

BEDS VMCC NEWS

STILL KEEPING YOU INFORMED



The January club night that never was

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EDITORIAL

A shorter than usual newsletter as I haven't received much to include. Why not occupy the odd dark, damp evening putting a few words and/or pictures together? Almost anything original would be welcome related to motorcycles, the people that ride them and the places they go on them.

Many thanks to the contributors to this issue: Nick, Sam & Will. Please submit your contributions to me on:

bryan.marsh@btinternet.com and please, if possible, use Word with any photographs separate, not embedded in the text, to make it easier for me. Don't worry about grammar or spelling, I can sort that out.

Bryan

Beds Section News

Upcoming Events

MIDWEEK LUNCH – NUYARD GARDEN CENTRE, WESTONING, THURS 15TH JANUARY, NOON

Very short notice I'm afraid – in fact, it will probably have already happened by the time you read this. Don't forget to check out the special board for a bit of variety.

BREAKFAST MEET – THE NEW COFFEE BAR, SHUTTLEWORTH, SUN 25TH JANUARY, 10AM

The main Runway Café is undergoing a major refurbishment which is unlikely to be finished before our breakfast meet. Nevertheless, the new coffee bar is open and will be serving bacon baps, sausage baps, all day breakfast wraps amongst other snacks and cakes.

WINTER WANDERING – THURS 5TH FEBRUARY, STMA START, 10.15 FOR 10.30AM

Weather permitting, we'll head out in search of suitably muddy roads that lead us to coffee and lunch stops. Maximum distance about 40 miles, less if the weather dictates a shorter run.

CLUB NIGHT – TALK BY NORMAN KEIGHTLEY, STMA, 12TH FEBRUARY 2026, 7.30 FOR 8.00PM

Section member Norman is an authority on the Great War and will be bringing along a collection of artefacts to supplement his talk.

MIDWEEK LUNCH – MAYPOLE FARM CARVERY, KEMPSTON, 19TH FEBRUARY, NOON

We haven't been here for a while so it should make a pleasant change.

BREAKFAST MEET – DAIRY CAFÉ, FRANKLINS FARM, THORNCOTE GREEN, 10AM

If you've not been here before, you're in for a treat. There is also an excellent butchers and farm shop on site. One of my favourite places.

Other events of possible interest

BONHAMS ONLINE MOTORCYCLE AUCTION VIEWING DAYS

The next online auction is taking place on 13-23rd February and the Bletchley site will be open for viewing on at least one day, not sure which yet. An added bonus will be the chance to look at some of the bikes that will be in the April Stafford auction, including the wonderful 1898 Holden from the Rex Judd Collection, previously on display at the Whitewebbs Museum in Enfield. That's a wonderful museum to visit if you get the chance but it's not open very often - just Tuesdays and the last Sunday of each month, maybe we should hold one of our breakfast meets there?

FANCY A BLAST AROUND WEST WILTSHIRE?

Nick Kotarski highly recommends this event. It was over-subscribed last year so, if you fancy it, best get your entry in smartish.



THE WHITE HORSE SCATTER
12TH JULY 2026 - SELLS GREEN, WILTSHIRE



A one-day scatter navigation event around North Wiltshire's rural roads and, optionally, gentle green lanes. For entry forms and further details please email:

whitehorsescatter@gmail.com

or visit

<https://westwilts.vmcc.net/Events>



I doubt whether that QR code will scan at this scale.

Alternatively, if you have a pre-1940 machine you might be interested in the Fen Tigers Run organised by the Sunbeam MCC. Open to non-members. It's a 90-mile run from West Wrating, near Newmarket, to Thetford and back. Goggle "Fen Tigers Run" for details.

Event Reports

DECEMBER CHARITY AUCTION

As ever, this was a wonderful night out. Lots of interesting lots, lots of pizza, lots of laughs, and lots of money raised (about £350 if I remember correctly) which will be split between the club (to bolster our diminished funds) and a Diabetes charity. It's a real team effort with Brent as our star auctioneer, Nige looking after the pennies, Grace handing out the tickets, and Martin and Fay preparing the traditional festive pizza (traditional for us, if no-one else). Thanks to everyone for bidding (even if you didn't know you had) and to Sam for the great pictures.





