

BEDS VMCC NEWS

STILL KEEPING YOU INFORMED

John Bull's beautiful bikes at club night



IN THIS ISSUE:

**SECTION
NEWS**

**VINTAGE
STONY**

**JOHN BULL'S
GREEVES**

**1904 ALBERT BROWN
TROPHY EVENT**

EDITORIAL

The New Year got off to an excellent start at Vintage Stony. Not one of our events, per se, but one where several of our members can be found. Now in its 13th year, it seems to get bigger year-on-year; initially fitting into a single car park, it now takes over the whole of the centre of Stony Stratford. You'll see some pictures of a few of the bikes that caught my eye later in this newsletter.

Another great start to the year was the visit to club night of trials ace John Bull and two of his beautiful machines, as seen on the front cover and below. He didn't want to give a formal presentation but we managed to keep him chatting for over an hour, much to his surprise.

One or two people pointed out that I had the wrong date for the visit to the Velo Club in May. That has now been corrected in the diary on the last page of this newsletter.



I suppose we shouldn't be surprised, after all it is January, but I'm getting a bit fed up with waking up to scenes like the one above. My motorcycling is getting seriously curtailed. I don't mind riding the modern Honda on salted roads, but it's getting to them without falling off that's the problem; I should have bought a house on a bus route!

Many thanks to our contributors this month – Don, Sam (Andrew) and Will. Please submit any contributions to me on bryan.marsh@btinternet.com, or even hand them to me, written long-hand if you wish, at any of our events. There are still many long, cold nights ahead before we hit Spring so why not use some of them to look out some old pictures or scribble down a few paragraphs about some memorable biking adventure, your favourite bike, or anything that you think might be of interest to our readership; Will is bound to run out of ideas eventually.

Bryan

Beds Section News

Upcoming Events

BREAKFAST MEET – SUN, 29TH JAN, MAYPOLE FARM, KEMPSTON, 10AM

We return to Maypole Farm (though not really a farm, and not a maypole in sight) for our first breakfast meet of the year. They have a help-yourself buffet, or you can order from the menu. Hopefully, the egg shortage they suffered at our previous visit will have ended by then.

INFORMAL RUN – THURS, 2ND FEB, SHEFFORD MEMORIAL HALL (STMA), 10.15 FOR 10.30AM

As usual at this stage, I don't have the route worked out yet but we do have a destination. By request, we'll be heading to the Giddy Goat café in Riseley.

“Informal” means no route sheet - just follow-my-leader - and a distance to suit the weather and the inclination of those showing up. At least 21 miles as it's that far from STMA, but probably more like 30-40 miles.

CLUB NIGHT – GYROCOPTERS, WITH ROBIN BRAITHWAITE - THURS, 9TH FEB, STMA, 7.30 FOR 8.00PM



Not James Bond but our own Robin Braithwaite telling us all about the fascinating and, to me at least, rather frightening world of gyrocopters. You'd never get me up in one of those – even if you do get to live twice.

MIDWEEK LUNCH – THURS, 16TH FEB, MUSGRAVE ARMS, SHILINGTON, NOON



We return to the Musgrave Arms for the first time since last Summer to see what's on their predominantly Italian menu – including a good selection of pizzas.

See the 2023 programme on the last page for future dates and venues.

BREAKFAST MEET – SUN, 26TH FEB, SCALD END FARM, 10AM

Home of the best bacon sandwich in Bedfordshire but also traditional full breakfast made with local produce including homemade sausages.

See the 2023 programme on the last page for future dates and venues.

January event reports

INFORMAL RUN – THE RUFUS CENTRE, FLITWICK



The riders in the car park of the Rufus Centre, eagerly awaiting the opportunity to get in the café to grab a coffee and a chance to warm up. The route to get there took us from Shefford up the B658, only to find the road to Broom still closed, so on to the roundabout and down past Shuttleworth, up through Ickwell and Northill to Couple, Cardington, Haynes Church End, Houghton Conquest, Stewartby, Millbrook and into Flitwick. A jolly enjoyable Winter's ride in good company.

CLUB NIGHT – AN EVENING WITH JOHN BULL



Devoid of Trouble – one of the Villiers-engined Dots built by John



John's gorgeous MV Agusta – built from a road bike



Thanks to Sam (Andrew) for this great picture of John.

