group went with them. A new clubroom was needed and eventually, in 1946, a new meeting place was found at the Navigation Inn at Wilmorton.

This was a much better clubroom. It was an upstairs room, over the lounge and bar of the pub. It was a long room with two bay windows on the left side. In the first bay was a piano. After about 12 months the juniors took over this window. They made so much noise and hammered on the piano so much that there were complaints from the landlord. This led to the committee asking them to meet on the side of the canal, which was just below the clubroom. But they made just as much noise down there so they had to be brought back into the clubroom.

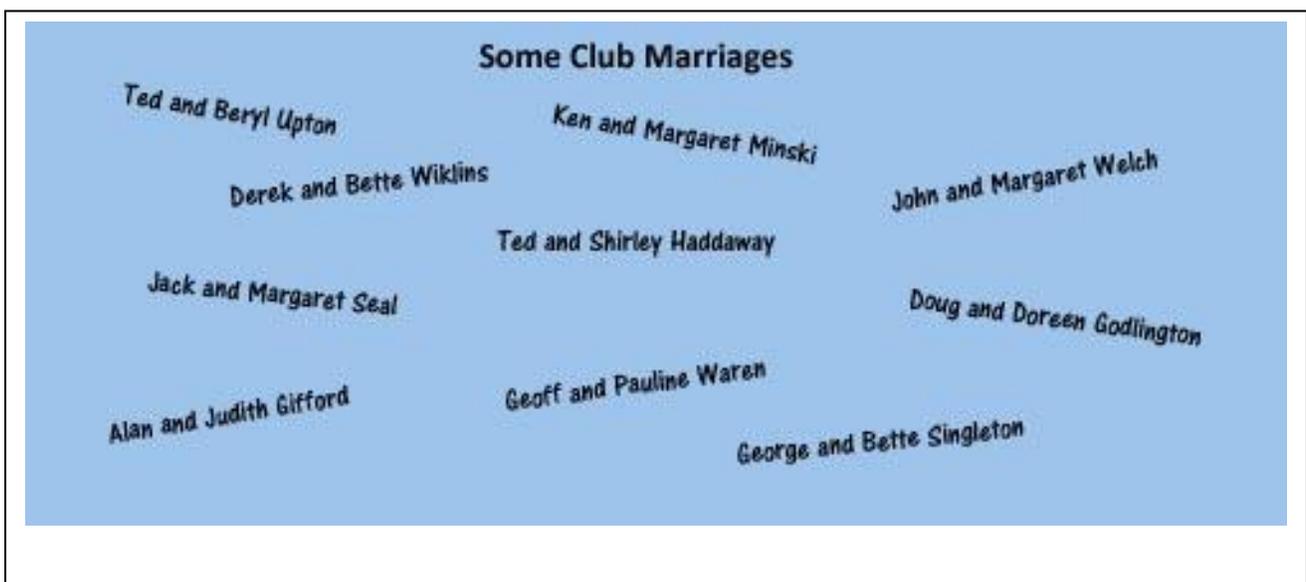
In the second bay, all the girls gathered, and in those days there were lots of girls. Some went on to marry club lads so one other role the club played was that of Marriage Bureau! Some are shown below and some have made it to their Golden Weddings!

At the far end of the room were the climbers, rambles and potholers - a very big section of the club.

In the centre of the room were the racing men, another large group, usually gathered around Ted Upton, an exceptional rider but always happy to help and encourage the others.

On the opposite side of the room from the bay windows, the touring section gathered. This was another large group. There were weekend tours, based on Youth Hostels, every week. In the winter in those days, most put their cycles away and went walking.

Club membership had risen to around 100 by the time the club moved to the Navigation, and they were all under the age of about 33, all active and around 20 were juniors who, during the winter months, rode what were called 'clag irons' put together from whatever parts were available (today they would probably be mountain bikes).



## Nicknames

The use of nicknames was commonplace at one time and many club members were almost always referred to in this way. The examples below are reproduced from one of the many articles written by John Welch for the club magazine.

<b>Chain-oil</b>	<b>Jim Turner.</b> From a Claud Butler frame with a drip feed chain oiler built into the seat tube.
<b>Pop</b>	<b>Les Davis.</b> From the Popeye badge on his racing vest. Better known as <b>Shufter</b> because of his quick moving abilities
<b>Duchess</b>	<b>Barbara,</b> later Mrs. Eric Tucker. Noted for her immaculate turnout including glittery hairslides which on one occasion looked very like a tiara.
<b>Shave-off</b>	<b>Dave Orford.</b> Due to his penchant for hair removal from his limbs.
<b>Pekoe</b>	<b>Denis Yates.</b> Possibly the greatest tea drinker of all time.
<b>Fritz</b>	<b>Tom Riddings.</b> The junior with the German haircut.
<b>Jinx</b>	<b>Gerald Chapman.</b> Everything he did seemed to go wrong.
<b>Moan</b>	<b>Joan Cook.</b> A corruption of her name reflecting her personality.
<b>Buck</b>	<b>Ray Carrington.</b> Because of the bright check cowboy shirt he wore.
<b>Bones</b>	<b>Derek Wilkins.</b> His knobby backbone always stood out when he was crouched over the handlebars.
<b>Young Bones</b>	<b>Ralph Wilkins.</b> Derek's younger brother.
<b>Nip</b>	<b>Brian Underwood.</b> Small when at school, the name stuck even when he grew to about six feet tall.
<b>Bette Blue</b>	<b>Betty Wilkins.</b> There was a need to differentiate between several Bettys at the time and she had an affinity with the colour.
<b>Tinsel</b>	<b>Mrs Pat Allen.</b> Small in stature with bottle blond hair she looked like the fairy on the Christmas tree.
<b>Percy</b>	<b>Alan Gifford.</b> From a two day racing event at Stockton when he helped Percy Stallard chase down every break, including those of his clubmates.
<b>Joe</b>	<b>Arthur Buxton.</b> Always known as Joe though that was not his real name. When he started work and didn't know his workmates' names he called them all Joe.
<b>Hambone</b>	<b>Ken Broadhurst.</b> Resulted from his constant reference to hambones after seeing them hanging in a Derbyshire farmhouse during a cycling tour.
<b>Bokker</b>	<b>Jack Wright.</b> Apparently often given to people with this surname.
<b>Doggy</b>	<b>Don Warren.</b> Even his brother had no idea why.

There were certainly more but often not suitable for putting into print.

There was a great family atmosphere at the clubroom. In the winter people gathered round the piano and listened to jazz played by Cyril (Sidge) Bennett, who later became an international jazz musician! A favourite was 'Honky Tonk Train Blues'.

In 1948, the Mercury purchased its own club hut. This was an ex-RAF hut at Gamston aerodrome, located just off the A614, Sherwood Forest. It was dismantled over 5 weekends by a small group who cycled over at weekends to do the work. The sections were brought back to Derby on a lorry belonging to the father of a club member and were unloaded at the Derby Corporation Building Yard at Wilmorton. The club was promised a site at the top of Green Lane and members of the club spent several weeks clearing and levelling the site ready for a concrete base to take the hut.

The club had outline planning approval but it was finally turned down because of unsatisfactory access in the event of a fire and, sadly, the hut eventually rotted away.

The magazine was re-launched in June 1948, still called the Signpost but the badge on the front now had the wings as well as the figure of Mercury and the words "Mercury RC". Also note the words on the front cover - "The Organ of the Derby Mercury RC" followed by the aims of the club - "to help all, especially the young of poor means, to a better love and care of the countryside".

Photos were included for the first time (of Hostelling and climbing) but this proved too expensive and was not repeated.



Pete McMahon was editor and in his editorial he stated that: "Our aims, throughout the series, will be to inform members of the club of the activities of the others, to give instruction to newer members, to provide good reading, and to enlighten the world at large of the activities, the varied and successful activities, of the club, the very variety and versatility of which is its strength".

In December 1948 the editor was getting very heated about opposition from landowners, industry etc. to the proposed bill to create National Parks, access to mountains, footpath preservation etc. Members were working hard to support the YHA, the Ramblers Association and the Camping Club.

By the end of 1950 the magazine was struggling again for contributions but still trying to have issues each month. However, the magazine did not appear every month, in fact the only ones available are for June, Sept and Dec 1948 and Dec 1950. It would not appear again until 1973.

The club moved from the Navigation in 1952 and, for a brief period, met at the Duke of York Pub on Burton Road, Derby. The landlady, Mrs Woodyet, was a very cheerful lady, always smiling. She presented the club with a cup which was awarded to the winner of the photographic competition. Early in 1954, Dennis Yates put forward plans for a possible site for a new clubroom in a building in the yard of the Seven Stars Inn in King Street, Derby. By October 1954 the club had moved in and 37 members gathered there for the half-yearly general meeting.

This was the nearest the club has come to owning its own clubroom. Phil Henry and family owned the pub and the room was offered to the club rent free and the Mercury were the only ones to use it. It was a brick building over the top of a row of garages. It was a long room and about 18 feet wide. In the far end wall was a door which led into the hop store; beer was brewed on site by a

very old retainer in a ramshackle annex at the back of the pub.

The shortest way into the pub from the clubroom was from the rear. The first room on the right was 'gents only' the scene of many well-oiled evenings, including Rob Wain's stag night in 1960. Marion's hen night had to be in the snug adjacent.

The once derelict room needed a lot of work doing to get it into shape and this was undertaken by club members. Rob Wain's father was in the painting and decorating trade and provided a fair amount of the materials, including the much needed external waterproofing for the ancient brickwork - it was the new and revolutionary silicone treatment which has since proved to be the death of much historic brickwork because it prevents it from breathing. The building was the same age as the pub (circa 1600) and it was the original stables and coach storage on the ground floor, the clubroom being in the ex-tack store above. One reached the clubroom via a steep, narrow, unlit, unrailed, stairway-cum-ladder.

The floor, was painted cardinal red and topped with coconut matting. In the roof there were large beams, painted black and covered with photos of club people and club activities.

The club bought kitchen equipment, Peter McMahon made a wooden counter and there were gas rings and a sink. The 'canteen' was an essential feature of the clubroom. There were regular appeals for more people to help behind the counter, the same few people doing most of the work. The club had an account with Kendal Mint Cake and sold all their supplies. In 1957 it was noted that £36 was made from the sale of Kendal Mint Cake! Sometimes the canteen made a profit and sometimes it didn't, fluctuating with clubroom attendance.

On the end wall, Peter McMahon, who was club chairman for many years, built a map rack which

covered most of the wall and had its own strip-light above. Large scale maps were stuck on hardboard and they slid in three grooves. Using these maps, leaders of weekend hostelling trips could plan their rides or walks. The club's library of Bart's half inch maps and cycling guides had been broken up and the maps sold off to members when the club moved from Friargate..

Phil Henry also owned the Spondon Picture House where, as a 13 year old, Derek Wilkins had worked as an usher, so Derek had met Phil Henry before. This contact enabled the club to buy 30 chairs to be used for film shows etc. There was a large screen that pulled down from the ceiling. There was a regular winter programme of slide shows and talks, often about tours made by various members, to places such as Snowdonia or the Lakes, Skiing trips, the Alps, Tour de France etc. Film shows and slide shows were always popular and in 1957 the club purchased its own slide projector. Films were hired.

Club nights were twice a week on Thursdays and Sundays. There was a table tennis table that was in use most of the time and on the wall there was a dartboard. In 1957 Brian Collinson was organising a darts and table tennis competition and this remained a popular clubroom activity.

Club members, mainly juniors, spent time maintaining and decorating the clubroom and the club acquired its own furniture. A popular event at the clubroom was the annual Christmas party. The clubroom was decorated, often to designs by Betty Wall, and in 1957 the juniors even planned to put on a pantomime.

The annual photographic competition (for the Woodyet Trophy) was also held at the clubroom. The winner was decided by a panel of judges (club members and sometimes an outside expert) who awarded 40% of marks for technical quality and 60% for club interest. However, support for the competition by the late 1950s was poor and it was

discontinued in 1958.

By the time the club left the Navigation and while it was meeting at the Duke of York membership had been falling and, at the request of the older members, Ken Broadhurst undertook the jobs of Chairman, Secretary and Cycling Captain following his de-mob from national service. In 1953 he was still club secretary and cycling captain. However, membership increased during the 1950s back up to 101 in 1959. Around 50 people were attending the general meetings, which were held at the clubroom twice a year in February and October, and a clubroom attendance of about 40 was considered to be low.

The club was financially stable (£200 - £400 in the bank which would be at least £4000 at today's rates). Funds came from membership subscriptions and clubroom fees (there was a small charge at the clubroom) as well as profits from the canteen and social functions such as dances. There was also a growing income from the Dovedale Dash.

At AGMs in the mid 50s and early 60s the hoary debate was what to do with the cash in the bank. There were some strong proponents for buying a club hut in a scenic location, eg the Peak District or North Wales but never enough to carry the day. A missed opportunity perhaps.

The club had a full programme of social events. Dances were very popular throughout the 1940s, 1950s and beyond. They were advertised in the local paper so they were always well attended with around 40 to 50 Mercury members and a total of perhaps 100. There was always a live band, and plenty to drink! There were often two or three a year in the winter months, often jointly organised with either the YHA or the Long Eaton CC, with whom the Mercury had a close friendship.



*Club Dinner, 1951*

The Blue Ball, Risley, the Chaddesden Park Hotel and the Rialto Ballroom were popular venues. For example, in 1950 there was a Christmas Ball at the Plaza (with Dave Orford as MC), a Cyclists Social at the Blue Ball, Ripley (organised by Long Eaton CC), the Christmas fancy dress competition and carol service at Castleton YH, the Derby Town Group YHA New Year Ball and the Mercury social at the Navigation on New Year's Eve.

In addition, there was a 'Grand Cyclists Ball' at Churchill Hall in 1955 and an Olympics Dinner in October 1956, attended by the Mayor and his wife

But the major club event each year was (and still is) the annual dinner and prize presentation. Attendance through the 1950s was generally 100 or more (150 at the dinner in Jan 1959) and they were held at the Albert Rooms or the Chaddesden Park Hotel. Cross toasting was popular at club dinners, which were formal occasions. During the meal someone would raise their glass and announce that he wished to take wine with the person who.....(embarrassing incident follows). The guilty party would then stand and accept the

general ribbing to complete the toast. This tradition lasted well into the 1990s. Mercury members also used to go to Long Eaton dinners (even though they were an NCU club).

A major award made each year was, and still is, for the Clubman of the Year. In 1953 a points system was introduced by Ken Minski to determine who the winner should be and this system continued for many years, except for 1954 when a secret ballot was held (because nobody had kept track of the points scored for contributing to various club activities).

1959 was a special year for the club as it celebrated its 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. A Christmas prize draw (Xmas 1958) was used to raise funds for the 21<sup>st</sup> dinner in October at the Trocadero Ballroom. A lot of planning went into this during the year and it was a great success.

The Mercury's varied programme of outdoor activities continued through the fifties. The club was affiliated to cycling organisations, the BLRC, NCU, RTTC, CDLCA and from 1955 the BDCA and

also to non-cycling bodies, the YHA and the RA.

Youth Hostelling ruled. A full programme of hostelling week ends, started in the 1940s, continued through the 1950s and into the 1960s. There were printed forms which were put on the notice board at the clubroom. On the form was the leader's name and hostel. Members put their names on the form and paid a deposit. The leader then booked the hostel. Many who cycled in summer, went rambling in winter. The established practice of holding combined hostel weekends for cyclists and ramblers was still popular. September also marked the end of the season for the climbers. The programme of Sunday rambles and weekend trips as well as cycling club-runs and hostelling weekends was published in the Derby Evening Telegraph and posted up in the clubroom. These were still Youth Hostel based with cyclists and walkers meeting up on the weekend trips.

Hostel trips were popular with the ramblers and some figures are recorded for the number of 'bed-

nights' booked. For example from August 1953 to February 1954, there were 438 male, 199 female and 27 junior bookings. In 1956 the total rose to 754, falling again in 1957. In 1957 a camping programme was issued and in 1958, over 16 weekends 146 people went camping while another 53 stayed at Youth Hostels.

Christmas was always spent at Youth Hostels, eg Castleton, Edale, Whitemeadows, Ilam. Club Christmas's in Youth Hostels were always great events with the hostel virtually taken over by the club. Group meals out at pubs were booked for Christmas lunchtime and there were evenings of fun and games in the common room. There was even a club printed song sheet for rousing choruses in various pubs. Songs like 'Waltzing Matilda' and 'I'm a Rambler' were popular as well as original lyrics sung to well-known tunes. Ilam bonfire night was an annual, not to be missed occasion – fireworks really were fireworks then and what was health and safety? Fancy dress and stage shows were often held.