THE JANUARY CLUBNIGHT THAT NEVER WAS

I don't recall us ever having cancelled a meeting due to the weather, but the warning issued by the Met Office covering our area was dire and suggested we were about to become a suburb of Siberia, buried under a couple of feet of snow. No wanting to be responsible for people getting stranded in huge drifts on the way home, we decided it was wise to cancel. Apologies to anyone who didn't get the message and turned up anyway but at least you didn't get snowed in. As it was, it just turned out to be a horrible night to be out but it was a close thing - according

to Alex, the BBC Look East weather girl, had it been just 1°C colder we would have had a massive snowfall rather than the rain that we got instead. On balance, I think we made the right decision.



I know I've used this picture before but it is rather wonderful, and seems rather appropriate.

The Page 4 Girl



Heading for Trouble?

WILL CURRY

The reclassification of most of my motorbikes as Historic Vehicles has been of great benefit to me. Zero road fund licence has saved me a fair amount of money and the exemption from MOT has saved me both money and time. Apart from running costs, the cost now is for insurance which would be necessary even if the bikes weren't being used.

Things couldn't really get much better, could they? Which means that sooner or later they'll get worse - it's being so cheerful that keeps me going.

So, what do I think could go wrong? I can see two threats but before I go on to describe these threats here's some background to the concessions themselves.

Concessions for the amount of road tax payable have existed since the start of taxation. At first, the amount depended upon the weight of the bike: originally 200lbs but raised to 224lbs by one Winston S. Churchill, then Chancellor of the Exchequer in the late '20s. Going back to my first days in the VMCC, the 1926 Ariel I rode was taxed at a lower rate than more modern, heavier 500s. Back then it would barely have qualified for Historic Vehicle status.

I think the first time that capacity was used was with what were called 'Snowdens' after the Chancellor of the time, Philip Snowden. This was in 1931 when motorcycles under 150cc models were treated to a lower rate.

For a while cars were taxed according to their carbon emissions. Our family car costs less than half of what my modern Yamaha does. At least this didn't happen retrospectively and to bikes. Imagine the fun if we had to provide evidence of carbon emissions to qualify for less than top rate of tax.

Creating Historic Vehicle status is the first time that I'm aware of, that age has become a criterion.

Quite why we get the zero rate I'm not sure. Perhaps some enlightened member of government reasoned that if the use of historic vehicles was encouraged more money would be spent on them and the economy would benefit - who knows?

As regards the exemption from the MOT test I think it's a pragmatic approach to keeping an antiquated and overloaded set of computer systems from being completely overwhelmed. This is a legacy ultimately of out-sourcing activities in the last 40 years with the drive for the providers to make a profit and not necessarily provide a service.

So, where do I think the trouble's coming from?

The zero rate is vulnerable to some cash-strapped - or profligate - Chancellor who has only to be reminded of the Historic Vehicle concession: "If they can afford to buy antique vehicles they can afford to tax them too." There have been plenty of rumours recently about this happening.

The assumption that justifies the relaxation of the requirement for MOT is that "Owners of historic vehicles will take appropriate care of their vehicles". How many people avail themselves of the 'voluntary' testing service I wonder?

With many years of fettling my transport, I think I have a pretty fair understanding of what constitutes roadworthy and there is always the DfT MOT Tester's Handbook - available online - to provide guidance. Another factor I'm well aware of is that nowadays I don't bounce when I fall, I break.

The threat comes from those who lack such caution or knowledge. I haunt the Ariel pages of eBay, not to buy you understand, but out of curiosity. In the last few weeks, I've seen two examples of Ariels which would never pass an MOT and are downright dangerous.