I have to admit to knowing nothing of John, his trials exploits or the beautiful Dot bikes he's built over the years, but it was clear that several of our members in the audience were well aware and by firing a range of questions at John kept him chatting for over an hour. Apparently he still competes, mainly on the continent, but spends an increasing amount of time on his electric mountain bike.

A truly entertaining evening that, John himself said afterwards, went better than expected. Obviously modest as well as supremely talented.

MIDWEEK LUNCH – FLITVALE GARDEN CENTRE

Another cold and frosty morning kept most of the bikes at home apart from myself, who only had to come three miles to get there, and Brent who braved frozen fingers to ride his CL200 Honda down from Wilden.

There were eight of us in total, including a visit from VMCC national chairman, Mario, who just made it down from the Burton-on-Trent HQ in time to join us.

The Page Three Girl



Better than a bicycle? Marginally, perhaps.

Glad they got that wrong

When the Beeston tricycle company closed down in 1903, Autocar magazine said that this “recognised the uselessness of the motor bicycle for general use.”

In 1901, Engineering magazine dismissed motorcycling as a “form of entertainment that can appeal only to the most enthusiastic of mechanical eccentrics... we think it doubtful whether the motorcycle will, when the novelty has worn off, take a firm hold of public favour.”

Something of a Mission...

WILL CURRY

This is a tale of memory with there being something of a twist in the tail.

January's clubnight was a chat about trials and trials riding with John Bull. It was particularly interesting for me because I'd owned the ex-John Bull Greeves TAR 21D. It didn't come directly from John but via the late Simon Walton who lived at Noke, near Oxford. Simon, for reasons I cannot remember now, wanted the dreadful C15T which I'd given up on because of its appalling unreliability and on offer was the Greeves. The deal was done and Simon threatened me with dire consequences if I turned up with an Ariel with Ceriani front forks.

The Greeves was much better than I was and I wasn't making the best of it. I lent it to a friend of mine who managed it much better than I was doing so I in the end gave it to him. We lost touch for many years after he got married and moved away and thus the Greeves disappeared, eventually going to somebody from Birmingham.



The print John presented to me

At the clubnight John presented me with a print of a photograph of him in action on TAR 21D and looking at the print later at home a memory stirred. The front numberplate in the print seemed familiar. I was sure I'd seen it somewhere in this house, obviously no longer attached to the bike which went several houses before this one. It occurred that I'd have taken the numberplate off as unnecessary weight when they were no longer a legal requirement which was, I think, some time in 1975.



Close-up of the numberplate

So, where had I seen it? Five unsuccessful minutes with the torch in one of the more likelier regions of the workshop served only to metamorphose a whim into an obsession. I spent all my spare time and some that wasn't spare for three days searching the shelves and boxes. It is indeed an ill wind which blows no-one any good and I found a quite number of things I'd misplaced. The search took a longer time than one might otherwise expect as a result of frequent stops to reminisce over some of the things I found or to repair cardboard boxes that had split over the years. I even managed to throw some stuff away.

Eventually I found the numberplate in with my collection of Ariel primary chaincases, an obvious place to have put it. I even found the front numberplate from the C15T which preceded the Greeves. I wonder what it is with me and front numberplates?

Anyway, once I've taken some photos of it I'll offer it back to John.



The numberplate I found

And the twist in the tail?

Comparing the numberplate with the print revealed that while the registration number is the same the lettering isn't - look at the cross-stroke on the letter A - and so it's either been repainted at some time or it may even not be the same numberplate. Good old memory.

Vintage Stony

BRYAN MARSH



Very nice flat tank Norton



Whichever way you look at it, it's unmistakably a Brough Superior



A very nice example of the once ubiquitous NSU Quickly



My own 1947 Triumph Tiger 100, in good company



Anyone fancy an Indian? Who wouldn't - hot stuff!



Seldom seen – a rather tasty trials Levis

The original Albert Brown Trophy events – Part 1 (1904)

BRYAN MARSH

[This is the first of two articles I have written for the Harlington Heritage Trust newsletter based on a presentation I gave them last weekend, similar to the one I gave to our section a few year ago]

Prior to 1900, motorcycles were mostly tricycles like the pictured 1899 Ariel with a French De Dion engine.