Youth Hostels were also the favourite venues for celebrations such as 21<sup>st</sup> birthday parties which always attracted a good crowd, Beryl Read's 21<sup>st</sup> was celebrated in 1947 at Whitemeadows and in 1957 it was the turn of Margaret Pankhurst (later Welch) at Hartington, followed by Brian Collinson at Loddington.



*The Mercury at Whitemeadows Youth Hostel, 1947*

Another annual event, ending up at a YH was the Tramps Run, started in the 1940s and still going through the fifties, although the number of riders taking part had dropped considerably from what it was in the late forties. Participants met at Derby Market Place on the Saturday at noon and went to a Youth Hostel for the weekend. On reaching the

chosen Hostel and after the ceremonial photo, the final act was to tear as much clothing off each other as possible. The pretext was to provide the Hostel with a year's supply of cleaning cloths but the sub text, among the 'youths' at least, was fairly obvious.



The 1949 Tramps Run ready to leave Derby....

.... and at the Youth Hostel.



Whitemeadows YH was the Mercury's second home. Quite a number would go on a Friday evening till Sunday and use it as a base. Mercury members (mainly Shufter Davies) would do gardening etc. Walkers would get there by bus to Fenny Bentley. Tourists and cyclists on two wheels. Many parties were held there in the winter. It was also used by the racing team as a training base and was the base for the BLRC 'classic' Whitemeadows road race. The club riders (occasional racers) would be at the YH most weekends meeting up with the club ramblers usually.

A popular annual event throughout this period was the parents' outing. This was a bus trip with a lunch stop and tea stop, often going to Youth Hostels in the Peak district. The club cycled to a Youth Hostel for the weekend and the parents came to the YH by bus for lunch. It gave parents an insight into what the club was doing.

Jack Ives was the bus owner/driver who looked after the Mercury's every need. As well as the parents outing and local trips to dinners etc, weekend coach trips were organised for walking in North Wales and the Lake District and the Yorkshire Dales. Dennis Yates (Peeko –because he drank so much tea!) was a tireless organiser of events and trips.

The rambling section also organised bus trips to more distant locations such as Dolgelly, Grasmere and Mae's Carodoc in Snowdonia, mostly based at Youth Hostels.

Cycling trips included the annual Easter tour, often to Wales but in 1954 to the Yorkshire coast (led by Derek Wilkins and Eric Keeling). There was always a tour at Easter and Whitsun.

From 1950 onwards there was a training ride (race) to North Wales in early April every year. Tom Crowther of Mercians organised this weekend and all the gear went in his large motor. A typical

itinerary would be to ride easy to Stone for lunch then, in the afternoon of Saturday, race to Llanrhaeadr via the Nantegarth climb, racing back on Sunday over the Horseshoe Pass. Tom Crowther was a member of the Derbyshire Road Club in the 1950s, as was Lew Barker. They formed Mercians Cycles together.

Another destination was Llanrhaeadr, a small village NW of Ruthin - about 90 miles one way direct but interesting diversions often took it to over 100 miles. It was over a weekend, accommodation being in the village pub with overflow sleeping at Mrs Williams, the Police house, the bakers etc.

There were usually two groups, the tourists with full winter gear and the fast lads with stripped bikes but large bonk bags. It invariably rained for at least half a day and the demands on the pub's limited and rather primitive washing facilities could be overwhelming. On one occasion, in the only bathroom (no shower) the last four lads (of about 30, ladies first) were squeezing the last few tepid pints out of the ancient geyser when it blew itself off the wall - steam and gas all over the place. Fortunately no one was hurt and a whip-round placated the publican.

Another popular Springtime event was the annual '100 in 8', ie 100 miles in 8 hours, held from 1952. These were well supported, usually with about 25 riders, mostly with full tourist equipment. The modern equivalent would be a reliability trial or audax event. The events used a different course each year

Whitsun overnight rides to Bridlington (120 miles) were legendary with many people taking part at one time or another.

The start would be 8:00 pm Friday, to arrive at Bridlington at 9:00 am Saturday. First call, a double fish and chips at the Best Plaice in Town. Then to digs at a traditional boarding house for a

wash and brush up for a beach excursion. Saturday evening, a dance at the ballroom (girls had dresses rolled up in their saddle bags!). Monday, return bike ride to Derby. Three similar trips were made, usually full of incident. On one occasion John Welbourn's crank fell off around midnight and a repair was carried out in a garden shed using a borrowed hammer etc.

On the 1948 trip Ted and Beryl Upton set off on a tandem from Derby at 12:15 am and came across the party of 13 who had left at 8:00 pm the previous evening, all sitting along the pavement edge outside the Boothferry Bridge café awaiting opening time at 6:00 am, all with the 'Bonk' having been fighting a head wind. After refreshment, the journey was completed to Bridlington in single file behind the tandem. The highlight of the ride was seeing the dawn break.

All weekend rides finished at the clubroom. Many a very weary body collapsed in a heap after a hard ride, maybe from a long weekend to Wales. The 'Salt Box' hill, on the flat Uttoxeter Road. was legendary –being the last climb on the way home into a head wind!



A club run in 1951. Jake Seal far right and Johnny Besant far left.

By the end of the 1950s, interest in cycling weekend trips was diminishing, apart from Bank Holidays and the annual Christmas Youth Hostel weekend. Sunday runs were still going, although it was getting difficult to find people to lead them. One reason for the decline was that by this time some of the older members had purchased motorbikes (while still keeping up their cycling) and they tended to do their own thing.

In the late 50s, skiing was recognised as a club activity. There was more regular snow during the winters in the late 50s than now and it was possible to predict, from the direction the snow had come, where there would be good skiing. Initially it was ex-army skis, without edges and old rambling boots but soon proper gear appeared and night time skiing in Darley Park was a frequent event, it of course being necessary to climb over the wall first since the park was closed. Some even came on the bus with skis if they had no lift available. A regular venue was on a field at the top of Turnditch (at the junction of the road off to Wirksworth), and the local farmer was even persuaded to grub out a hedge to provide a better run. A portable petrol driven ski tow was designed and constructed to haul people back up the hill.

Towards the end of the 1950's the Derby Ski Club was formed and took over this sport but many Mercurians were members of both clubs and the interest continued. In 1960 the club was affiliated to the Ski Club of GB and was looking to organise a winter ski trip the next year. In 1962, Eric Thompson, the club's ski rep, and a fairly large party went to Scotland for skiing.

Camping weekends were part of the club programme in the 50s and 60s. Destinations included: Dowel Dale, Hulme End, Flagg, Riber, Alton, Bank Top Farm. Camping has always been popular within the club and later, for some, caravanning, both for weekends and holidays. In 1949 the club started with 14 day summer

holidays, last week in July and first in August. For 12 years this was in Jersey. Dennis Yates organised the first ones, then Derek and Bette Wilkins and Eric Keeling and others. At first, they went by train and boat from Portsmouth or Weymouth. They were camping holidays and all the tents, stoves etc went in tin trunks. For the last few years a plane was chartered from Derby Airways -a 36 seater so some people still went by train and boat. The cost of booking the plane / train / boat etc and the campsite was £10 per head. Jersey trips were very successful.

The annual club Whitsun pilgrimage to Whitesands Bay, near St Davids, Pembrokeshire began in the early 1950s. About 30 small tents would descend on a couple of fields owned by Farmer Williams, and a few stayed in static caravans. Milk was bought from the farm and the club's children earned pocket money picking early potatoes. Basic supplies and newspapers could be got from Mrs Miller's house by the site. Activities - everything you could think of: cycling, wonderful cliff walks, rock climbing, snorkelling, surfing, sailing, bird watching, beach volley ball (very popular), night netting for fish (illegal). Rugby club bar most evenings. There was a tug of war contest with the rugby club.

Most memorable was the night of the Fastnet Race storm which caused devastation on the campsite. Spray was blown over 60 - 70m cliffs.

Whitesands became very popular and people gradually started going in the summer too. Many members had children by this time (mid 60s) and it was very popular with the children. Some club members are still taking holidays there.

During the late 60s and 70s Whitesands was like a training camp, training in the morning and playing on the beach in the afternoon. Many top riders were training with the Mercury - eg Vin Denson (TdF rider 8 times), Billy Holmes (Tour of Britain winner), Ray Booty and brother Gordon, as well as our own top riders - Mick Potts, John Welch, Ralph and John Wilkins and riders from LECC, LE Paragon, Leicester RC and Doncaster wheelers. The ladies had a run of their own in the mornings too.

For much of the period from 1946 to the mid fifties bikes were 'king of the road' - there were so few cars around! Many of those around at that time remember it as a great time to have grown up, even if the food rationing in the early years meant fighting to get enough food to pursue such active lives.

## Racing Activities in the Post War Years

In 1946, Ted Upton and Les Davies decided to switch from time trials to massed start events (road racing). Jim Turner and Jack Wright joined from the Derby Roads Club to form a Mercury team to enter the Manx International Road Race, round two laps of the Isle of Man Motorcycle TT circuit, in June of that year.

Ted Upton was an excellent, strong time trial performer, Turner a superb track rider and Davies and Wright were both strong support riders.

The team started their training in February using a circuit based around the Whitemeadows Youth Hostel (in order to supplement their diets). The first run, scheduled to go via Ashbourne, Swinscoe and Blore had to be abandoned at Swinscoe because of deep snowdrifts on the top section which were still being dug out. However, by the race day they were all pretty fit. But the French

riders were fitter and better nourished than expected, particularly as they had only just emerged from war torn Europe. Even their cycle equipment was superior, for example they had double chain rings compared with the single ring "Osgear" set up (see photo) giving 4 gear ratios.



Baldassari turned professional shortly afterwards and rode in the Tour de France. Coste won the Grand Prix des Nations later and also rode in the Tour de France. The Mercury riders were just "Babes in the Wood". They were tactically naive, presenting the French with an "arm-chair" ride.

More road racing experience was clearly needed and in the UK this could only be obtained by joining the British League of Racing Cyclists (BLRC).

In the Isle of Man race, Ted Upton had been by far the strongest rider in the chasing group while members of the England team had sat in the main bunch and contributed very little to chasing down the leaders. After an excellent report in 'Cycling' magazine, it was expected that Ted would be selected for the GB team for the World Championships that August. However, he was only named as the non-travelling reserve.



*The Mercury Team for the 1946 Isle of Man race.  
Left to right: Roland Herbert (Northampton), Jim Turner,  
Ted Upton, Jack Wright, Les Davies*

### **Ted Upton's recollection of the 1946 Isle of Man race:**

The opposition was dominated by the French riders Baldassari, Coste, Ferrand and Defraire from the Velo Club de Levallois. 103 riders started. Just before the first prime, Bob Maitland rode alongside and said "Ted, we'll show these French riders how to go". Shortly afterwards the French swept past with ease and took the first and second prime on the Creg' Willey's hill.

After the first lap, the Mercury team was intact and holding the pace. The second time on the Snaefell climb from Ramsey, Baldassari jumped away from the bunch about a quarter of the way up the climb. Les Davies shouted "after him Ted". I hesitated, waiting for the more experienced riders (Maitland, Fleming, Mitchell, Lanes etc) to react but they didn't. When I took up the chase only six people went with me, including Coste Ferrand and Les Davies. No help arrived. Either they would not or could not try. Les Davies didn't have the speed to match Baldassari. I persisted alone at the front with the rest in tow. Baldassari crossed the summit at the Bungalow still in sight but having bike trouble, but he could almost freewheel to the finish line, which he crossed alone to win.

The descent was long, straight and fast with sand bags around the bottom corner at Creg-ny-Baa. Ferrand hit the bags and vanished over the top. At the finish, Coste easily sprinted away from me to take second and Ferrand was able to adjust his buckled front wheel, re-mount and still finish before the main bunch to give the French the team prize. The Mercury got the First British Team prize when Jim Turner finished well up in the main bunch, together with Jack Wright.

Strong feeling in the club over this no doubt contributed to the decision taken at the next Annual General Meeting for the club to leave the National Cyclists' Union and to affiliate to the BLRC in time for the 1947 season.

The immediate consequence was that the Mercury was banned by the NCU and Road Time Trials Council (RTTC) who regarded the BLRC as a 'rebel organisation'.

As already noted, the NCU and RTTC both prohibited massed start races on the roads and only time trials, starting at dawn, with riders clothed head to foot in 'inconspicuous' black were permitted. On the continent massed start road races dominated while in the UK they were only permitted on small closed circuits (on airfields for example). As a consequence this country was a

back water for international road racing. There was a strong swell to introduce such races on the open road and in 1942 Percy Stallard ran the first, the Llangollen to Wolverhampton race. It was a great success but all the riders (and participants or organisers of future events) were then banned by the NCU and the RTTC. This action led to the formation, in 1942, of the British League of Racing Cyclists which grew from strength to strength and in 1945 organised the Brighton to Glasgow Victory Marathon race. This six day stage race was a great success and the League's popularity grew stronger.

The embargo by the NCU and RTTC lasted until 1953. In 1953, the UCI world controlling body recognised the BLRC after the BLRC National Team had won the classic Peace Race (Warsaw - Berlin - Prague). First team and first individual (Ian Steel). This meant that both the NCU and the RTTC had to

withdraw their embargo against the BLRC and so clubs and riders could affiliate to all three organisations.

During the years of the embargo, the Mercury was the only BLRC club in the area and local riders who wanted to ride road races flocked to join, especially juniors who probably enjoyed the label 'rebel'. The juniors in the club numbered about 20. Being 'banned' created an 'us and them' situation and some NCU people took it to extremes, leaving a café if League riders went in! In the late 40's rivalry was particularly intense - even the Sunday evening 'road-race' from Cromford to the 30 mph sign at Allestree was League v the rest. People met at Smokey Joes café (up the alley to the pool) prior to assembling on the A6 for a mass tear up - sometimes 40-50 riders at the start

1947 was a truly great year for the Mercury. Ted Upton had shown the way. The Mercury had at least six first class riders at any one time and were able to field strong teams in most of the big races between 1947 and 1952, including the Brighton to Glasgow Six Day race.



The 1952 Brighton to Glasgow team, from left to right (front row): Johnny Besant, Rex Butler, Joe Buxton, Jake Seal and Alan Gifford. Below - with the team car.



**The Brighton to Glasgow Six Day Race**

Alan Gifford, Johnny Besant and Joe Buxton (left to right in light jackets) and the French team in 1951.

Other races included: Dover to London, Tour of the Peak, Severn Valley GP etc and also the East Midlands 3-Day, organised by Alan Gifford in 1953. Ted Upton was the club icon. He won the BLRC National Amateur Road Race Championships as well as several other races including the classic Circuit of Urmston GP, and the Nidderdale Road Race, all by the lone breakaway. Les (Shufter) Davies won the BLRC 100 mile Time Trial Championships, having won the Broad Oak 100 the previous year, Joan Cauldwell won the BLRC Ladies National Road Race Championships and Johnny Besant was 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Junior BLRC Road Race

## The Brighton to Glasgow Six Day Race

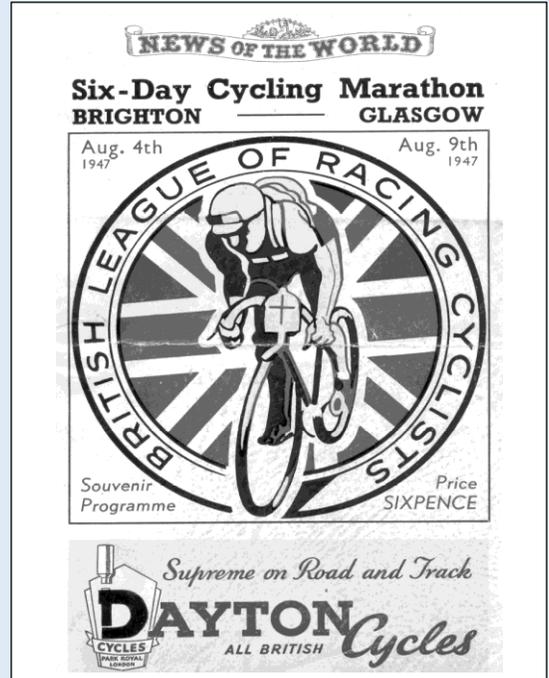
The 620 mile Brighton to Glasgow 6-Day stage race was the Precursor to the Milk Race / Tour of Britain and there was a Mercury team in the race in 1947, 1948, 1950, 1951 and 1952.