Close-up of the front wheel of an Ariel Special offered by a classic bike dealer

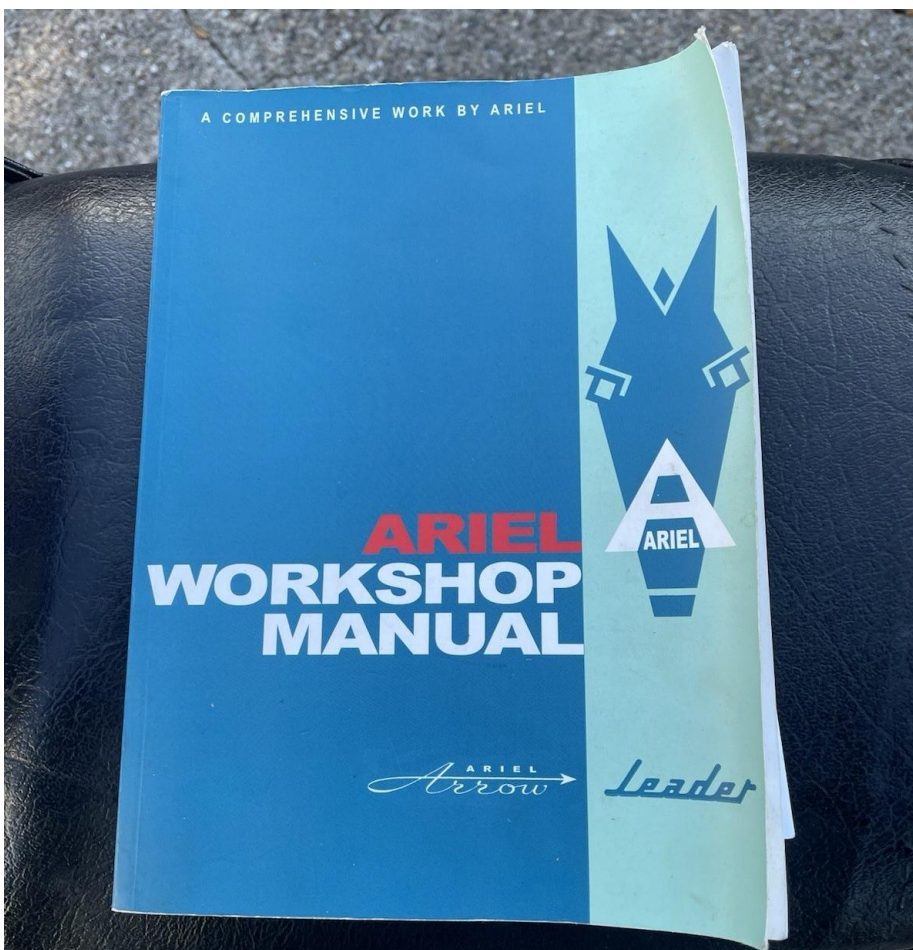
The first was offered by a dealer. An inspection of the picture will show that the nut on the front wheel spindle is not done up properly - the spindle should project through the nut. I suspect that the wheel bearings are incorrectly fitted and that tightening up the nut will load one of the bearings which will fail spectacularly and probably lock the front wheel. The second horror is the nut missing from the brake cable abutment. The abutment won't fall out - the brake plate will stop that, but the action of the brake will be spongy at best. Finally, the brake cable is incorrectly routed and is rubbing on the brake adjuster. The cable should run up the fork leg to a clip on the centre mudguard stay.



Not easy to see, the brake anchor of an Ariel Leader offered by a private seller . . .

The second seemed to be a private sale of a Leader restored by a previous owner. The problem with this bike, like the first, is brake related. In this case the brake anchor assembly has been put together the wrong way round. It should fit in front of the fork leg and not behind. This results in the assembly being in compression when the brake is applied and not in tension as it should be. Another problem with this is that the whole brake plate is rotated so much that the original cable will only just reach and then is liable to jump out of the abutment on the brake plate.

The ultimate irony here is that the Leader is offered with a copy of the factory workshop manual; a manual I consider to be particularly well written and illustrated.



. . . and the workshop manual to accompany the Leader

It won't take many accidents for the 'Road Safety Champions', already braying after those of us over the age of 70, to add Historic Vehicles to their list of targets. Who would dare criticise any action taken to improve road safety?

Feet first

In a shock move, our BSA/Triumph triples guru, John Young, has bought the Quasar from the foyer of the National Motorcycle Museum (their original one was lost in the fire). Quite why is anybody's guess but I'm sure he'll have a talk ready before too long. Perhaps we'll have him back to tell us all about the fun he's had bringing it back to life.