1899 Ariel tricycle

In the early 1900s, solo motor bicycles grew in popularity following the development of the flexible drive belt. By 1904, however, things had moved on apace and two-wheelers had largely taken the place of the tricycle but, as seen in the picture of the Letchworth built Chater Lea they were still little more than a strong bicycle frame with an engine attached.



1903 Chater Lea motorcycle

Typically they had a single-cylinder, four-stroke engine driving directly from the crankshaft to the rear wheel by a belt. No gears and no clutch – starting would involve either pedaling away or by running alongside until the engine fired up and then hop on board. The lack of a clutch also meant every time the machine came to a halt, the engine stopped and the effort to get it going again had to be repeated. The pedals also helped on steeper hills by providing, what was known as LPA or light pedal assistance. Brakes were simple bicycle calipers acting on the wheel rim, and not particularly effective but, then again, stopping too quickly on the loose surfaces of the day probably wasn't too good an idea. Hidden in the petrol tank was an accumulator (battery) and trembler coil to provide the necessary current to the spark plug. There was no electrical charging system, so the accumulator had to have enough charge at the start to last the whole journey. Controls were on the petrol tank and comprised separate levers for throttle and air in the carburetor and another to advance and retard the ignition timing. Just behind the seat is a pump to get oil into the engine with a squirt needed every few miles. Nothing was automatic on these machines, and it was said that, if you were riding along enjoying the scenery, you probably weren't doing something you should be. No suspension, front or rear, and a rather uncomfortable bicycle saddle didn't have provided much comfort on long runs.

Albert Brown, one of the Brown Brothers, the well-known London motor factors, and manufacturer of the Brown Motorcycle was concerned that the British motorcycle industry was too reliant on foreign made components, such as engines, carburetors and accumulators. To encourage the British manufacturers, in 1904 he put up a valuable silver rose-bowl trophy to be competed for in a 150-mile non-stop reliability test.



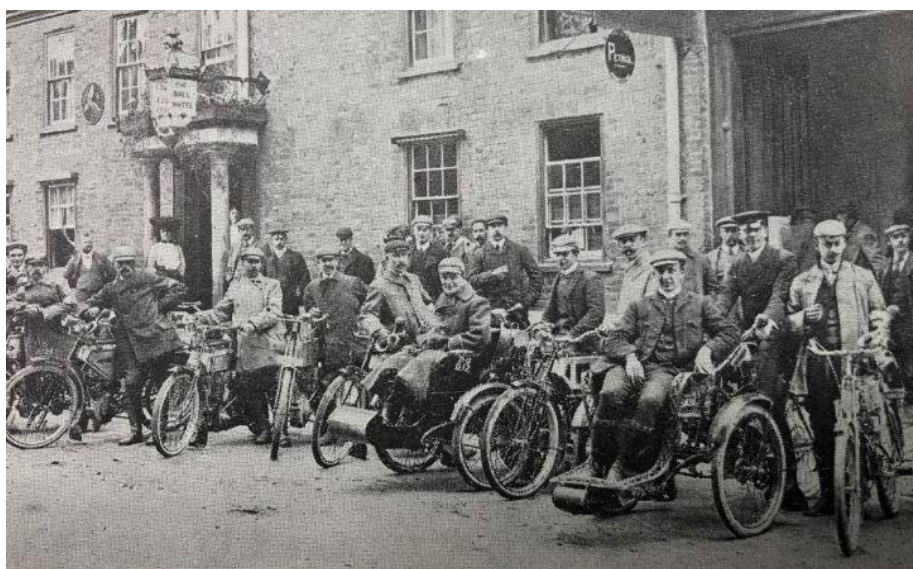
The Albert Brown silver rosebowl trophy

The event was organized by The Motorcycling Club and comprised a there-and-back run from Redbourn to the outskirts of Ampthill, three times to make up the 150 miles – twice before lunch, then once afterwards. The non-stop element meant that no dismounting was allowed, and the only adjustments permitted to the motorcycle were those that could be made from the saddle whilst in motion. The original intention was to run between Redbourn and Stony Stratford, but the route was changed, presumably to give the riders a change as that route had been used in other events earlier that year. In addition to the splendid trophy for the winner, the club added gold and silver medals for second and third place, and a handsome gold medal for the first tri-car, provided that, *in the opinion of the judges*, the performance was *sufficiently meritorious*, as the number of tricars entered was expected to be small compared to the number of solo motorcycles.