In 1947, Ted Upton, Les Davies and Everard Judge made up the team when Les Davies was first amateur, finishing 8<sup>th</sup> overall. In 1948, Jack Wright and Everard Judge rode.

In 1951, Dave Orford, Johnny Besant and Joe Buxton finished 3<sup>rd</sup> team and would have won the team award easily but for the fact that Joe punctured on the first day, smashing a wheel and losing 20 minutes. Dave Orford got to the front to lead the race through Derby. Johnny Besant finished 6<sup>th</sup>, Dave Orford 8<sup>th</sup> and Joe Buxton 18<sup>th</sup>,

Alan Gifford was the travelling manager for the Mercury team on this occasion and, at short notice, acted as interpreter for the French team who presented him with a cigarette lighter in appreciation

In 1952 the Mercury was represented by Johnny Besant, Joe Buxton, Alan Gifford, Jake Seal and Rex Butler. Rex, Jake and Alan finished 31<sup>st</sup>, 51<sup>st</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup> on this occasion with Johnny and Joe having to abandon.



Championship. Beryl Read (later Upton) won the Ladies BLRC East Midlands Road Race Championship and Ken Broadhurst (aged 18) won the BLRC East Midlands Hill Climb Championship.

The Mercury was the dominant club in the area for a number of years and enjoyed many successes at both junior and senior level.

The late 1940s and early 1950s saw a number of changes to the Mercury team. Ted Upton had to curtail his racing activities to pursue his work career and Jim Turner had to leave the Mercury and join an NCU club in order to compete on the track, which was controlled by the NCU. For the same reason, Eric Thompson had to leave the club

in 1950. Although Eric was a strong road man, track racing was his forte and he went on to represent GB at the Melbourne Olympic Games. The war (as the News of the World cycling correspondent called it) between the NCU / RTTC and the BLRC also forced the time trialists who wished to ride RTTC events to switch to an NCU / RTTC club.

However, the successes continued. In 1948, Dave Orford, who had joined the club the previous year, won the BLRC East Midlands Junior Road Race Championship by 1½ minutes (in Ted Upton style).

Another very successful rider, Johnny Besant, joined the club in 1948 from the Derby Road Club and that year took 2<sup>nd</sup> in the BLRC National

Amateur Road Race Championship but later that year he and Dave Orford were called up to the RAF for National Service. In 1949 the RAF Cycling Association was formed and Dave began his career as an organiser and official.

In 1950 they returned from National Service and immediately picked up where they left off with Dave winning Sheffield - Glossop - Sheffield, the Soar Valley RR, the Circuit of the Handleys and getting several 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> places. In 1951, he won the club Road Race Championship and was 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Notts - Skegness Classic. Johnny Besant and Dave Orford led the Mercury senior team.

Dave Orford and Johnny Besant, supported by Ken Minski, continued to gain individual and team successes in road races until 1953 with Besant winning the BLRC National Road Race Championship that year before emigrating to Australia in 1954. Dave got a contract with Wilson Cycles, Sheffield, turning independent. The independent category was introduced in 1947 for semi-pros, all riding for cycle firms.

In 1953, after the UCI recognised the BLRC and the NCU and RTTC had to withdraw their sanctions, Jim Turner returned to the Mercury as a current national champion ( a member of the team pursuit squad with East Midlands Clarion) and applied to

the BLRC for a racing licence. John Bennett and Dave Orford, both Mercury members were East Midlands Registrar (responsible for licences), and road race secretary respectively for the BLRC and expected it to be a formality that Jim's record would qualify him for a 1<sup>st</sup> cat licence. However, the meeting insisted that, as he was a new applicant, a 3<sup>rd</sup> cat licence would be issued. Three weeks later, Jim won the classic Tour of the Cotswolds, an event for which he needed a 1<sup>st</sup> cat licence to enter. Everyone knew that he had won this classic event but nothing was said.

In 1954 Jim Turner took over, winning the Soar Valley RR, the Tour of the Cotswolds, Notts-Skegness and the Senior East Midlands Championships, leading the Mercury team to wins in the latter two events. He was also second in the National Senior Championships. Dave Brindle won the Junior East Midlands Championships.



*The Club Juniors - 1949*



*The winning Mercury team in the 1954 Notts – Skegness Road Race. Left to right: Bill Henshaw, Jim Turner, Alan Gifford.*

Successes in the late 1940s and early 1950s were too numerous to detail. As well as the riders mentioned above, there was Johnny Welch, an East Mids Road Race Champion (later an Independent riding for Viking ), Ken Minski, Bob Jones, Rex Butler, Rob Wain, Johnny Saxton, Les Francis, Vere Bellian, Les Hazelhurst.

There was an excellent spirit within the club. During the season the juniors would ride out to

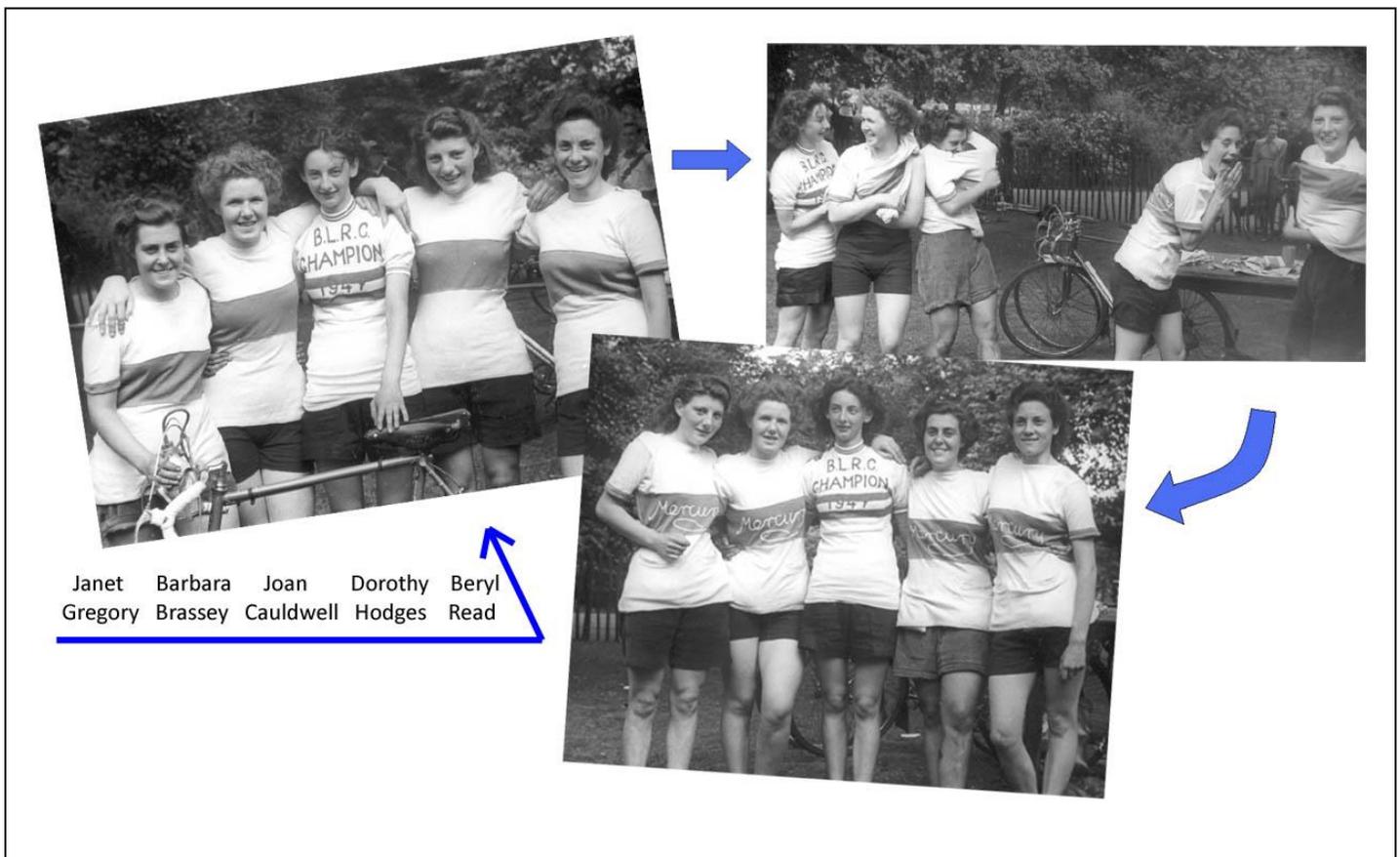
support the seniors who were racing. However, Road Races were limited to 40 riders plus 10 reserves (who usually rode as well) with club teams limited to four riders and this eventually led to some riders leaving to form the Derby Halcyon because they could not get into races if they were Mercury members.

The photo of the Mercury team at Notts - Skegness shows the riders in blue jerseys with a white band. However, the earliest club colours were white with a horizontal blue band across the chest. The first club vests were made by Beryl Read (later Upton) who was a dressmaker by trade. Cloth was bought from British Celanese by Ted Upton, in white, from which strips were cut to be dyed blue to form the club colours. After sewing the vests together, the word Mercury was embroidered in white across the blue panel on the back by the club racing girls. Around 20 vests were made at minimal cost. In the photos below the girls were persuaded to turn the vests round so that the

Mercury name showed on the front for the picture. For more on the club kit, see page 53.

In 1955 the club had 17 BLRC licence holders and 1 NCU. In 1958, when the BLRC and the NCU combined to become the BCF, the total number of licence holders was 21.

The Mercury promoted its first road race, the Whitmeadows Race, in August 1947. Ted Upton was the organiser and the race was a 50 mile event for amateurs with the headquarters at the Whitmeadows Youth Hostel near Parwich. The original course started near the Youth Hostel and followed a large circuit via Grangemill, Bakewell, Taddington, Buxton, Hartington and Fenny Bentley. There were primes for the King of the Mountains at Longcliffe, Taddington, Longnor Bank and between Hartington and Fenny Bentley. The men's' race was preceded by the girls event which used the same start and finish but took a shorter route through Alport and Youlgreave, rejoining the main



Janet Gregory Barbara Brassey Joan Cauldwell Dorothy Hodges Beryl Read

circuit at Newhaven. The following year, the event was organised by Johnny Besant and Alan Gifford and attracted 40 starters. Johnny Besant won with Joe Buxton second and Eric Thompson third.



*Johnny Besant winning the 1948 Whitmeadows Road Race*

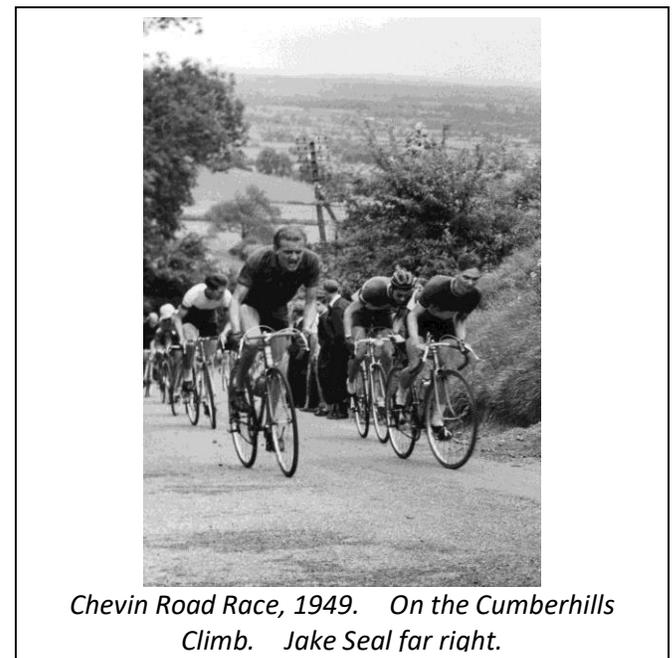
In the early 1950s, although the Whitmeadows name was retained, the course was changed to a circuit starting on Broadway, Derby and going via Allestree, Duffield, B5023 to Cowers Lane crossroads, Turnditch (prime at top of the hill), Weston Underwood, Kedleston and back to Broadway. The first cat race was over 80 miles (4 laps) and there was also a 40 mile version for 3rd cats and juniors. The 1959 edition was run as two races; one for independents and 1st cat riders and one for 1st, 2nd and 3rd cat riders.

The Chevin road race, for juniors, was first held in 1948 and took place in the spring. Initially it started from Mickleover but by the early 1950s it was using the same course as the Whitmeadows except that a shortcut was taken via Cumberhills Road.

In the period from 1947, when the Mercury became a BLRC club, the emphasis was on road racing and there was a season long club competition for Senior Road Race Champion. In 1950 Vere Bellian won the RR Championship



*Start of the Chevin Road Race, Mickleover, 1949*



*Chevin Road Race, 1949. On the Cumberhills Climb. Jake Seal far right.*

Trophy. It's not clear how this was decided in the very early years but in 1957 a set of rules was formulated for a points scoring system to determine the winner of the competition with Jake Seal keeping score.

As a BLRC club, there had been little interest in time trialling beyond the club's own events. However, from 1953 a handful of Mercury riders were also competing regularly in RTTC open time

trials and BDCA events and of course the club's own time trial events continued and became more popular. Through the 1950s there were usually 15 to 20 riders in the evening time trials. In 1951 the series was won by Jake Seal who received a splendid medal (see photo) made of silver with a gold centre – the events were clearly taken very seriously.



It is not clear whether these early events included 20 and / or 25 mile events as well as the 10s or if other clubs were involved in the competition. Jim Turner was the club's top tester. After 1953, when BLRC members were allowed to ride RTTC time trials, Janet Gregory returned to the Mercury having been Ladies National 50 mile Champion and 100 mile Champion in 1950 with Nottingham Wheelers.

The Club Championships (Club Trophy Day as it was originally called) was started in September 1948. This was always a Sunday morning. Most of the club rode, tourists and racing men. On some occasions, older members would go to the turn and make tea to hand up to people. Water, stoves etc. were carried out on their bikes. Some riders dressed up. It was always well attended. A 25 mile course on the Uttoxeter Road was used and three trophies were competed for: the Jack Ashworth Cup (seniors), the Junior Memorial Trophy and the Ray Carrington Cup (ladies).

These events have always been well supported. In 1958 they were moved from August/September to June/July.

The inter-club 25 mile time trial competition was also started in the 1950s with four local clubs taking part, always Derby Mercury RC and South Pennine RC with various other clubs over the years. In 1956, Billy Gray donated two trophies for this competition, one for the winning five man team and one for the fastest individual rider on the day. That year the other clubs taking part were Derby Wheelers and Overseal C & AC who won on that occasion.

In 1959 the first club Hill Climb Championship was held at Riber and a new trophy was bought to present to the winner.

A further challenge for the time trialists was set up in the early 1950s - the Derby - Buxton - Derby. In 1953, Tom Crowther (who founded Mercian Cycles with Lew Barker) set up a record for a route from Derby to Buxton and back to Derby. The route went from Mackworth via Brailsford, Ashbourne and Newhaven to Buxton. Tom Crowther posted a time of 3:19:34 and offered a trophy to anyone who could beat 3:19:00. The challenge was open to all the Derby clubs. In June 1953 Alan Gifford set a club record time of 3-21-28. This was broken by Ken Minski the following year with a time of 3:09:43 and this was later reduced to 3:03:52 by Jim Turner. In 1959 Audrey Sharratt set a time of 3:40:13, the first lady to do it, beating the target time of 3:50:00.

In 1957 the racing committee was considering a BAR for time trials because of the increasing interest in time trialling. Also, after some debate as to the need, Roy Dable was appointed within the racing committee as Time Trials captain - a new post.

Over the same period, the road racers and a few others regularly rode the evening track league

meetings at Derby municipal track on Osmaston Road and Harvey Haddon Stadium, Nottingham. Track racing was governed by the NCU so Mercury members could not ride between 1946 and 1953. Eric Thompson was refused entry as a Mercury member. During the war, the concrete Derby track was covered in hawthorn bushes to disguise it. Mercury members helped to clear it after the war so that racing could start again.

A 'team from Derby' won the inter-town track event at the Staveley Iron Works Sports Ground. A few riders were riding in evening league events on the track and in 1959 the Mercury did well in the BDCA Track Championships.

Roller racing was a popular part of the weekly programme through the 1940s and 1950s and took place in a local cinema, complete with an announcer on stage and quite a few spectators.

The club bought it's own set of rollers as far back as 1944 and they were first used by Johnny Welch in the back yard at the clubroom on Friargate. Venues: included the Gaumont Cinema, London Road, Churchill Hall, Curzon Street, the Rialto Dance Hall, London Road/Nightingale Road and Therm House, Long Eaton.

