

A Little, but True Story from Bygone Day's

With Barrington Day

The year is 1953, less than nine years since the end of World War II, The conservatives were in power and Winston Churchill was serving his second (not consecutively) term as Prime Minister. Food and clothing would be rationed for another year, although some commodities had already been removed.



However it was May of this year that I cycled from my home in Weston-super-Mare, in Somerset, through East Brent and then onto Highbridge, taking a left turn towards Mark, a rather small village on the edge of Mark Moor. A very flat lowland type of area known as the 'Somerset Levels'. Local people have been digging peat there for centuries. The Mark Moor is criss crossed by long, straight, but not very wide roads, each with a deep ditch along each side, filled with black and uninviting water. The area always floods in winter when most of the roads are under water. However, it was always under control.

My reason for visiting this particular area was because I had read in the local paper (well my Mum pointed it out to me) that the local club, the Weston-super-Mare Wheelers were promoting a cycle road race; it was to go twice round a 25 mile circuit. This was the first bike race that I had ever watched. I do not think that there was any bike racing on the television in those days, just as well, we did not have one. Television was yet to reach the Deep South west.

The race called the 'Mid Somerset Road Race' was won by local lad, Tim Organ in an exciting sprint finish. I knew Tim vaguely as he used to be Head Boy at the school that I attended.

We talked and I ended up joining the 'Weston Wheelers' for the rest of the day, this included a stop for tea. Fortunately I had half a crown in my pocket, and as tea was just two shillings, I was able to pay my own way. Tea consisted of various sandwiches, lots of cake and as much tea as you could drink, there was no limit.

After tea and on the ride home I was told all about peat cutting by an older member, I was only 15 and everybody was older than me. These days it is the other way round.

I arrived home at about eight O'clock, very excited by the day's achievements, but received the biggest scolding that I can remember, apparently I was expected home for Sunday lunch, my parents were very vexed and I was sent to my room (without supper) until the morning.



Barrington in 1953

After pleading with my parents to be allowed to join the club, and winning the argument, I began my association with serious bike riding. The summer passed very quickly, I rode with the 'Weston Wheelers' on the Sunday club runs. The rides were usually round about the 100 mile mark. I managed to climb the many, steep and long West Country hills, after a few weeks I was looking forward to the bigger hills. Soon I was able to stay with the more experienced club members without too much effort, but, then I was under ten stone in those days.

We stayed out all day, stopping for lunch at an Inn, to eat our sandwiches and drink a pint of orange squash. Then it was back on the road again, stopping for tea, at a pre-arranged and booked location, this was normal practice back in the 1950's.

We now neatly follow on to the next part of the story, a very exciting day indeed.

It was an early October Sunday, the clocks had just gone back from British Summer Time, the racers had finished competing, the season was at an end, we were all looking forward to the Sunday club run, but today was to be different; it was the day of the annual interclub hill climb. I remember that four clubs were involved, 'Clevedon Road Club', 'Somerset Road Club', the 'Blackdown Couriers' and of course, the 'Weston-super-Mare Wheelers'. The venue was a long hill out of Taunton called Corfe Hill; it was about three miles long and rather steep in places. As it was a BLRC (British League of Racing Cyclists) event, it would be a massed start. That is how the French did it back in those days. Although I was under age, I was allowed to ride, as were a couple of others about the same age. At the bottom of the hill, mudguards and saddlebags were removed; hopefully somebody would take them to the top for us. (Fortunately somebody did).

I cannot remember how many starters there were, I think about 12 or 15. Then we were off, seemed a nice steady pace for a while, but then it began to get steeper, I could not believe that riders were dropping back behind me. I could see two riders about 100 yards in front, Tim Organ (the winner) from Weston Wheelers and John Pearce from the Blackdown Couriers. Eventually I could see the top and I was holding my own in 3rd place, so I thought, but my little legs were really starting to hurt, I was then passed by Bertie Bragg of the Somerset Road Club, known affectionately as the

'Descender most crazy'. I ended up 4th at the finish, feeling lots of pain, but inwardly very pleased with myself.

When it was all over the saddlebag and mudguards had to be refitted, a kindly older member helped me, informing me that I was using 2BA fibre locknuts and bolts to secure them, I did not know this, but I expect my Dad got them from the BAC (Bristol Airplane Company). I must have nicked them from his toolbox.

We then cycled about 20 miles to an Inn near Dunster, where we consumed our sandwiches and drunk a pint of orange squash, we always had a pint of orange squash, well us younger ones did. I believe that the older members had beer or cider. We then took to the road again on a wandering route past Taunton, stopping at the 'Compass Inn' in North Petherton for tea.

This tea place was different from most of the others in so much that cooked food was available, there were many combinations, beans on toast, egg on toast, mushrooms on toast, tomatoes on toast, in fact any combination you fancied. Beans, egg, mushrooms and tomatoes on toast with a meat pie seemed to be the favourite, plus all the bread, butter and jam and tea, that you could take on board. If you had everything, the maximum price paid was 3/6d.

After tea we would begin the 25 mile ride home, all feeling very full, after trying to eat everything put before us. This did not prevent most of the younger riders sprinting for every 30mph sign on the way. However, there were not many of them as most signs had been removed during the war and were yet to be replaced.

Arriving home at about 8-30pm, I was asked if I had a good day and did I want something to eat? Yes, I had a very good day, but I could not eat another thing. A lot different from that day in May, when I suffered such a telling off. I went to bed and fell asleep listening to 'Radio Luxemburg 208' on my crystal set. I was still wearing the headphones when I awoke in the morning.

The icing on the cake came a few days later, when I saw my name in the paper for the first time ever.

Barrington Day - February 2019