The event was held on Saturday, 10th September 1904, and went from Redbourn High Street straight up the Holyhead or Coventry Road, via Markyate and Dunstable, to the crossroads 3½ miles past Hockliffe (now a roundabout by the Flying Fox pub) where they turned right, down to Woburn. Then left through Woburn and right to, what the contemporary reports called, Husband's Crawley, or Husborne Crawley as it's now known. Another mile and a sharp right to take them to the Station Road hill up to Ridgmont where it was said they created rather a lot of excitement amongst the villagers; hardly surprising as it wouldn't have been an everyday occurrence to see fourteen motorcycles and two tri-cars passing through a backwater hamlet in those days. Then on to the crossroads a mile short of Ampthill itself, where they were checked and turned around at a distance of 25½ miles from the start.

The route from Hockliffe to Ampthill hadn't been used on previous MCC events, so marshalls were stationed along the route to prevent riders getting lost. Despite having been used in earlier hill-climb competitions, Ridgmont Station Hill is only about 400 yards long and no steeper than 1 in 13 so didn't provide a big problem; indeed, there was nothing particularly severe by way of hills over the whole route. Steep hills would have been a particular problem for those low-powered, single speed machines.

On getting back to Redbourn, they turned around at the top of the long hill just before the village, and were sent back over the same route to Ampthill and back again before a break for lunch in the Bull Hotel. Filling up with petrol was allowed during the lunch stop, but not topping up the oil or water, or any other adjustments to the machines. After lunch they set off on the final leg but this time starting from the railway bridge on the London side of the village, presumably so the locals could enjoy the spectacle as they passed along the High Street.



Some of the entrants outside the Bull Hotel in Redbourn

Although organized by the Motor Cycling Club, the event was open to anyone who could meet the stringent requirement for entirely British construction. Indeed, one or two machines that had originally been entered were withdrawn because some part of them was of foreign manufacture. One manufacturer claimed not to be able to obtain British-made cylinder castings clean enough or light enough for what they needed, and, apparently, several competitors were seen tearing about London a few days before the event trying to find British-made replacements for their usual French Longuemare devices. The final entry comprised two tri-cars (both Humber Olympia forecars) and fourteen solo motorcycles (3 Quadrant, 2 Ariel, a Brown, Humber, Bat,

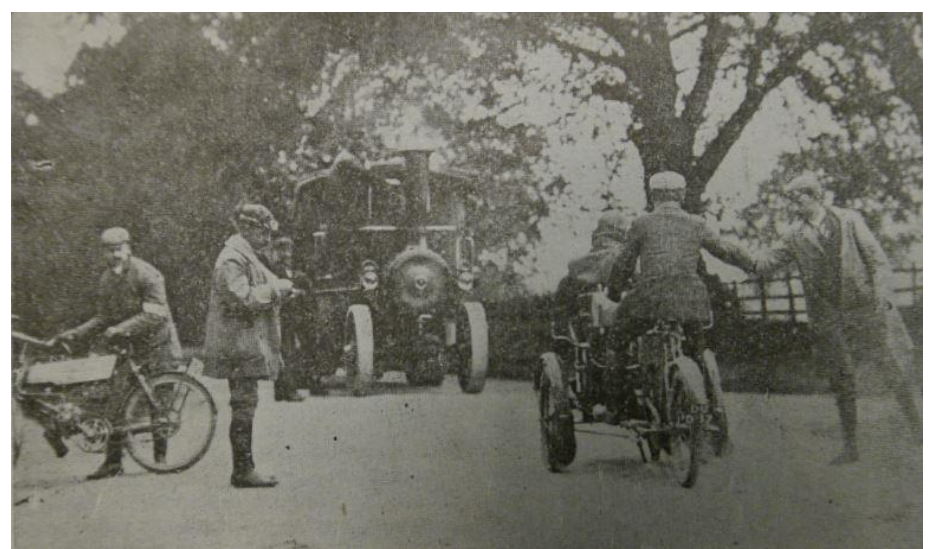
Millenium, Anglian, Riley, Excelsior, King and a Hulbert-Bramley). The tricars were required to carry a passenger as well as the driver, with a combined weight of not less than 18 stone. A Riley tri-car that had originally entered was a non-starter on the day, but the Riley company went to great trouble to make it known through the motor cycle press that it was simply due to the difficulty they had experienced in finding suitable British replacements for the French parts they normally fitted as standard. On the way over to Redbourn on the Friday night, the British-made coil they'd fitted at the last minute went wrong, and the machine was running so badly that they decided it would be folly to attempt to run it like that in the competition.