Teams, each of four riders, were from Derby, Burton and Long Eaton Clubs. Our riders included: Jim Turner, Eric Thompson, Johnny Welch, Joe Buxton, Wally Box, Reg Moreton, Jack Wright, Melville Garner.

From the end of the war, right through the fifties, was a great time for the Mercury racers and an eventful period in cycle racing in general. It is only right therefore that quite a bit of space has been devoted to it.

## The Dovedale Dash

By far the biggest event organised by the club in terms of number of participants was not a cycling event at all but was a cross-country run. It started in 1952.

Each year the Club celebrated Bonfire Night at Ilam Hall YH on the Saturday night nearest November 5. After the fire and fireworks there would be boisterous games, sketches and a sing song in the hostel. Next morning the run was held, starting and finishing at the hostel.

The first race was called The All Cyclists Cross Country Run and was organised by Ken Broadhurst. It was contested between members of the Mercury, Derby Ivanhoe and the Derbyshire Road club. There were 16 runners and the overall winner was Ken (Hambone) Broadhurst with Rob Wain first junior, both Mercury members. The following year the name Dovedale Dash was coined by Nat Allen, a climber member of the club, and was opened to all comers.

The race was started by letting off a 'banger'. The 4.5 mile course started outside the hostel, and went to Ilam Cross, over the river bridge, left along the riverside footpath to Coldwall Bridge, crossing the river again by the bridge then left along the river path to the road. Across the road, following the footpath to the foot of Thorpe Cloud and then over the river at the stepping stones. Left onto the footpath across the fields behind the Izaak Walton Hotel and on to Ilam village and back to the hostel.

For some years, Edgar Smith, the hostel warden, served soup after the event, but as the numbers grew he stopped and so trestle tables were set up by the village cross, to serve hot drinks, produced using Primus stoves. The runners washed down in the river. That year it was a short course, the start and finish being in the village but the villagers had words with the warden and the following year

the event moved back to the hostel.

Trophies were awarded to the winners - from 1957 the first Derby Mercury runner received the Sam Andrews Memorial Trophy and from 1960 the overall winner received a cup donated by Eric Thompson. George Rhodes, an international runner, won this on three consecutive years and was given the cup to keep. However, he presented a new trophy for the overall winner. Later, in 1979, the Bucko Bowl, in memory of Joe (Bucko) Buxton, was donated to give to the first Mercury Lady to finish.

By the early 1970s the number of participants was increasing and some top cross-country runners were taking part. The event came to the attention of the AAA who banned any of their members from taking part in any non-approved event. This did not stop the keenest runners and entrants such as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Popeye and Superman started to appear on the start sheet. The club did get a licence from the English Cross-Country Union to avoid this problem.

By 1974, after Shufta Davies was left on his own to clear up, it was realised that a named organiser was needed and Dennis Yates took on the job. After a couple of years John Welch took over and ran the event very successfully until the last time it was a Mercury event.

By 1976, the Hostel could not cope with the numbers and the event was moved to Thorpe Pastures. A small rent was paid to the landowner for the weekend and on Saturday a working party from the club would arrive to set up car parking arrangements and mark out the course. Two marquees were erected by the scouts for signing on and for refreshments.

The pasture was also used for the car park, the parking fee being collected by Farmer Frith, who farmed the pasture. This was his perk. The parking was organised by the Club juniors who

thought it was great fun.



*Crossing the river at the stepping stones.*

The running of the event was still very much an 'amateur' affair, dependant on volunteers from the club turning up to help and the use of loaned equipment, eg gas water heaters from the GPO. Water had to be carried from the car park toilet block. Even in 1976, with over 300 runners, this was a significant undertaking. The set-up was akin to a cycle time trial event with the runners getting a free cup of tea when they returned their number (all hand written on unused computer punch cards) and club members donating homemade cakes etc.

After the first year at Thorpe Pastures a good team of helpers developed, individuals and groups of club members taking on either allocated or self appointed tasks. The whole came together on the day, generally worked like a well oiled machine and was then laid to rest for another year, but there was a lot of unseen and unheard of effort done behind the scenes.

As the number of participants rose, more problems had to be overcome, not least of which was the totally inadequate toilet arrangements at the small Thorpe car park. After the '82 event the drains had been blocked by mud due to competitors washing their legs in the toilets. Outside facilities were to be provided next year, a hose and a footbath. After the 1986 event they were totally clogged up again. Derek Wilkins, quietly and without fuss, donned his rubber gloves and, having been up to his armpits, cleared them out. The following year, the last event organised by the

Mercury, Portaloos were hired.

Runners had to sign a disclaimer form, and after 1980, under 18's had to sign a separate form together with a parent/guardian signature. In 1983 the under 18's had to have their own signing on queue to help relieve congestion. The entry fee for all runners was increased from 10p to 50p. In 1982, at the suggestion of Ralph Wilkins the current chairman, a banner was produced and displayed above the signing-on tent. This stated that the Dovedale Dash was organised by the Derby Mercury, as many competitors were unaware of this.

The start and finish were now at the top of Lin Dale. However, this start created a potentially dangerous mass stampede down the dale to the stepping stones and it was recognised that St Johns Ambulance should be in attendance. Also, in the interests of 'safety', a rope was suspended across the river for use as a handrail. This caused more

problems than it solved. Many people were unbalanced off the stones due to the large numbers holding onto the rope. The vast majority plunged through the river upstream of the stones, to the delight of the spectators.

The following year the start was moved to the back of The Peveril of the Peak and this helped to spread the field out a little before the descent to the stepping stones.

Congestion at styles was resolved with the help of the local farmers who moved animals and left certain gates open to ease the runners' way and protect their hedges.

More congestion at the finish was solved by a system of four channels, controlled by marshals who switched finishers from one channel to another in blocks of 25. A team of helpers ferried results from each channel to the overall result sheet and ensured they got there in the right order. The first ten to finish were given individual times and thereafter times were given in blocks of one minute. A full result sheet was sent to anyone providing a stamped and addressed envelope..

The growing popularity of the Dash can be seen in the number of finishers, '76-302, '77-580, '78-668, '79-743, '80-912, '81-1204, '82-1479, '83-1516, '84-1451, '85-1513, '86-1572, '87-1555.

The event was a major source of funds for the club, eg. the income in 1982 was £700. At the AGM in 1982 the President, Eric Thompson, suggested that having Dovedale Dash tee shirts could be a good source of income. In March the following year a design was agreed - a pale blue shirt with a dark blue neck and arm trim and logo designed by John Welch, and Brian Rick of the Heanor Clarion CC produced the shirts.

They were a great success. In 1983 the club took £780 plus £95 from catering and £575 from the sale of T-shirts. £100 was paid to the scouts.

After another brush with the AAA concerning the distance that children under 12 years of age were permitted to run and increasing problems with parking in and around Thorpe, the end of the Dovedale Dash as a Derby Mercury event was effectively brought about by the sale of Thorpe Pastures to the National Trust. They wanted the event run differently. They also wanted £200 for a licence to run the event. The club had had to take out insurance against participant injury the previous year but the Trust wanted the number of entrants to be controlled. The event was held on a trial basis in 1986 but the following year the cost of the licence went up to £250 and the Trust wanted 15% of the takings and would not allow T-shirts to be sold. It was decided that, with increasing bureaucracy and diminishing returns, 1987 would be the last year that the club organised the event and it was taken over by the Scouts.

The Sam Andrews Trophy is still awarded to the first Mercury senior to finish. The George Rhodes Trophy was re-assigned to the Junior Road Race Competition and the Bucko Bowl became the Ladies BAR Trophy.

## In and out of the doldrums

The club remained at the Seven Stars clubroom throughout the fifties and well into the sixties, although even before the end of the fifties the committee was looking again into the possibility of buying a clubroom and finding land to put it on. Finally, Phil Henry sold out to Youngers Brewery and moved to a pub in Melbourne. The Seven Stars 'went posh' and many felt that it lost its previously very welcoming and traditional feel very quickly.

The Seven Stars was home to the Mercury until 1966 and it was a sad day for the Mercury when the out-building was eventually pulled down to extend the pub car park.

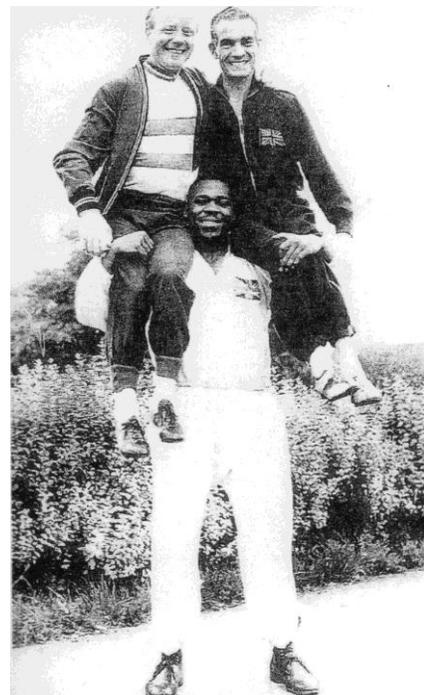
With the loss of the clubroom at the Seven Stars, the search was on for a new home. It was the start of a difficult period for the club. The first move was to Ashbourne Road where the 102 Club offered the use of a building that was actually an above ground blast shelter. It was offered rent free if the club did the work to convert it into a useable room. The job was taken on and Eric Keeling was employed to do the work that club members could not do themselves. This included putting in a new concrete floor and fitting a window. Inside, a counter was constructed and the room was painted. Derek Wilkins got a lot of bus seats from a breaker's yard to put round the walls. Eventually the place was up and running. However, the 102 Club had expected that the Mercury members would spend money in their bar and, when this turned out to be too little, the Mercury was told to move on in 1971. This was a disaster for the club since a lot of its money had been spent on the conversion work and this was simply lost.

As a stopgap measure, the club met for a year or so at the Lancaster Youth Centre in Chapel Street, Derby while a new clubroom was sought.

At the end of 1972 the club moved to the Crown and Cushion on London Road. But this was just a small room in the pub and unsuitable for cycles. Club night was on Thursday but also on Sunday for activities such as film shows, slide shows, table tennis (a table was obtained on loan), darts, bingo or the Christmas Party. However, these activities were soon cut back due to a lack of interest and after Christmas 1973, with Thursday nights not paying their way due to poor attendance, only the Sunday nights were continued.

The future of this clubroom was soon in doubt and other clubs were approached with a view to sharing a clubroom. Although the South Pennine RC expressed an interest, nothing came of the idea.

By 1974, after talks with the Derby Parks Department, the club was on the move again, this time to the Sherwood Foresters Recreation Centre, next to Normanton Barracks. The move was supposed to be in April but delays meant that the room was not available until October and so, for several months, the club was without a clubroom. The room, which was quite large, was shared with Louis Martin's Weightlifting Club.



The photo, taken sometime earlier, shows Louis Martin with Eric Thompson (left) and the runner Arthur Keily (right), Derby's three Olympians at the 1960 Rome games.

Each club had the room for two nights each week. The Mercury had it on Thursdays and Sundays and, once again, Mercury members set about doing the place up. The room was painted and storage heaters, given to Derek Wilkins, were installed. Once again the possibility of buying a clubroom was under discussion and there was talk of large-scale fundraising but nothing came of it.

Over the next few years the room at the Barracks frequently suffered from vandalism and break-ins and there was a lack of manpower to carry out repairs. Attendance was poor (even film shows flopped) and, after appeals for people to use the clubroom, the Thursday sessions were stopped for a time. Towards the end of 1975, after the evening time trial series was over for the season, the clubroom was opened up on Tuesday evenings to attract the 'Tuesday crowd', ie the time trialists. But this too was soon cancelled due to lack of support.

In 1975 beer was on sale at the clubroom but, after questions about the legality of it, it was stopped the following year. The room was sub-let in 1976 to a pop group to try to raise funds. The lease was basically too expensive. There was also speculation about the Council's future plans for the site and so, once again, the club moved on. The building at the Barracks was eventually demolished.

In 1977 the club was meeting at the Old People's Hut on Upper Moor Road, Allenton but this was just another stopgap location. In 1978, during the racing season, club nights were suspended until a new clubroom could be found.

Membership was on the decline towards the end of the club's time at the Seven Stars, in fact by the

mid 1960s it had dropped to its lowest level since the club was started with only around 50 members and fewer than that actively keeping the club alive. Actual numbers are not certain since the membership list was lost in 1973. However, from 1969 to the mid 1970s numbers increased steadily, reaching 171 in 1974 in spite of the club's somewhat nomadic existence. By this time there were increasing numbers of people taking part in racing, time trialling in particular, even though very few of them were going to the clubroom on a regular basis. It was particularly encouraging that there was an influx of youngsters coming into the club and getting into racing after the dip in the 1960s.

The club administration underwent a number of changes through this period. After a series of problems with finances, the accounting system was changed to bring everything under the control of the treasurer. Previously, each section had its own accounts. Membership fees were also raised and the AGM was moved to November instead of January to allow officers to operate January to January. A rule book was also produced and sent to all members. Beyond 1965 there was no longer a separate social committee but the position of clubroom captain and rambling captain continued through the 1970s.

With the increasing membership, the magazine was re-launched in 1973 after a long period without one. Lew and Enid Barker were the editors of the new quarterly magazine and 1000 copies were printed by the Long Eaton Advertiser and distributed to the South Pennine RC, Derby Wheelers, Long Eaton Paragon RC, Long Eaton CC, Coalville Wheelers, Matlock CC, Belperion, Mercia CC and Derby CTC. This may have been a little ambitious. At first there was a good supply of articles, particularly from John Welch who was a prolific contributor on a variety of topics. There was also advice on winter training from Dave Orford and Tony Miles, the club coach. However, by 1975 the club was once again going through a

bad time and so was the magazine. There was a proposal to replace the magazine with a monthly newsletter to be distributed at the clubroom and at the evening time trials but the magazine did manage to keep going even though articles were always very hard to come by.

Although attendance at the clubroom was often very poor the traditional social events and fundraising activities, eg the sale of Christmas cards, ties (see photo), badges, car stickers and T-shirts, jumble sales, catalogue gifts, raffles etc were still well supported through the 1970s. The annual Christmas party was always popular, as was the annual prize presentation and dinner. This was held at a number of different venues during the 1960s and 1970s including the Beau Brummel and the Derbyshire Yeoman. Although there were generally more than 100 people present, attendance was not always that good and in 1976 it was held as a buffet at the Hardings Arms in Kings Newton. The following year it reverted to the traditional dinner and was held at the Friary Hotel. For a while during the mid 1970s there were also other social events, such as a New Years lunch and a Valentines Eve party as well as events including other local clubs.



There was also some support for activities such as ice-skating at Nottingham on Monday nights in winter and tennis in the summer at Alvaston Lake courts. However, many activities went through cycles. Thus, after a low point in the mid 1960s when the club was really in the doldrums, the early 1970s saw an increasing membership, including youngsters, reaching a peak around 1974. There were successful trips organised by the racers to the World Cyclo-Cross Championships at Crystal Palace in 1973 and to the Skol 6-Day at Wembley in 1974. Rambling was very popular once again and there was a full programme of Hostelling and camping weekend trips which were especially popular with families with children, of which there were many. Record numbers were out on family rambles and the club purchased a set of 1:25000 walkers' maps. Attempts were made to coincide rambles and camping trips but they were supported by different groups who chose to remain separate, as they had twenty years earlier.

In the 1970s, Eric Cook did a great deal to encourage the youngsters in the club, organising camping and Youth Hostelling trips. He also donated trophies and prizes to the club, including one for the Schoolboy/Girl of the Year (for doing most to help with club activities such as marshalling, helping at the clubroom, recruiting etc) and the Schoolboy/Girl Tourist Trophy (for participation on club-runs, YH trips etc). In 1973 he offered a bike frame to the most improved schoolboy/girl and also money towards medals. The following year he donated a bike for the most improved schoolboy/girl. Eric was given Honorary Life Membership of the club for his contribution to encouraging the youngsters.

All of these activities declined rapidly after the peak around 1973/1974. Traditional bus trips for walkers had to be cancelled due to lack of support and by the late 1970s there was no response to a programme of rambles put together by Ken Partington.

Only the holidays at Whitesands continued as usual. This Derby clubs get together continued to be popular.

The Sunday club-runs were also experiencing problems through the 1970s. They were mostly juniors on the club-runs and they often broke up with the faster riders not staying with the slower ones. In 1973 a second run was started to accommodate this and then efforts were made to re-introduce run leaders with a pre-determined destination, but the 'tear-ups' continued and it was very difficult to keep it together. By 1976 it was very difficult to attract youngsters and find run leaders. An attempt was made to re-introduce the Tramps Run, popular in the 1940s but it was not well received; those days were gone.