I'm sure most people of our age remember the Quasar from magazine articles in the 1970s claiming that "feet first" was the way of the future. Luckily, that prophesy never came to fruition but, needless to say, there are a few "special" people around who have kept that dream alive, and John seems to have joined them. There's even a website: quasarworld.co.uk with more information than you could possibly want. It claims it was years ahead of its time – seriously, does anyone really think that time will come?



John Young's Quasar being inspected by visitors to his garage

Most of the 22 or so Quasars built were fitted with the 850cc Reliant engine from the Robin three-wheeler but at this year's Classic Stony there was a one-off Quasar powered by a Honda VF750 V-four engine. Apparently, there is at least one other with a Suzuki GS1000 engine.



The unique VF750-powered Quasar at Vintage Stony on New Year's Day



Graham Robb's feet-first Voyager

By a strange coincidence Graham Robb from St Albans was also at Vintage Stony with his feet-first "Voyager". Graham has owned this bike ever since I have known him, which is over thirty years, and he has put many thousands of miles on it in that time. Like the Quasar, the Voyager has a reliant engine. I had the privilege of trying one myself many moons ago – just for fun, I had no intention of buying one. Very comfortable with its seat taken from a Volvo car but I struggled with its length when it came time to do a you turn and riding a bike that sounded like a Reliant Robin was bizarre.



Yours truly test riding a Voyager quite a few years ago

Vintage Stony



A very stylish Benelli



Francis Barnett Bushman Villiers in-line twin



A rare Royal Enfield Prince



Tidy little Yamaha trailie from the 70s



A brace of Broughs (there was a third just out of the picture)

VMCC Bedfordshire Section Diary – 2026

15 Jan	Midweek Lunch – Nuyard Garden Centre, Westoning
25 Jan	Breakfast Meet – Runway Café, Shuttleworth
5 Feb	Winter Wandering – Start STMA
12 Feb	Club Night – Norman Keightley, The Great War
19 Feb	Midweek Lunch – Maypole Farm Carvery, Kempston
22 Feb	Breakfast Meet – Dairy Café, Franklins Farm, Thorncote Green
5 Mar	Winter Wandering – Start location TBA
12 Mar	Club Night – Intersection Quiz
19 Mar	Midweek Lunch – Equestrian Centre, Keysoe
29 Mar	Breakfast Meet – Nuyard Garden Centre, Westoning
9 Apr	Club Night – Talk from Bonhams Auctions
16 Apr	Midweek Run - STMA
19 Apr	Spring Run – start location TBA
26 Apr	Breakfast Meet – Danish Camp, Willington
10 May	Roger and Arthur King Memorial Run - STMA
14 May	Club Night – Ride a bike to Shefford
21 May	Midweek Run – STMA
27 May	Visit to Velo Club, Rose and Crown, Ridgmont
31 May	Breakfast Meet – Dairy Café, Franklins Farm, Thorncote Green
11 June	Club Night – Fish and Chip Van
18 June	Midweek Run - STMA
21 June	Baton Run - STMA
28 June	Breakfast Meet – Jordans Mill, Broom
9 July	Club Night – Car Park Concours
16 July	Midweek Run – STMA
26 July	Breakfast Meet – Runway Café, Shuttleworth
26 July	Albert Brown Run – start location TBA
13 Aug	Club Night – Noggin and Natter
20 Aug	Midweek Run – STMA
23 Aug	Summer Run – start location TBA
30 Aug	Breakfast Meet – Equestrian Centre, Keysoe
10 Sept	Club Night – Talk on Dan Albone, local inventor
17 Sept	Midweek Run – STMA
27 Sept	Autumn Run & Breakfast Meet – location TBA
1 Oct	Winter Wandering - start location TBA
8 Oct	Club Night – Talk on the ISDT
15 Oct	Midweek Lunch – Musgrave Arms, Shillington
25 Oct	Breakfast Meet – Danish Camp, Willington
5 Nov	Winter Wandering - start location TBA
12 Nov	Midweek Lunch – Nuyard Garden Centre, Westoning
19 Nov	Club Night – AGM and Photo Review of Year
29 Nov	Breakfast Meet – Jordans Mill, Broom
3 Dec	Winter Wandering - start location TBA

10 Dec	Club Night – Charity Auction and Xmas Grub
17 Dec	Midweek Lunch – Toby Carvery, Goldington
27 Dec	Breakfast Meet - TBA