The conditions on the day were said to be splendid, with very little dust and an entire absence of wind. The riders were dispatched at one-minute intervals starting at 7am, with the requirement that the maximum speed overall was not to exceed 19 mph, whilst the minimum was 17.



Brice (Brown), Priest (Quadrant) & Silver (Quadrant) at the start

After the first 50 miles, A Hoffman on his Ariel arrived back some 15 minutes earlier than he should, having failed to make it all the way to Ampthill. Coil troubles had burnt away the platinum points in his trembler ignition, and, just to make things worse, he'd picked up a puncture. Curiously, he was entered as No. 13 and broke down at the 37th milestone, 13 miles from the start – apparently, he wasn't keen on getting that entry number again the future.



Crundall (Humber Olympia tri-car) at the Ampthill checkpoint

Quadrant mounted, Tom Silver was the first man back some 2 hours and 31 minutes after he had set off. He was followed six minutes later by WA Priest on another Quadrant and F Hulbert on a machine of his own manufacture, the Hulbert-Bramley. Another minute later came RG Priest (on the third Quadrant) and Rupert Brice on the Brown (made by Albert Brown and his brothers' company) and then the remaining riders in groups of two and three over the next few minutes. Hoffman's troubles with his Ariel meant he was now out of the competition along with Densham whose camshaft had seized on his Anglian, having already had problems with his drive belt at the same 37th milestone where Mr Hofmann's troubles had started. Allan Riley suffered a broken drive belt on his Riley, and Maffert had problems with lubrication of the engine of his Bat. This left ten riders and the two tri-cars.

After the 2nd 50-mile round trip, they arrived back at The Bull for lunch, with Tom Silver still leading the way, but 12 minutes slower than his

first leg. He was followed by the other riders spread over the next 12 minutes, apart from E Gray whose Olympia Forecar had stopped on the way back, with his accumulators run down after 99 miles, just a mile away from arriving back at Redbourn, and the tread on his rear wheel tyre badly damaged. But the rules wouldn't have permitted him to swap the accumulators at the lunch stop anyway, so he was out of the running.

The surviving 11 competitors were set off again after the lunch break although, try as he might, Tom Silver never made it off the line due to what turned out to be just a flooded carburetor that he could have fixed in a jiffy but was against the non-stop rule as it would have meant dismounting to get at it. EF Elliot, on his Millenium, retired when he ran out of petrol after 147 miles, just three miles from the finish. GW Spicer had left Redbourn after lunch with his tyre already slowly going down and only made it as far as Dunstable.



The final eight heading for the special test on Redbourn Common

After a 30-minute tea-break, the remaining eight riders were led to a starting and stopping special test on Redbourn Common. This was on a fairly level stretch of road, approximately half a mile each way, with marshalls positioned every 250 yards. Starting with a dead engine they had to get going, then come to a complete stop between two lines of tape just 10 yards apart; immediately restart and ride to the next stop line for each of three sets of lines. Then, they had to turn around and do it all over again in the return direction. If they overran the line of the stop box they had to dismount and go back to the start and try again but with the clock still running. The rider completing the task in the shortest time being the winner. In their haste to make good time, all the competitors on the outward run approached the stop boxes too fast and, with their rather poor brakes, over-shot the 10-yard line before coming to a complete stop. This meant they all had to go back and start all over again, much to the amusement of the Redbourne villagers who had turned out en masse, and considered this part easily to be the highlight of the day's entertainment.