Racing activities followed a similar pattern, from a dip at the start of the 1960s to a peak in 1973/1974 followed by a decline. In the mid 1960s the South Pennine RC and the Derby Wheelers were both strong time trialling clubs whilst the Mercury still had a reputation in Road Racing with a small but strong squad of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cat riders. This group, comprising Tony Millward, Reg Carter, John (Chick) Pickard and John Horrocks travelled widely, competing in good quality fields and racing against Milk Race and World Championship standard riders with a good deal of success. Although this group broke up by 1969, by now the club had a good number of members taking part in road racing. In 1969 the Whitemeadows race included three Mercury riders and the overflow event (the main event was over-subscribed) included seven more. In 1971 Mercury riders took 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> places in the Chevin RR as well as the last two places.

The two road races promoted by the club, the Whitemeadows race in August/September and the Chevin in April, continued throughout the 1960s. However the large numbers of entries (190 for the Chevin in 1954) declined going into the 1960s and the 1961 edition of the Whitemeadows race had to

be cancelled due to a lack of entries. The following year, with Rob Wain taking over as racing secretary, the race was back and incorporated the East Midlands Championships. Also that year, the Chevin race incorporated the East Midlands Junior Championship but entries were well down on those of the past. Many club members took a turn at organising these events.

From the mid 1960s both races were moved to a course around Turnditch. The Whitemeadows had semi-classic status for 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> cat riders whilst the Chevin was shorter but on the same circuit for 3<sup>rd</sup> cat and junior riders.

After 1973 a variety of courses were used for the Whitemeadows and Chevin races. In 1974 the Whitemeadows was run as a 90 mile tour of the Peak via Buxton. The following year it was sponsored by a group of Derby Traders. In 1976 a circuit round Melbourne and Ticknall was used and, after not being run in 1977, by 1979 it was using a circuit through Windley and Weston Underwood in June. The Chevin also used a number of courses - in 1974 it was at Little Eaton then in 1976 it was on the Spondon / Stanley circuit using Spondon Cricket Club as the HQ and attracting a full field. By this time the race was no longer just for juniors but included 3<sup>rd</sup> cat riders as well.

In spite of declining participation, or perhaps to generate more interest, additional events were promoted by the club, eg in 1966 there was a series of criterium races on a 505 yard circuit at James Keiller's factory at Mickleover. The factory manager was a keen supporter and a sub-committee was set up to organise the events, three of which took place. Several attempts were made over the next few years to repeat the events, including one for schoolboys, but they did not come to fruition due to difficulties finding organisers, permissions from the corporation and venues (the Rolls-Royce car park on Raynesway was one that was considered). Interest picked up going into the 1970s and

1973/1974/1975 was a very busy time for the club. The Mercury has always been a club that is willing to put into the sport at least as much as it takes out but at this time it was putting on more promotions than ever before. The club was getting good coverage on Radio Derby, which had a regular cycling spot with Mike Reid (the Mercury general secretary). A sub-committee, DMRC Promotions, was set up to handle the events promoted by the club (road races, criteriums and cyclo-cross but not time trials) and £1000 of sponsorship was sought for promotions. In 1971 Mike Reid also led negotiations with Derby Corporation for the club to run closed circuit criteriums on a course at Normanton Barracks on Thursday evenings from May to August, providing a rare opportunity at that time for schoolboys to take part in massed start events. In fact the series kicked off with their East Midlands Championship. These events carried on for a couple of years until the barracks was demolished.

As well as the regular Whitemeadows and Chevin races, in 1974 the club promoted two races at Winster in March based on a circuit incorporating the Via Gellia. These were just 25 miles, one for 1/2/3 cat riders and one for 3/Jun riders. The club also put on a 2-Day, 3-stage event for the Winster Carnival in July. The first stage was one hour plus one lap around the houses, stage 2 was a hill climb sponsored by DFS and stage 3 was a 60 mile road race around the Peak. These events were held again in 1975.

The club also promoted the divisional championships in May 1974 on a circuit round Spondon and Stanley. The two races were 85 miles (10 laps) for 1/2/3 cat riders and 45 miles for juniors. In the same year the club joined forces with Matlock CC to promote the Ladies and the Vets National RR Championships on the same circuit.

There were discussions about the possibility of seeking a sponsor for the club itself but not

everyone was happy about doing that. It had always been recognised that the Mercury was about more than just cycle racing and that a sponsor would just want to support the racers. The idea of becoming a sponsored club was therefore dropped.

In 1974 the number of members taking out BCF licences reached an all-time high. There was organised training most nights of the week and much discussion about how to let youngsters have a go at racing without having to get a licence. Cyclo-Cross was seen as one way to do this and so the club affiliated to the BCCA in time for the 1975/76 season. The affiliation was continued, even though there was only one active rider the following year.

The local track league was also still going strong all through the 1960s and 1970s and continued to attract a small number of riders from the Mercury in spite of a clash of nights with the evening time trials. In fact, in 1962, the Mercury organised the BDCA track league. In 1973 the club's own track competition was instigated with the winner receiving the Woodyet Trophy, originally donated for the photographic competition, which was no longer running.

But the level of activity outlined above could not be sustained and from 1976 the decline was rather rapid. In 1975 'Derby Promotions' was ended and Mercury events were being largely ignored by our own racing men. The following year, a number of Mercury racing members left the club to form the Derwent Velo Club, seeking sponsorship. The decline was not confined to the Mercury; 1975 also saw the end of the Derby Wheelers. In 1975 there were problems promoting races due to apathy, marshals not turning up etc and there was even a risk that the club could be barred from promoting events in 1976. In the end, John Horrocks, the racing secretary, stepped in as organiser to ensure that the events did take place in 1976.

Throughout the history of the club the basic programme of time trials established in the very early years has continued. The club has always promoted at least one Open '25' each year and, for very many years, a second '25' on behalf of the BDCA. The Club Championships and the Inter-Club competition are also long established and the Hill Climb, established in 1959 has been a popular event ever since, together with the Freewheel Contest, which was taken very seriously at one time with cranks strapped to chain stays to prevent cheating! Taking the chain off the sprockets also reduced friction from the freewheel.

The season-long series of mid-week evening time trials has always been the mainstay of the programme and the starting point for most people wanting to get into cycle racing, the only requirement to enter being club membership. These events have been run right from the start of the club. The events were originally run on a course on the A6 from Shardlow but have moved quite a few times over the years, first to Little Eaton with a brief excursion in 1963 to the Uttoxeter road from Mickleover to the Salt Box cafe. The points system based on 12 rides was introduced in 1973 and one of the 10s was designated the Championship event for schoolboys/girls and for ladies. The series included one 25 mile event each month on the Ashbourne road and a 20 mile event run with the South Pennine RC. The juniors were the main participants in the evening tens which were held on a Tuesday.

But even the time trial events were not immune to the decline of the early 1960s. The number of riders taking part in the evening series fell from a typical entry of around 20 to just 2 or 3 in 1964 and there were sometimes no Mercury members riding, the event being mainly for the benefit of riders from the Ivanhoe club. There were only 66 entries for the Open '25' that year with no riders from the Mercury and only 12 riders in the club championships. Time trialling was at a low ebb.

However, whereas support for road racing declined rapidly after the peak of 1973 - 1975, time trialling picked up and became the dominant racing activity in the club. The club's open 25 promotion was particularly successful. For example, in 1976 there were 180 riders split between a senior event and a vets event plus 10 tandems and even then 30 entries had to be returned. A good number of Mercury members were participating in open events. The 25 at this time was run on a course between Etwall and Uttoxeter with the start in a layby near Etwall. The HQ was a tent with the results board clamped to a fence. These very popular events were organised for several years by Ralph Wilkins with a regular, well organised support team of Bette and Derek Wilkins, John and Margaret Welch, Enid Barker (and others).

The juniors had all but disappeared by this time and there were few schoolboys/girls. In the 1960s there were attempts to run schoolboys time trials but the Education Committee objected on safety grounds and they did not take place. By the 1970s there was little interest in schoolboys racing in the district and there were few youngsters coming into the club. There were also few lady riders. There were two attempts made to organise ladies 25-mile events, one in 1961 and another for the CDLCA in 1978 but neither event received much support and they were not repeated.

Through the 1970s and into the 1980s a number of older riders were returning to racing and the club gained something of a reputation for its 'super-vets', winning many local time trial events both individually and as a team. 1973 was a vintage year with Dave Orford, John Welch, Ralph Wilkins and Lew Barker all scoring successes. John Wilkins then joined the group and Jim Turner and Ken Minski also made comebacks. Bette Wilkins and Margaret Welch were also flying the flag for the ladies. The successes continued through the 1970s and notable among them was John Welch's win in the Leicester Forest CC 12 Hour event in

1975. Starting as the scratch man John caught the entire field covering 260.4 miles, a new club record which stands to this day.

The inter-club competition continued to be a popular event and in 1978 was also designated as the club 25 mile championship for the first time. The early history of this event is confusing. Originally there were six events each year – two 10s, two 20s and two 25s. From 1956, when Bill Gray donated his trophies, these were clearly contested over a single 25 mile event and yet, in 1978 it is noted that the Long Eaton CC ran the two 25s at Shardlow. Since then it has just been a single 25 mile event run as part of the South Pennine RC time trial programme. The Mercury and South Pennine have always been involved but the other clubs have varied over the years. An early participant was Derby Wheelers.

When they folded in 1975 Belper BC took their place but other clubs who have been involved at various times include: Overseal C&AC, Mercia CC, Coalville Wheelers, Long Eaton CC, Long Eaton Paragon, Walsall RCC, Heanor Clarion, Derby Eagles and Derwent Velo. The competition had to be limited to four clubs at any one time to be classified as a 'Club Event'.

In 1964 the BAR competition for juniors was instigated to be contested over four events, 2x10 and 2x25.

In 1974 there was a new trophy for a Vets BAR - the Sarah Ellen Potter Memorial Trophy given by Enid Barker in memory of Sarah Ellen.

## Breadsall Old Hall

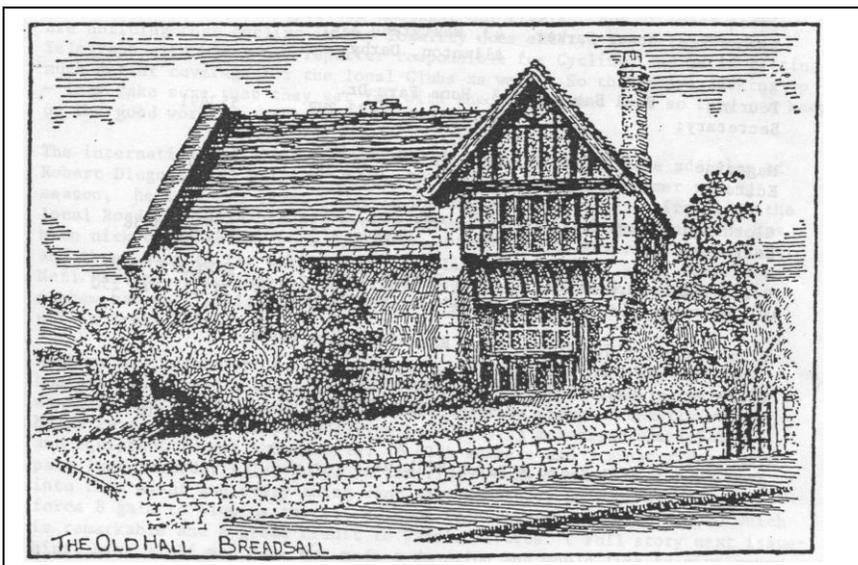
The search for a new clubroom finally led to Breadsall at the end of 1978. With the move to the Old Hall at Breadsall, the club found an excellent clubroom that would remain the club's base for the next fifteen years. The Old Hall was an ancient stone and timber building dating back at least to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In medieval times it was much larger than it is now and was home to important knightly families. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century part of the building fell into ruin or, according to tradition, was destroyed by cannon fire from Cromwell's forces. For the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was used as a rectory and there is an underground passage (now bricked up) connecting the hall to the church. The Old Hall later became a farm house, a hunting box, a school, a village shop and has even served as a public house. It was also reputedly used as a joiner's shop and more recently a post office before becoming available for parish meetings etc and, of course, a clubroom for the Derby Mercury. It was one of the happiest clubrooms for the club, partly because of the charm of the building itself and also a good caretaker.

There were two rooms. The smaller one was the kitchen and the larger one, the general meeting

room. This had a sloping floor, making it very difficult to play table tennis, although attempts were still made to play table football.

Club-night was Tuesday in the summer, to coincide with the evening time trials, and Wednesday in the winter. The hall was not available on Tuesdays in the winter. Club-nights were well attended; in fact they were sometimes packed out. The good attendance did not necessarily translate into more willing helpers and the age-old problem of finding people to man the kitchen and clear up afterwards continued with Derek and Bette Wilkins and Barbara Smith bearing the brunt most of the time. Committee meetings were held at the clubroom for a short while but this was found to be impractical and they soon reverted to committee members' houses. The committee was kept busy and an increasing membership led to a number of changes. In 1982 the posts of membership secretary and trophies secretary were created, in 1983 the position of clothing secretary was added and in 1984 the positions of vice-chairman and club coach were added. In 1988 John Welch was appointed 'clubroom organiser'. The constitution was amended and updated and, in 1984, membership cards were introduced and clubroom subs were scrapped. Once again, the question of sponsorship (by GT Cars) was discussed and rejected. Club affiliations were reviewed and, in

1986, it was agreed that the club should affiliate to the Derby Cycling Group, a Campaigning group set up in 1980 to look after the interests of cyclists in Derby. Tony Miles, a committee member in several roles over the years, was a committed member of Derby Cycling Group and Sustrans, surveying and campaigning for off-road routes. Although the club was not active in that area, it was felt that the group should be supported, in name at least. Later, in 1995, the club affiliated to the Midlands section of the Road Records Association. In 1991, a club Handbook was issued,



bringing together the revised club constitution, rules, club time trial records and past winners of club competitions.

The position of club president was also under discussion. Some people were unhappy with the, largely absentee, president but he was appointed for life. However, in 1991 he offered to stand down in favour of someone more actively involved. When he stood down in 1993 the position was made a three year appointment, voted for at the

AGM. Derek Wilkins was elected to the position and has been re-elected ever since.

The rising membership from the late 1970s continued into the 1980s with a peak in 1982 of 240 members. What's more, there was a good cross-section of people and the club was, once again, on the crest of a wave. The clubroom was popular and well attended, a good number of youngsters were joining and Lew Barker, in his magazine editorial, was prompted to compare this

### **Eric Thompson**

Eric Gordon Thompson was born in 1927 in Derby and was expected by his father Fred to become a boxing champion. Eric soon lost interest in boxing but became good at football and played for the very successful local Abbey Street team. At 17 he joined the Fleet Air Arm at Warrington and his interest in sport grew. He was good at running, Cross country and on the track, and was determined to succeed at something sporting. He still played for the Abbey Street football team and as a boy scout had met a girl in the Guides and therefore travelled back to Derby at weekends by train and bus. However, this was costly and hitch-hiking was unreliable so one Sunday evening he borrowed his brother's bike, a heavy machine with a 79" fixed gear, and set off at 10pm to ride the 65 miles to Warrington, arriving at 3am. It was a tough ride but the next weekend he made it in 4 hours and it became his regular means of travel between Derby and Warrington.

The girl he came back to Derby for was Dot, the sister of Ted Upton and she introduced him to the Derby Mercury. Eric did not consider himself good enough to try racing but went with the club to support the team to Chesterfield for the Circuit of the Handleys race. When one member of the team failed to turn up someone lent Eric a pair of shorts and persuaded him to join the team. 'Thommo' not only won the race but King of the Mountains as well. Unfortunately his unofficial presence in the team was noted and earned a three month suspension.

Now committed to cycling, in 1949 he won the East Mids BLRC Championship but from 1950 he concentrated on the track, winning the Derby Track League that year. Between 1953 and 1966 he won nine tandem sprint titles with different partners (Peter Brotherton (2), Dave Handley (3) and Geoff Cooke). In all he won 12 National titles, Commonwealth gold in the Road Race in Vancouver, 4<sup>th</sup> in the Melbourne Olympics on tandem with Peter Brotherton and competed in the Rome Olympics.

Thompson also had a go at competitive skiing. At the Scottish CCPR School the 'Bon Accord' event (a giant slalom) attracted entries from all over the country and was won by fellow Mercury member Doug Godlington with Eric Thompson second. In 1990, after suffering a heart attack, he was told to stop squash, marathons, iron man events and hang gliding and just stick to golf and some gentle cycling.

healthy state of affairs with the 'golden era' of the 1940s. This situation continued through the mid 1980s and part of the success was attributed to the efforts of Dave Fox and Paul Brunt in promoting touring and Youth Hostelling and encouraging the youngsters. It was also very encouraging that so many of the members were active participants - the number of BCF licences peaked at around 70 in the mid 1980s and in 1984 over 100 members rode at least one of the evening time trials.

However, Lew's comments were perhaps a little premature. Numbers did start to fall again although membership remained quite healthy at around 150. The concern was that not many of the youngsters were staying on into the senior ranks. In fact, by 1994, there were only two schoolboys/girls and no juniors at all. An increasing interest in mountain biking was seen as a potential solution.

By 1990 few people were going to the clubroom, the AGM was poorly attended and communications were breaking down. A questionnaire put out by Joy Potts with the magazine to find out what people wanted from their club got virtually no response. People seemed content to 'do their own thing', club activities were suffering and once again it was very difficult to attract young people into the club. A related issue was the reporting of results from the club's evening time trial series. These were normally reported in the Derby Evening Telegraph and helped to maintain awareness of the club and its activities but by the late 1980s and early 1990s reports were sporadic and not always very accurate.

The club was financially very healthy as a result of the increased membership and high interest rates (11%) at the bank but mainly due to the income from the Dovedale Dash and there were discussions about how the money could be spent for the benefit of all the members. In the end no agreement was reached but table football was bought for the clubroom – a very small gesture.

When attendance at the clubroom fell off, the hall was deemed too expensive and so, reluctantly, a new clubroom was sought. Joy Potts found the Fellowship Rooms attached to the church in Darley Abbey and so, at the end of 1994, the club was on the move again.

The club was at the Old Hall, Breadsall for 15 years and, for the most part it was a very happy time. Most of the club's activities, road racing, time trialling, rambling, Youth Hostelling, touring etc, have experienced peaks and troughs over the years but the staples have always continued regardless. Thus there were traditional clubroom activities such as slide shows, training talks, bring and buy sales and talks from members about holidays etc. Videos were shown from time to time and in 1985 several were purchased by the club for hire to club members. Quizzes were also popular, sometimes with members of the South Pennine RC participating.

In 1983 Roller Racing, which had been very popular in the 1940s and 50s, was also re-introduced. The rollers were borrowed from the BDCA. They were a great success and were borrowed again the following year. In 1986 there was a roller racing competition run by the Mercury at the assembly rooms as part of a Derby Sports Council event. In the magazine, Lew Barker wondered why they ever fell out of favour.

The Christmas Party continued to be a popular event at the clubroom. For a while the party was held in the afternoon, after the 'mince pie' run - a cycle ride organised by the CTC. From 1984 the club organised this ride itself, finishing at the clubroom at lunchtime on a Sunday for tea and mince pies. By the end of the 1980s the party was held on a normal clubnight with everyone bringing along something to add to the buffet. In 1992 Joy Potts introduced carol singing to the Christmas Party and this has become a permanent feature, not popular with everyone but nobody gets to eat

until the carols have been sung.

1993 was the European Year of the Aged and a trophy was presented to the club's oldest member, Bill Gray, who was still riding time trials. The following year a party was held at the clubroom to celebrate his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The annual dinner and prize presentation also continued at the Friary Hotel with the format unchanged. In 1984 it moved from the Friary Hotel to the Midland Hotel where it remained for many years, organised by Bette Wilkins. In 1990 a raffle was introduced for the first time. By the early 1990s the numbers attending started to drop off and changes were tried, eg in 1994 a band was hired instead of the disco so that people could talk more easily. However such minor changes did not really affect the general trend, attendees typically numbering around 90 compared with the 120 of a few years earlier.

1988 was the club's 50th anniversary and a special dinner and get together was held at the Co-op Banqueting hall on Albion Street to celebrate the occasion.

In 1979 Lew and Enid Barker were back as editors of the magazine, taking over from Karen Renshaw. As always there were repeated appeals for articles for the magazine and, more often than not, it was John Welch who responded. Articles describing members' holidays and cycling trips were, and still are, popular and included locations from the Peak District to Bombay and California.

A special edition of the magazine was produced to celebrate the club's 50th anniversary.

A newsletter was started in 1989 because there was not enough material for a full magazine. At the end of 1990 Lew fell ill and Joy Potts took over as editor and, for several years, kept it going almost single handed, providing most of the content herself. Members had been collecting their magazine from the clubroom but from 1990,

when Joy included her questionnaire, it was posted to all members and has been ever since. At this time the magazine carried advertisements from local firms which helped to cover the additional costs. However, in 1994 and 1995 contributions from the membership were still hard to come by and only two issues were put out instead of the usual four.

The problems experienced on the weekly club-runs towards the end of the 1970s continued.

Although the club-runs were well attended, the juniors, who were the majority, were still turning the runs into training bashes and this prompted Lew Barker to use his editorial in the magazine to remind people to keep racing and touring rides separate. (there were also separate chain-gang rides). In fact, by the mid 1980s there were so many riders and they were getting so fast that, once again it was suggested that they were split into two groups, partly to cater for the slower riders but also to make it easier for traffic to get passed. Discipline was also hard to maintain in such a large group. Bill Keery and Ken Moorledge generally led the more sedate group but in their absence it was still difficult to find leaders.

By the second half of the 1980s, although the club-run programme was still being published in the magazine, the number of riders had decreased to around a dozen and attendance was described as patchy. Nevertheless, in 1987, when records were kept for the Tourist Trophy, a total of 55 seniors and 30 schoolboys/girls rode on at least one of the club-runs. The juniors had all but disappeared again. By the early 1990s a group of older riders looking for a more leisurely and somewhat shorter outing became established. The self-named 'Autumn Tints' were attracting 8 to 12 riders on a regular basis. The group also served as an easier introduction for newcomers to cycling who could be put off by the main club-run.

By the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s efforts were being made to get hostelling going again, and

with some success. Dave Fox was instrumental in promoting touring events and involving the increasing number of youngsters joining the club. There were two regular events each year, one to Llangollen in February and one to Hagg Farm in October. There was also an annual ladies outing attracting around 10 riders and often going to the same destinations, for example, in 1986, the YH weekend trip, the ladies run and a training ride all went to Shrewsbury and a van was hired to carry everyone's luggage. Other trips were arranged to coincide with another event such as the Dovedale Dash or the National Hill Climb. These trips typically attracted 10 to 20 people. Individuals also organised cycling holidays and these were advertised in the magazine.

Ron Smith was another club member promoting touring activities and, in 1985, put together a comprehensive set of rules for the competition for the Tourist trophy, donated by Eric Cook for the winning schoolboy/girl. Points could be earned by going on hostelling weekends, official club tours and also the weekly club-runs, but only half points for riders without mudguards! Points could also be earned by organising these events or completing audax events with more points for the longer rides. The tourist competition was very popular for a number of years. In 1987 55 seniors and 30 schoolboys/Girls earned points.

Eric Cook continued to organise tours for the youngsters in the club all through the 1980s. These ranged from hostel trips to the Peak District, the Lake District and Norfolk to two-week trips to Norway in 1986 and 1988, attended by 8 schoolboys and juniors. There were generally at least two trips each year.

The annual Spring trip to Whitesands also continued with a chain gang and a touring group going out every day but numbers were falling by now.

Going into the 1990s walking was also being

promoted once again as a winter activity with a programme of walks organised by Avice Sleath.

On the racing scene, in terms of participation, time trialling remained the dominant activity going into the 1980s and the evening time trial series was attracting more and more riders. In 1980 the Joe Buxton Handicap Competition was instigated. Numbers peaked in 1984 with 104 members riding one or more of the events and 32 riding at least 10 (the rules were changed in 1984 reducing the number of counting events from 12 to 10). Many of the more active participants were schoolboys/girls and juniors and there were several ladies competing. In fact it was often difficult to find enough helpers to run the events with 40 or more riders and control was becoming a problem.

When the club moved to Breadsall, the evening 10s were held on a course starting between Lower Kilburn and Denby crossroads and going towards Little Eaton, turning at the Hampshire Road roundabout. This was very convenient for the Breadsall clubroom. However, development of the A38 and the island at Little Eaton led to a number of course modifications and a gradual reduction in numbers, possibly due in part to the frequent disruptions. In 1989 a new course was tried using the A38 dual carriageway from Coxbench to Ripley and back. However, the police were not happy with the use of this dual carriageway road. For a couple of years a course starting at Morley and going towards Derby, turning at the Roller World island was tried but this was very unpopular and there were two serious accidents, something that was never experienced on the A38. The events therefore returned to the A38 course in 1992. But the use of the dual carriageway still attracted a good deal of disapproval from the police, even though there were never any problems, and in 1995 the events were moved to a course on the A6, starting in Allestree and turning at Belper.

After the peak of 1984, in response to the

decreasing number of riders efforts were made to introduce different events to maintain interest. In 1991, on two evenings in the season, the normal 10 was replaced by sprint events over 5 km (later 4 km) between Kilburn and Little Eaton. This was repeated for a few years. There were also some events run on the Spondon - Stanley road race circuit, including a 3-up TT with teams put together on the night. There was also a Boxing Day 10, introduced in 1986, which continued for several years, initially in fancy dress, although that was not popular.

In spite of these efforts, numbers continued to fall and the youngsters in particular disappeared again. The reason was never clear but by 1992 the schoolboys/girls and juniors had all but gone. However, there were around 48 seniors riding and the competition between them was as keen as ever.

The other established club events continued as usual. The Hill Climb moved from Farnah Green to Hob Hill (Hazelwood) in 1983, then to Sandy Lane (Brackley Gate) in 1986, Park Lane, South Wingfield in 1989 and Holly Lane, Ambergate in 1993 before settling down in 1995 on Pistern Hill where it remained until 2013. The Freewheel contest remained at Longcliffe until the move to Pistern Hill when the Freewheel was held on the same day on the same hill as the Hill Climb. It has now returned to Longcliffe.

The Inter-Club competition continued every year and from 1985 this event was designated for the club championships as well. In 1992 Belper and Heanor Clarion were invited to ride.

The Open 25 in July and the BDCA 25 later in the year continued to be held every year on the A25/11 course between Etwall and Uttoxeter and from the late 1970s through the mid 1980s, with Ralph Wilkins organising, the Open event attracted huge fields. Headquarters was a tent in a lay-by by the Silver Wheel cafe with the results board

clamped to a fence and hot drinks were prepared on portable gas stoves. By splitting the event into Open and Vets events a field of 180 was permitted, and still some entries had to be returned. There was also a tandem category which typically attracted about ten entries. In 1993 the course for both events was switched to the A25/26 starting at Rocester and going out to Blythebridge along the infamous 'concrete mountain' (just a long gradual rise in reality) that was sometimes cruel but could also be very fast.

In 1994 a new event was added to the list - an early season hilly comprising two laps of a circuit through Windley, Weston Underwood and Duffield making a total distance of 21 miles. It was an early attempt to break away from the traditional and, some believed, increasingly dangerous, dual carriageway courses. Even though the events were designated part of the Peaks to Coast series, and later the Leicestershire series, and were liked by those who took part, they never attracted very large fields. In 2008 the event was dropped in favour of a ten mile event on the Griffydam circuit. Only when this changed to the dual carriageway course at Etwall in 2009 did the numbers pick up.

All through the late 1970s and the 1980s there was a good representation of Mercury riders in the Open time trials in the Central District and also further afield. The club's vets were prolific winners of events both as individuals and also taking the team awards. The club became well known in the region for its 'super-vets'. Ralph Wilkins, John Wilkins, John Welch and Lew Barker were all very successful and were joined later by Mick and Joy Potts and then Roger Smith and Richard Shelton. Ralph Wilkins also raced on a tandem, either with John Wilkins or John Welch and John and Margaret Welch made a formidable tandem team in the mixed category.

However, it was not only the vets who were clocking up the successes. Two youngsters, Andy Eagers and Simon Pedley both got under the hour

for the first time in 1979 and went on to score many successes through the 1980s. Also, in 1985, Jon Potts won the GHS 10 for schoolboys. Andy and Simon contributed to many of the club's team victories, including the BDCA BAR competitions where, in 1980, Andy won the junior title, John Welch won the Vets and the Mercury took the Team Championship. John retained the title in 1981 and Irene Hayward was second in the ladies competition. In 1982 the club regained the team championship. Bette Wilkins and Margaret Welch were also going well in the ladies events. In 1982 we had a National Championship Team win in the Vets 25 mile time trial.

The Club BAR competitions were popular through the 1980s. In 1984 the Central District BAR was introduced with the same rules as the Open but confined to Central District courses so as not to disadvantage those who were unable to travel further afield in search of fast courses. In 1986 the Junior BAR was reduced to 2x10 and 2x25 and in 1988 the ladies BAR was started, also 2x10 and 2x25. 1989 was the best year ever for entries to the club's BAR competitions.

It is an indication of the strength of time trialling in the club at this time that, for a period in the mid to late 1980s, club records were falling at the rate of six or seven per year. Also, in 1985 two National Vets records were broken and in 1992 Mick Potts set a new Northern Road Records Association record for 100 km on a trike (2:37:16). Dave Orford also set a new record for the East Mids Vets 10.

Through the second half of the 1970s road racing had been in decline but by the end of the decade there were signs of a revival. Even though, in 1979, there were only five riders regularly competing in road races, unlike the time trialists, these were mainly young riders who were coming on and starting to get placings in local events. 1981 was the best year for some time and the number of youngsters, including girls, racing

increased through the 1980s. Andy Eagers, Simon Pedley and Paul Brunt were leading the way. In 1982 Andy Eagers got a win - the first for the club in a road race for seven years. He was also Division Champion.

At the other end of the age range, in 1985, Mick Potts won the National Vets Road Race Championship. Also, Lew Barker was winning his vets age category virtually every time he rode.

But generally, through the 1980s, it was mainly the youngsters who were getting the results in road racing. Then, after a good year in 1989 with Alison Malcolm winning the Schoolgirls Division Championship and Dave Boyes and Lee Ward riding with the East Midlands Division squad in the Junior Tour of Ireland, the schoolboys and juniors disappeared once again and by 1995 there were only four riders competing in road races – back to the 1979 levels.

When Mick and Joy Potts joined the club in 1982 they brought with them a wealth of experience and did a lot to bring the young riders on with coaching advice and training sessions. Training sessions were set up at the cattle market which attracted around 35 riders and a council grant was obtained to send cyclists to a Youth Week for coaching / training. The Mercury sent two riders, Ian Sharratt and Gary Booth. The annual early season training weekend was continuing to attract around a dozen riders into the early 1990s. Popular venues for these outings were: Castleton, Skegness, Shrewsbury and Llangollen. Mick and Joy also started circuit training and weights classes which were well attended through the 1980s. There were occasional coaching talks from Joy at the clubroom and she also introduced stretching sessions at the clubroom to teach people how to warm up properly.

Even when there were few road racers competing and successes were few, the club continued to promote events. The two annual road races,

originally the Chevin in April and the Whitemeadows around July, were still promoted until 1982 although the names were no longer used and the courses used changed according to local circumstances. In 1986 the club hosted the division Championships in June on a circuit around Turnditch and Weston Underwood. From 1979 the club promoted an evening road race each year as part of the local league, made up of 12 clubs in the district.



East Mids Div RR Champs 1988.  
Simon Pedley (far left) climbing out of Stanley.

There were also occasional additional, for example a May-Day event in 1979 comprising 30 laps of a 1.5 mile circuit at Sinfin and an Easter road race in 1981. Mick Potts also organised a schoolboys race in April 1983 around a circuit at Aston Hospital.

With the arrival of Joy Potts in 1982, the club got involved with ladies road races. Each year from

1982 to 1985 a race was organised by Joy on the Spondon – Stanley 8.5 mile circuit, sponsored by TI Parkray. The 1984 event was the Ladies National Road Race Championship, held in June. Although these events were popular, they were not continued beyond 1985 due mainly to increasing difficulties with traffic, particularly at the Spondon end of the circuit, and lack of assistance from the police. However, ladies racing was resurrected in 1991 with a 3<sup>rd</sup> cat race on a circuit at Great Cubley. This provided good racing for the lower category riders and was very popular for a number of years but eventually came to an end when the 1997 edition was cancelled due to a lack of entries.