Brice, on the Brown, in the stopping and starting test

W King put in the best performance in the starting/stopping test to take the very impressive Albert Brown silver rose-bowl trophy. The way he got his rather heavy machine away each time was said to be very smart indeed. His King motorcycle, of his own manufacture, was powered by a Coventry-built, 3½ hp MMC engine. It was described as a powerful and strongly-constructed mount, scaling about 180 lbs. Its success, apart from its general reliability over the 150-mile run, was attributed to how well it could be controlled in the starting and stopping tests.



The winner, W King, on his King motorcycle

Hulbert on the Hulbert-Bramley was a very good second to take the gold medal but looked at one stage as if he would be beaten on time by Brice on the Brown, who took third for the gold-centred medal. WA Priest had bad luck when he was slowed down by a horse and trap getting in his way, and RG Priest also had bad luck just before the start when his drive belt broke.

Writing in his column in the weekly publication "Motor Cycle", the well-known journalist Ixion described the stop-and-restart test as "ridiculous in a public reliability test"; strong words indeed. Apparently, he had been told it was unsatisfactorily carried out with one rider losing half-a-minute through some frightened ducks getting in the way but wasn't allowed a second attempt.

Acknowledgements: The National Motor Museum archive, the VMCC library, Yesterday's Antiques and the Mortons Archive.



Gordon Hallett at an REOC rally locally, riding a Royal Enfield Meteor sidecar outfit with an RE Super Five 250cc on the sidecar platform

VMCC Bedfordshire Section Diary – 2023

[NB. Date for visit to Velo Club corrected]

29 Jan	Breakfast Meet - Maypole Farm, Kempston
09 Feb	Club Night - Gyrocopters! (Robin Braithwaite)
16 Feb	Midweek Lunch - Musgrave Arms, Shillington
26 Feb	Breakfast Meet - Scald End Farm, Thurleigh
09 Mar	Club Night - Intersection Quiz Night
16 Mar	Midweek Lunch - Danish Camp, Willington
26 Mar	Breakfast Meet - Jordans Mill, Broom
13 Apr	Club Night – SERV Herts & Beds - Blood Bikes
16 Apr	Spring Run – Jordans Mill, Broom
20 Apr	Midweek Run - STMA
30 Apr	VMCC Founders Relay Rally/Coffee - STMA
11 May	Club Night - Fish and Chips Night
14 May	Roger & Arthur King Memorial Run - STMA
15 May	Ride to Velo Club - Rose & Crown, Ridgmont
18 May	Midweek Run - STMA
28 May	Breakfast Meet - Danish Camp, Willington
08 June	Club Night - Ride a Bike to Shefford Night
15 June	Midweek Run - STMA
25 June	Breakfast Meet - Flitvale Garden Centre, Westoning
02 July	Albert Brown Run - Wilden Village Hall
13 July	Club Night - Car Park Concours Competition
20 July	Midweek Run - STMA
30 July	Breakfast Meet - Toby Carvery, Bedford
10 Aug	Club Night - Noggin and Natter
17 Aug	Midweek Run - STMA
27 Aug	Summer Saunter/Breakfast Meet - TBA
14 Sept	Club Night - Moto Giro (Gordon Hallett)
21 Sept	Midweek Run - STMA
24 Sept	Sand & Motorcycles, Leighton Buzzard
24 Sept	Breakfast Meet - Scald End Farm, Thurleigh
12 Oct	Club Night – Bradbury Motorcycles (Mike Wills)
19 Oct	Midweek Lunch - Cross Keys, Pulloxhill
21 Oct	Autumn Gold Run - Saturday! - STMA
29 Oct	Breakfast Meet - Danish Camp, Willington
09 Nov	Club Night - AGM and Slideshow
16 Nov	Midweek Lunch - Scald End Farm, Thurleigh
26 Nov	Breakfast Meet - Flitvale Garden Centre, Westoning
14 Dec	Club Night - Xmas Bash and Auction
21 Dec	Midweek Lunch - Toby Carvery, Bedford
26 Dec	Boxing Day Meet - TBA
31 Dec	Breakfast Meet - Jordans Mill, Broom