In 1984, the Derby Sports Advisory Council sponsored a 'Mini Olympics' event with Derby's twin town of Osnabruck in Germany. Derby sent six cyclists (under 18 year olds) including four from the Mercury, one from Belper and one from Long Eaton CC. The following year Osnabruck sent a team to Derby and the exchange continued for another couple of years with Mercury riders involved each time.

All through the 1980s there continued to be a small group of riders (only 3 or 4) competing on the track in the leagues at Nottingham on Wednesdays and Leicester on Tuesdays. In 1981 Lew Barker made his attempt on the Vets records for 1 hour and 25 miles, missing both by a narrow margin. In 1985 the club had six riders in the National Track Championships, without any great success, but interest was on the increase and in 1985 the club held its first track meeting at Harvey Haddon stadium, organised by Mick and Joy Potts and Ralph Wilkins with Ted Kerry commentating. This was repeated the following year, organised jointly with the South Pennine RC. Success on the track did come in 1989 when Paul Barber won the Junior 1km National Championship and also finished fourth in the 4km pursuit. After this interest declined again and, although Mick and Joy were giving coaching sessions at the Leicester track, the club had only a couple of members riding the track.

The club organised its first Cyclo-Cross event as part of the Notts and Derby League in 1981. It was held at Drum Hill for a few years and then moved to Shipley Park where it stayed until 1992. The 1988 event, organised by Roger Smith, was used to mark the club's Golden Jubilee and raised money for charity (Barnados and St. Johns Ambulance). In 1993 it moved to Sinfin.

## Long Distance Men

The club's direction took another turn with the arrival of Mick and Joy Potts from the Long Eaton Paragon RC. Mick, having 'retired' from racing after winning the National Vets RR Championship in 1985, turned his attention to audax and the longer distance events. Interest in audax rides increased within the club and quite a strong audax section developed. People were taking part not just in UK audax events but in larger events in the Alps and the Pyrenees.

But the ultimate audax event was the Paris – Brest – Paris (PBP), a 1200km ride held every four years. Mick set about getting a team together to ride the centennial PBP event in 1991. Others involved were: Geoff Sleath who had been riding UK audax events for several years but who later had to withdraw following an accident (with a cat), Phil Sparham, Ian Parry, Simon Pedley and Graham Moulton who joined the Mercury from the Nottingham CTC and was the fastest UK rider in the 1987 edition of the PBP. They had all done the qualifying rides at 200, 300 400 and 600 km required to enter the PBP. Mick, Simon and Graham rode in the Veddetts group (about 600 riders aiming to get inside 80 hours) while Ian and Phil were in the 90 hour group. The support team for the Mercury riders was Joy Potts and Dave Razzetti. They had to drive for about 52 hours

with only 2 hours sleep. About 4000 riders started and all of the Mercury riders finished. Mick was the first British rider home in 52 hours, 42 mins, 8 hours quicker than Graham's 1987 time.

Audax and other long distance events continued to be popular for a number of years. In 1992 the Mercury won a trophy for having the most riders in the Windsor – Chester – Windsor 600 km event and was nearly the club with the most audax riders competing throughout the 1991 season.

Through the first half of the 1990s there were around 14 riders taking part in audax events, nearly as many as there were racing. In 1994 the Mercury were overall club winners on points with 20 riders contributing. Popular events on the continent were the Brevet Randonnee des Alpes and the Raid Pyrenean (700 kms taking in five major cols and with a 100 hour time limit).

In the UK, for several years, the club had around nine riders completing the Super Randonneur series, ie completing audax rides at 200, 300, 400 and 600 km in the season. The CTC 'Century Rides' were popular as was the York Arrow, a challenge to see who could ride the furthest distance to the York Rally in 24 hours. In 1994, Simon Pedley won this trophy with a record breaking distance of 610 km.

In 1989 the Mercury organised its own audax event – the China Run. This was organised for a number of years by Paul Bagshaw, originally as a 200km event heading south from Derby towards the Potteries but later with an additional event of 100km on the same day known as the China Teapot.

## The 24-Hour

As part of the build-up towards taking part in the 1991 PBP, it was decided to enter a team in the RTTC National 24-Hour Championship event, promoted by the Mersey RC. Mick Potts, Simon Pedley, Graham Moulton and Jim Ithell (on his trike) entered the event with the aim of getting a three-man team to the finish. Not only did they all finish, but Mick Potts won the event overall, becoming the oldest RTTC National Champion at 50 years of age. Mick, Simon and Graham also took the Team Championship against stronger opposition than there had been for some years. Mick's winning distance was 486.43 miles – 11 miles further than the last time he won the Mersey RC event 20 years earlier (not the championship on that occasion).

The Mercury entered a team again the following year to defend the title and went on to win the Team Championship for five years out of six, starting with the 1991 event. The team varied from year to year. In 1992 Ian Gray, Graham Moulton and Simon Pedley retained the Team Championship and Jim Ithell was the winner of the trike category. Ian Gray also won the Mersey RC event. In 1993 Simon Pedley, Graham Moulton, Dave McGeachie-Clarke, Susie Gray, Jim Hopper (trike) and Jim Ithell (trike) all rode well but did not win. However, the Mercury took the Team Championship again in 1994 (Graham Moulton, Simon Pedley and Dave McGeachie-Clarke), 1995 (Simon Pedley, Dave McGeachie-Clarke and Jim Hopper on his trike) and 1996 (Dave Howes, Dave McGeachie-Clarke and Jim Hopper on his trike).

## Riding the 24 Hour

Riding a 24 hour event is a serious undertaking. In the years 1991 to 1996 a group of Mercury riders took part in a number of these events, including the National Championship event each year, achieving great success individually and as a team. But for each rider there was a support team of two or three people travelling by car, leapfrogging the rider and stopping every 10 miles or so to provide the rider with drinks, food changes of clothing, lights for the night section and anything else that might be required. The logistics for such an operation require detailed advance planning, checking the route to identify suitable places to stop etc. And on the day itself the support group must track and identify their rider to stop him when required. This can be quite difficult at night, especially when after many hours in the saddle the rider may not be fully 'with it'.

An idea of the commitment involved can be gained by looking at the preparation undertaken by Mick Potts before his Championship winning ride in 1991. Although Mick was using the 24 hour as part of his preparation for the Paris-Brest-Paris event, and is therefore a bit extreme for the 24 hour alone, it makes interesting reading nevertheless.

In January and February Mick was doing 300 miles per week, mostly on 66" fixed with some mountain bike rides added for variety. By March, audax events had started – two 200km events and three 130 mile day rides on the geared bike using mostly a 70" gear. A certain number of audax events at distances up to 600km have to be completed to qualify for the PBP. April included three 300km audax rides and by the end of the month the total mileage had risen to 6065 miles.

May included a 400km and a 600km audax but also a couple of weeks where the mileage was less than 300 – "it's important to include some easier weeks for recovery".

In June Joy Potts had to go up to Durham so took Mick along and made him ride home. The following week Mick fell heavily, hurting his hip but after a check-up at the hospital and some anti-inflammatory pills was able to ride a 600km audax a few days later. Total mileage to the end of June was 9729. The mileage was then tapered off a bit before the 24 hour event.

Mick was supported throughout his training and in the race itself by Joy Potts whose coaching experience and expertise in massage was invaluable. Joy also applied her knowledge of nutrition requirements to great effect with a scientific approach that the current Sky Team would be proud of.

The result of all this dedication was a runaway win in the National 24 hour Championship (at 50 years of age, the oldest National Championship winner) and beating the previous British record in the PBP by 8 hours.

## A New Century

It was sad to leave the Old Hall at Breadsall but by the end of 1994 it had become necessary. The club's new home was, and still is, the Fellowship Rooms, attached to the church in Darley Abbey. The Fellowship Rooms, whilst not having any of the charm and character of the Old Hall, provide a clubroom of good size in a convenient location with good kitchen facilities, a small amount of storage space, a large car park and all at a very reasonable rent. The club was also able to have its club night on a Tuesday all year round.

When the club left Breadsall, membership stood at about 140 although only a small fraction of this number were actually coming to the clubroom. The total membership remained at about this level for the next ten years but the number of schoolboys/girls and juniors fell to zero by 2005. This situation has changed dramatically in the last few years thanks largely to the club's involvement with the Go-Ride scheme (see later on) and membership currently stands at around 450 with under 16s making up a significant part of that number (around 100) and lots of family groups

With the death of Eric Thompson in 1996, a new club president was required and at the AGM Derek Wilkins was elected unanimously, this time for a three year term. 1996 also marked Derek's 50th year as a member of the Mercury. Since 1996 the makeup of the committee has undergone a number of changes, reflecting the changing popularity of various activities. From 2001 to 2007 the post of touring secretary, though retained, was not filled, reflecting a low level of activity in this area. When Pete Turner took over the position in 2009 it was recognised that the dominant activity under the touring banner was audax. Other posts created in 2009 were Cyclo-X secretary and Mountain Bike secretary.

At the same time the position of press secretary was given the new title of Media Secretary. The

job of the press secretary had been mainly to submit reports and results from Mercury events to the local newspaper. However, from 2006 individuals were encouraged to send in their own reports directly to the newspaper, leaving the press secretary with less to do. The club was also starting to make more use of computers, initially to process results but later to set up the club's own web site. In 1999 the club tried, without success, to obtain Lottery funding to purchase a computer. In 2001, Tim Streets created the first club web site. This was developed and in 2008 Dave Banks set up a message board on the site which proved to be very popular. The site was then taken over by Jon O'Brien who applied his professional IT skills to create a professional looking and very successful site incorporating a forum which is extensively used by members and others to disseminate all kinds of news and discussion on a wide range of topics, largely resolving the communication problems referred to in the past.

The magazine has been issued continuously, generally with four editions per year and with just enough material coming in to keep it ticking over. In 1997 a special issue was produced to promote the club at the Derby Cycling Awareness Week - a series of activities organised with the help of local clubs including the Mercury as part of National Bike Week. Autumn 1997 also saw the 100th edition of the magazine. In 2009 Dave Ellis took over as editor of the magazine and re-instated the old title 'The Signpost', first used in the 1940s. With the arrival of the web site, the need for a hard copy magazine was discussed but it was recognised that the magazine was still appreciated by many members and should continue. However, a questionnaire was sent out asking if people would like to receive the magazine in electronic form instead of the traditional paper copy. In the absence of any response it was decided to continue to send the magazine out by post but also to make it available to read on line via the web site. One advantage of the electronic version is the ability to include colour photographs at no extra cost.

The basic clubroom activities continued with talks, slide shows and an occasional quiz or bring and buy sale. In 1999 the photographic competition was resurrected with a new trophy donated by Derrick Johnson in memory of his wife. The competition has remained a regular event in the week after the AGM ever since with a small but enthusiastic group of contributors who submit their efforts to the comments of a guest judge, usually from the Rolls Royce photographic society.

The Xmas party has also continued and has been joined by other regular annual dates such as pancake night and bangers and mash night.

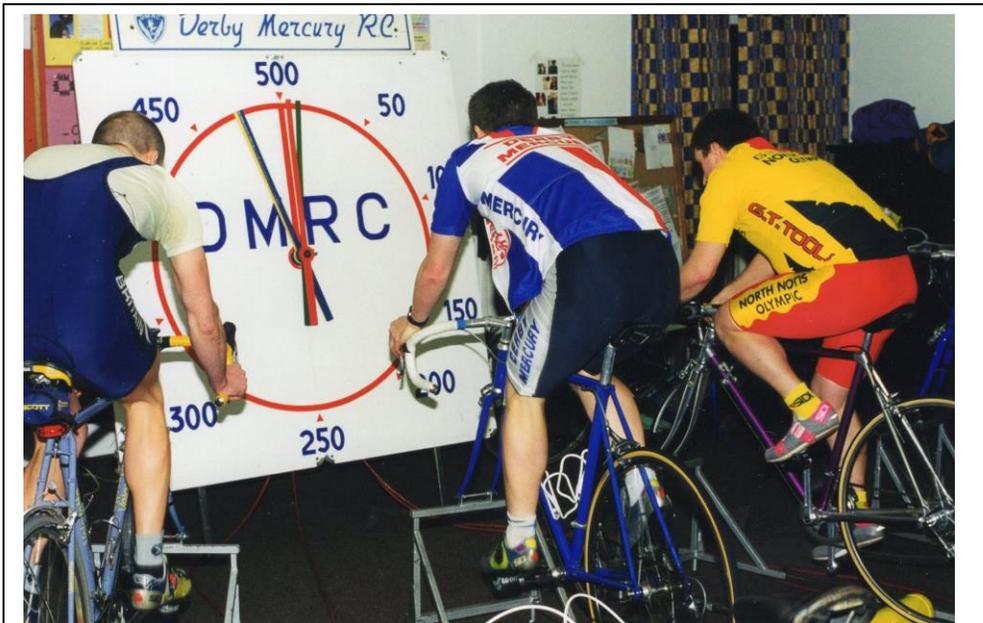
Roller racing at the clubroom over winter (95/96) had been well supported but the BDCA equipment was in need of refurbishment. In 1997 the rollers were given to the Mercury on condition that other clubs could borrow them. Dave Ellis and Derek Wilkins carried out some refurbishment of the equipment and they were used at the clubroom each winter from then on with competitions being organised between the Mercury and other local clubs.

The club dinner and prize presentation remained at the Midland Hotel until 2003 but by the end of the 1990s attendance was falling off and it was felt that the traditional formal format and setting was in part to blame. The January 2003 event was therefore held at the Police Headquarters at St Mary's Wharf and took the form of a buffet with a more informal arrangement of tables. Although the prize presentation was initially more difficult to conduct the event remained at St Mary's wharf for several years until, in 2007, a new venue was found at the Rugby Club on Haslams Lane. This has proved to be very popular and is still the regular venue for the occasion.

The club's financial position has remained sound going from small profits to small losses as a result of discounting or writing off of old style clothing (2002/2003), purchase of items such as a digital projector (2006) etc but benefiting from increasing membership in recent years. However, it was considered necessary to increase subscriptions in 2009 - the first increase since 1993.

In the late 1990s turnouts on the weekly club runs were disappointing and this prompted a

questionnaire in the magazine giving people the opportunity to say what they wanted from their club. As with previous questionnaires, the response was very poor. By the end of the decade the club runs were in disarray, there was no touring secretary and the tourist competition was effectively ended although there were still occasional Youth Hostel weekends organised by individuals, some as training weekends. The Autumn Tints group continues to meet every week, sometimes replacing the ride with a walk.



The rollers in action at the clubroom, winter 1999/2000.

By 2007 the Sunday club runs were still experiencing problems and were not well supported. A new member, joining in 2007 commented that he was surprised by the speed of the club run initially and newcomers may be put off by not knowing what to expect of the various runs. There was also another group (mostly non-DMRC) going out on a Sunday and there were now two groups going out on Saturdays. All this in addition to the established 'Autumn Tints' group and another group going out on Wednesdays.

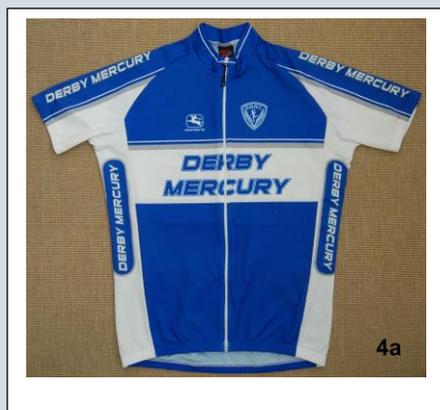
There was also confusion, particularly for new members, over the distinction between a 'club run' and a 'training ride' and a 'chain gang' etc. Having a runs list, available some weeks in advance was seen as too inflexible. However, a message board on the website was suggested as a good way for people to keep in touch and see what others were planning right up to the last minute and Dave Banks took on the task of setting one up.

### Club Kit

Over the years a variety of items of club kit have been produced such as badges, caps T-Shirts, sweatshirts etc as noted elsewhere and the club colours as defined by the design of jersey worn by riders in racing events have changed on a number of occasions. The first club jerseys were white with a blue band and were 'home made' – see page 26. However, by 1954 the racing colours were blue with a white band [1]. Apart from minor variations in the position and style of the lettering, the design remained the same for many years. In 1982 it was decided to supply racing vests and training jerseys so that the riders all had the same kit in races. At the same time, the position of clothing secretary was created. There were soon problems with the quality of the clothing and by 1988 sales were the worst ever with lots of surplus stock. New kit was proposed for the following year and a competition was held to design it. The new design [2] sold well but it took a long time to reduce stocks of the old one even though it was heavily discounted.



Further quality issues led to a new design and a new supplier in 2000 [3a,3b]. In 2007 there was another change of supplier and a new design for 2008 that took advantage of advances in materials and printing / production capabilities. Harvey Schofield was clothing secretary at the time and came up with a design that met with widespread approval [4a,4b].



A special design was produced in 2013 to celebrate the club's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This was a modern version of the original blue and white design [5]. The latest design was introduced in 2017 [6].



Audax events remained popular through the 1990s and there is still strong participation. In 1996 the club had five riders in the Paris-Brest-Paris and the Mercury won the trophy for greatest number of riders from one UK club. In 2007 four members completed Paris-Brest-Paris, including Jim Hopper who has now completed the event for the 8<sup>th</sup> time - no British rider has done it more times. The position of touring secretary was filled again in 2007 but by the following year the post was effectively redefined as the audax secretary.

The club continued to organise its own audax event, the 200km China Run together with the 100km. China Tea Pot. The event was very well supported and, after a break of several years, is back on again for 2018.

By the late 1990s mountain biking was gaining in popularity and MTB runs at Chatsworth in 1996 and Cannock Chase in 1997 were well attended. Weekend rides were organised jointly with the CTC. Evening MB rides were also organised by Dave Banks from 1996, initially around Ambergate and Cromford then around the Melbourne area and, from 2002 to 2016, starting from the John Thompson pub at Ingleby. They now start from Ticknall and continue to be popular attracting CTC riders as well as members of the Mercury.

In 2008 - A team of riders took part in the Sleepless in the Saddle mountain bike event – a 24 hour event for teams riding in a relay as well as for solo riders. Teams of riders have taken part in this and the similar Mountain Mayhem event on a number of occasions.

The club continued to promote the annual programme of open time trials, ie the open 25, BDCA 25, early season hilly (up to 2007). In 1998 the open 25 paid tribute to Lew Barker. In 2004 the open 25 in July was held on the Griffydam course for the first time in an attempt to move away from the A50 dual carriageway. Entries, unsurprisingly, dropped to 53. The 25 organised on behalf of the BDCA in September was also run on the Griffydam course and received just 30 entries. In spite of the low turnouts, there was a determination not to return to the increasingly busy and potentially dangerous A50 dual carriageway. However, the BDCA event was organised by the Mercury for the last time in 2006.

In 1998 the Mercury organized the National Ladies 25 mile Championship. Dave Ellis was on the Central District Committee at this time and volunteered to run the event on behalf of the Derby Mercury. The club had not organized a National Championship before and it was seen as a good opportunity to raise the profile of the club. The A25/26 Rocester course was used with the HQ provided by JCB at Rocester. The event was a great success thanks to the support of many club

**Ladies  
National 25**





Two things needed for a successful event:

A good results board (Ron Smith in charge)

And a good spread: L to R: Margaret Hopper, Pat? , Judy Smith, Julie Howes, Bet Wilkins.

members right up to the printing of the result sheet. With the finished result sheet at the printers and just a final proof read to do the company went bankrupt! The document was finally retrieved just hours before the administrators padlocked the building and refused to allow anything out.

In 2001 the early season hilly was cancelled due to an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the district. Turnouts for this event continued to be disappointing and, in an effort to increase numbers it was moved to June in 2004. This made little difference however and it returned to a March slot for the 2007 edition. The following year the hilly was replaced by an early season sporting 10 on the Griffydham circuit but this too attracted only a small field. In 2009, giving in to demand (outside of the Mercury) a 10 was run on the A50 road at Etwall in May and had a near full field of 119 entries (the Open 25, in July on the Griffydham course got just 32 entries, 11 of them from the Mercury).

Sadly, for the last few years the club has not organised an open time trial – the first time this has been the case since the club was founded.

The Mercury also got involved with other events within Derby. From 1998 to 2000 a series of city centre races were organised by Andy Eagers with the city council. As well as the cycle races round a circuit of about 1.5km, the 1998 event included a Penny Farthing race and the next year there was a race for in-line roller skaters (not organised by the Mercury). However, limited public interest and budget restrictions meant that the events did not continue. The Mercury, along with other local clubs also provided marshals when the Tour of Britain came through Derby in 2005.

The hill climb and freewheel events continue to be held every year and always attract a good number of participants

The number of riders taking part in the inter-club



Harvey Schofield on Pisten Hill



Descending Pisten Hill in the Freewheel Contest

25 had been falling for a while but the event went through a particularly difficult period from 2004 when it had to be cancelled due to a road closure. This also meant that the club championships, normally held in conjunction with the inter-club event, had to be moved to the BDCA 25 later in the year. The following year the event had to be reduced to a 10 due to a traffic census. This time the open 25 at Griffydham was designated as the club championships event.

An attempt was made to set up a three round interclub competition with Long Eaton and Beeston but attracted very little support. In 2006, in keeping with a wish to move away from the A50 road, the inter-club 25 with South Pennine, Mercia & Heanor Clarion was scheduled for our Long Lane circuit. However, SPRC had no interest in taking part. The following year only one non-Mercury rider took part with 13 of our own riders starting. In 2008 the interclub 25 with South Pennine, Mercia & Heanor was run back on the Etwall course again and 2009 saw the best contest for several years with only Heanor Clarion failing to field a team. The event has not been held since 2015.

In 1996 events in the evening time trial series were being held on the A6 between Allestree and Belper and were attracting 10 to 20 riders each week. However, in 1998 the events were badly hit by protracted road works and, when similar problems were encountered the following year, two of the events were run on a hilly circuit starting on the outskirts of Duffield and going via Windley, Cross-o'the-Hands cross roads, Weston Underwood and finishing at the bottom of Cumberhills Road, Duffield - just over 10 miles. This proved to be very popular and holding a limited number of the evening time trials each year on the Windley circuit became a permanent feature of the series. In 2000 a further innovation was tried. This involved replacing the regular time trial for one week with a 4k sprint event between Little Eaton and Kilburn. Although this was repeated, it never caught on and was soon dropped. Also in 2000 a strong metal box was purchased so that the time trialling paraphernalia, ie watches, numbers, signing on sheets etc could be stored at the clubroom.

As the A6 course became busier and more dangerous with each passing year alternatives were sought and, in 2003, the events were moved to a circuit of approximately 12.5 miles around Long Lane, Longford and Radbourne Lane. The number of riders taking part was already

decreasing and continued to do so reaching a low in 2003 when only 7 riders completed ten or more events to count towards the season long competition. It was also difficult at times to find people for timekeeping duties. Although numbers started to increase from about 2005 the scarcity of helpers persisted and a rota of helpers was introduced to be published at the start of the season. It became a condition for anyone contesting the evening time trial series competition that they help out on at least one occasion during the season. In 2008 one of the evening series events was run as a 25, ie two laps. This was repeated in 2009 and another week a 2-Up was held which attracted the biggest field of the series. By this time the number of members taking part in the series had risen to 67 with an average weekly turnout of about 20 including 7 ladies and 4 Under 16s.

The evening TT series currently comprises events on Long Lane and Windley and includes a two lap 25 which is designated as the club championship event. The 2-Up event has also become a regular part of the series and attracts the largest fields.



Waiting to start the evening '10' on Long Lane

The decreasing number of competitors in time trials during the early 2000s did not only affect the club's evening events. By the middle of the decade only about 20 members were riding open time trial events and the traditional BAR competitions were attracting very few riders. By

2003 discussions were going on to try to come up with an alternative format that would attract more interest. This led to the introduction in 2004 of the Club BAR, replacing the Central District BAR. Seven riders completed rides in the four categories of the new competition whilst only two (Jim Hopper and Liz Pilkington) completed the necessary rides for the traditional BAR competitions. This situation remained unchanged for at least the next five years. Things started to pick up slightly in 2009 when there were five riders qualifying for the traditional BARS (4 vets and 1 lady) and eight for the Club BAR but still only 24 members riding any open time trials.

The state of time trialling in the club can also be seen in the records book. Few years have passed without any records being broken but none at all were broken between 1996 and 2000 and when Liz Pilkington broke her own record for the ladies 50 that was the first new record to be set for six years.

By the late 1990s interest in road racing was on the decline. The ladies race at Cubley was cancelled in 1997 due to lack of entries and was not put on again. The Mercury continued to organise two events, one of them part of the evening league but in 2000 the league event was deleted and in 2001 Andy Eagers retained his 1<sup>st</sup> cat licence but was the only club member riding road races. Andy's good form continued, winning the BC Vets Series in 2004 and coming third in the over 40s road race competition the following year. Andy's successes as a vet at home and abroad have continued – eg winning at the 1999 Rail Industry Championships in Switzerland.

The number of members taking out BC licences have started to rise once again, though some of these were cyclo-X riders, and 2005 was described as one of the best years for road racing that the club had seen for some time with club members competing in the National Championships and the Peter Buckley races.

Events organised by the club were at a low ebb however with no club road races in 2005 or 2006. The club road race was revived in 2007 with a successful event at Hanbury attracting a full field. The revival of interest in road racing continued with members gaining wins at regional level and also in LVRC races. By 2009 the club had 22 full BC licence holders including two juniors, four under 16s and five under 12s (riding Cyclo-X). The club continues to organise one road race per year for 2/3/4 category riders as part of the East Midlands RR League. These races have been held at Hanbury, and East Leake and currently use the Windley circuit.

The annual Cyclo-X event in the Notts and Derby League continued to be run at Sinfin and was one of the club's most successful events, always getting large fields including lots of youngsters taking part in the 'have a go' events. In recognition of the large and growing participation in Cyclo-X it was decided to have a Cyclo-X competition and a trophy was purchased in 2001 for the winner. John Holmes was organising these events at Sinfin and from 2006 at Markeaton Park. In 2008/09 he also co-ordinated the joint Derby Mercury / South Pennine promotion of the Midlands Championship event, at Markeaton Park. John continues to run Championship and National Trophy Events, first at Markeaton Park and then moving to Moorways. The organization of the Mercury events for the Notts and Derby League was taken over by Andy Eagers and then by Matt Crouch. These events attract upwards of 300 participants across all categories.

By far the biggest changes in the club in recent times have been associated with the club's involvement with British Cycling's Go-Ride programme. Since the decision was taken in 2010 to work towards becoming a Go-Ride club youth activities have come a long way, from coaching sessions in Allestree Park attended by about 8 young riders to a wide variety of sessions covering different disciplines (road, cyclo-X, track, mountain

## Go-Ride

Go-Ride is British Cycling's development programme for young people, providing a fun and safe way to introduce young riders to cycle sport and to improve bike handling skills. The programme includes schools, clubs and other organisations running off-road coaching and training sessions. All organisations involved must sign up to the British Cycling "Policy and Procedures for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults" document and have a welfare officer and coaches qualified through BC training courses. The Mercury signed up to the above policy and when, in Derby, Dave Clasby of Sustrans and a cross section of people from across City clubs and institutions were working towards a Derby Schools Community Cycling Club and Derby became a "City of Cycling" with funding from Cycle England to promote cycling in the city by a range of initiatives the Derby Mercury had the opportunity to link into the project and encourage young people to sustain their interest in cycling outside the school environment. The next step was for the club to move towards the British Cycling 'Go-Ride' accreditation. Other clubs in the area were not getting involved and it was recognised that if the Mercury were to take a prominent role in these activities it could have a profound effect on the club for many years to come. The decision was made to go ahead and the club achieved full Go-Ride Clubmark status in 2015. The club has a welfare officer, nine members have qualified as coaches (assisted by lottery funding), some with specialities in track racing and mountain biking and puts on a range of activities in support of the Go-Ride programme. Each year, the Go-Ride community within the club also raises money for local charities.

biking) at various venues, including monthly events at the Darley Moor race circuit set up by Dave Luscombe, weekly evening sessions at the Forest Town track at Mansfield (before the opening of the Derby Arena) and most recently in Alvaston Park, typically attracting over 30 participants. In winter roller sessions are held. Originally these were in the club room but as numbers increased larger venues were found, currently at Woodlands school old gymnasium. The rollers are also used for various other events and are loaned out to other clubs and organisations. Numbers were boosted by the successes of the British team at the 2012 Olympics.

The Derby Mercury's young riders are already tasting success. In mountain biking Ben Chilton won the XC League and Regional Championships in 2017/18. In the Mountain Mayhem 24 hour event

the Mercury entered a team in the Mini Mayhem

event and the video footage of that team's performance was adopted by the event organisers to show "This is what it's all about". In Cyclo-X in 2017/18 the Mercury took the Youth Team trophy (Ben Chilton, Jack Husselbee and Joseph Kininmonth) and we were the second biggest club participating. Ben Chilton was also first U15 boy at the National Championships, receiving the Findus Trophy.

Interest in track racing never quite died. In 1997 track meetings at Nottingham and Leicester were revived and in 1999 Simon Pedley rode at the Masters World Track Championships at Manchester. In 2008 successful sessions at the Manchester track were organised by Jim Crew. But with the opening of the new velodrome in Derby (the Derby Arena) in 2015 track racing has really taken off. Members of the Mercury were closely involved in the development of the Arena



Members of the Derby Mercury outside the Derby Arena, 2017

and Paul Chambers, a Mercury member working for the Derbyshire County Council, was a key figure in the project. Jim Crew with support from other club members was instrumental in setting up the Derby Track League and Liz Dodson the Youth Track League. Mark Gray was also a key figure, setting up the Cycle Derby Cycling Club.

The club currently runs a number of sessions at the Arena: Four Go-Ride youth groups from age 9 to 16 every 3 to 4 weeks with about 15 riders per group, a monthly adult session with about 30 riders and a ladies session every 5 weeks.

The Mercury is part of a rota of clubs who access the track every Wednesday evening which means the the young riders have access almost every week. There are three leagues running at the Arena; the BC Track League, the LVRC Track League and the BC Youth Track League with Mercury members involved in all three and achieving successful results. In 2017 Julie Scales was British and European Masters Champion in her age group, John Manning, Andy Eagers and John Anglesea have been successful in the vets events and good placings have been achieved by other riders at British, European and World Masters Championships.

## Conclusion

Over the years the club has changed considerably. It started with a relatively small group of young people who were all very active and, although there were groups taking part in different activities, there was a strong sense of unity. Those who can remember the early days describe the atmosphere as being like a happy family with youth hostelling being a central part of that. The bus trips for parents, meeting up with the youngsters at a Youth Hostel are an illustration of a different time when families did not all have their own transport, there was much less traffic and cycles were 'king of the road'. The family atmosphere and club spirit prevailed in spite of the hardships during and after the war with rationing and shortages of almost everything, or maybe the conditions actually fostered it. The club enjoyed considerable racing success and juniors would ride out to events to support the senior team.

Things change - road racing gave way to time trialling and youth Hostelling declined as did the bigger cycle tours. Racing successes declined and the make up of the club membership also changed. Inevitably existing members grow older and, although the total membership grew to around 100 they were no longer all youngsters. There were periods when the club was in the doldrums, the mid sixties and again in the seventies. This may have been in part related to the clubroom. The clubroom provides a base and helps to create atmosphere. It needs to be a place that people want to go to with activities going on etc. The time at the Navigation is fondly remembered by those who knew it and the Seven Stars was a place that felt like home. The times when the club was at its lowest coincide with periods when it was moving around from one clubroom to another, some of which were not at all inviting. When the club moved to the Old Hall at Breadsall some of the old atmosphere was rekindled and this was a popular base for quite a few years. The present clubroom serves us well. The old dream of

owning 'our own place' is still not on but is mentioned from time to time.

The days when the focal point of the club was the clubroom have largely gone. With the rapid rise of social media, the web site forum etc there is no longer any need to go to the clubroom to find out what's going on. The current generation do things differently.

When racing success came again (eighties) it was very different from the early days. This time it was mostly thanks to the vets and the long distance men. Membership was high but so was the average age and less than half were actually active.

Non-racing activities (walking and camping/caravanning) have never died out but these days the walking holidays and Whitesands trips are enjoyed by essentially the same group of people each year and are probably not regarded by many as club activities.

Although as a club there has not been a strong focus on bringing on younger riders (except in the early years when nearly all of the members were young), by 2008 there were lots of children of members riding events in the club's name and the new club kit was being widely seen and admired, particularly at Cyclo-X events but also in the East Midlands Track League and on the Rollers.

With accreditation as a Go-Ride club, activities for young riders have taken off. There is an influx of new blood to the club. Involvement with the Go-Ride scheme and schools has resulted in membership reaching about 450 including lots of youngsters (>100). It is hoped that the young riders will stay with the Mercury and work their way through to the junior and senior ranks

Over the years the resilience of the club has been amply demonstrated and the future is looking bright.

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