

Rye Wheelers Club History 1881-2010



Did Rye have the first ever cycling club and are The Rye & District Wheelers the direct descendants, can they inherit the title?

The answer to the first question is certainly YES! The Rye Cycling Club of 1881 was the first club to carry the name cycling; all previous clubs were bicycle clubs.

The second question as to whether the Wheelers are directly connected to the Original Rye Cycling Club of 1881 the link is not absolutely proven, but judge for yourself.

1881 Rye Cycling Club formed

1883 Clark and Adams represented Rye Cycling Club at Hastings in a Grass Track Meeting and won two races.

1898. Harry Davis was Secretary of the Rye Cycling Club and was also Editor of the "Herald of Rye" a magazine that carried stories, articles and photographs of Rye events. Clark and Adams were still racing for the Club in 1899 when the first Rye Sports took place. J. H. Gasson raced for Rye in this year.

1889-1913 Rye riders took part in Rye Sports grass races up to August 1913.

1914. The Rye Football team volunteered for the army at the outbreak of World War One and went off to war together, as did several other groups from Rye sporting clubs. Ken Gasson, son of J. H. Gasson reported many years later that Rye Cycling Club was one of those other groups.

1918. Those that survived the Great War were too distressed by the horrors they had seen, or disabled and had no interest at that time to return to cycling.

1925. The Rye Cycling Club was reformed at the Wesleyan Club on a cold damp January evening. J. H. Gasson was the only old member present and he was elected President. The only point disputed by historians is was the original Club being reactivated, or was it a completely new Club with the same name. The original minute books were not present, probably lost in the war, so all members at the reformation were made 'Founder Members' and some claim this means the Rye Cycling Club of 1925 was not a continuation of the Rye Cycling Club of 1881. J. H. Gasson was certainly not one of these. He insisted that the title must be the same, "To honour members lost in the War". And so it was.

1928 Lady Members were first welcomed to the Club

1932. Members of the club from out-lying villages thought that the name of the club should be changed to Rye & District Wheelers. There was a great internal upheaval the upshot being that the name was changed. J. H. Gasson resigned. He thought the title Rye Cycling Club was sacrosanct and changing it was a slur on the memory of the men of the Rye Cycling Club that were lost in the War. Proof enough that he at least thought the club of 1925 was the same as the original Rye Cycling Club of 1881.

1933-39. The club went on from strength to strength, racing, not only on the Grass, but in Road Time Trials. The social side was good with all kinds of money raising events being held. A touring section roamed all over England and many local dignitaries were members. Leopold Amon Vidler, Twice Mayor of Rye and respected local historian was President. This was indeed a Halcyon period in the Club's history.

1939. Then came the war. The Club continued to hold club runs but as more and more members were drafted into the forces and fighting began the remaining members met and decided that it was not right to carry on with their enjoyable pastime while other members were risking their lives. The trophies were put into the safe keeping of Barclays Bank, remaining funds were given to the war effort, all members signed the minute book and the club was closed for the duration.

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1946. Six members came together at a meeting in April and Club Captain Ken Padgham made a speech in which he recorded that the Club was one of the oldest in the Country and despite the depletion of the members during the war years they would carry on. Perhaps they did not feel like racing again but they could pass on their experience to any youngsters that he hoped would soon be joining the club. It was decided that the club should continue with its same name and that the rules be unchanged.

1946-52. These were great years for the Club that became a founder member of the East Sussex Cycling Association and had many good riders competing in Road Time Trials and Grass Track meetings.

1953. For some inexplicable reason the Club lost its popularity and numbers dropped to such a degree that the Wheelers were in danger of becoming inactive.

1954. Several youngsters, including Mervyn Robbins and Jim Hollands became members, but such was the overall state of membership the club it had become completely inactive by the end of that year.

1956. A chance meeting between Robbins and Hollands, now members of the Hastings Club and Fred 'Curly' Price an ex Wheeler of some note resulted in the old club being reborn in 1956 and going on to strengths it had not known since the pre-war days. At the rebirth the old minute books were present and although everyone at that first meeting was made a 'Founder Member' in much the same way as in 1926, the old rules and title were retained. There was no suggestion that this was not the original Rye & District Wheelers with its roots in the Rye Cycling Club of old.

1956-69 The Rye & District Wheelers became a force to be reckoned with at Grass and Hard Track meetings and in Mike Ashdown, produced one of the best sprinters this country has ever seen. It was unfortunate that his potential was not realised by the national selectors he would no doubt have been Olympic and National Champion material. As it was, on a pre-war racing bike owned by his uncle he won the Sussex Sprint Championship on the hard track and saw off the National half Mile Champion easily at several Grass Meetings. All the old club records were beaten many times during this great period in the Club's history, and then suddenly, in 1969, it was all over.

1969. Once again interest in cycling seemed to drop away and the Wheelers became inactive. At the very same time the Rye Sports Festival, which had been held on the Cricket Salts annually since 1899, save for the war years, failed to find a new secretary and has not been held since that year.

2000. The years passed, but suddenly, out of nowhere, the Wheelers are about again. Robbins and Hollands dragged out their old bones along with Stuart Pope, who kept the club running through a period in the early sixties when several members were doing their National Service. Another old member, Gary Booth was back, along with several new faces including Ben Sharp and Tony Cosgrain. There was even talk of racing in 2001.

2001 – Membership grew. There were club runs every Sunday and much more talk of racing was heard around the tables at tea stops. A Club Dinner was held at the Riverhaven Hotel.

2002 – This year racing began again and a new name emerged. Roy Fritchley knocked a minute and a half off the "10" record and a similar amount off the "25" becoming the first Club "25" Champion since 1964. Two other strong riders, Barry Goodsell and Mark Nash emerged; Gary Booth, Jim Hollands and Granville Bantick were also riding short distance events. Three riders, Roy Fritchley, Gary Booth and Jim Hollands rode the "Dave Ashdown Memorial "10" organised by the Bexley Road Club in honour of the old Club Captain. A Barbecue at the Riverhaven was very successful.

2003 – Gary Booth devised an ingenious points competition based on the Tenterden Evening "10" events. Mark Nash was the first winner. Barry Goodsell and Mark Nash rode in the club's first Championship "100". The Club held a 24 Hour Roller Marathon and raised £750 to help with the education of Richard Mwangi from Kenya who had been a member during his stay in England. The Summer Barbeque was held in the garden of Peter Holland's house in Rock Channel. Tuesday runs became a regular event.

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2004. Red Racing vests with Rye Wheelers on the back were introduced. Championships at "10", "25", and "100" miles were run, Barry Goodsell winning them all. Jim Hollands won the Evening "10" Points Competition. A Fun Day was organised by the club in Market Street. Roller Marathon, Music, Stalls and even dancing in the street. The Summer Barbeque was held at Rolvendene Farm. It all raised £1,500 towards the new ambulance for St John. Margaret Ashdown was the Guest of Honour at the Club Dinner.

2005. Four riders from the 1960's competed in the Dave Ashdown Memorial "10". Mervyn Robbins, Gary Booth, Jim Hollands and Mick Ashdown (Dave's cousin) had all raced with Dave on many occasions. There were Championships at 10, 15, 25, 50 and 100 miles. Barry Goodsell won them all except the "100", where a phenomenal effort by Jon Beasley saw him grab the title and the Championship by 28 seconds. It was described as "The best race in the History of the Wheelers". Riders from the club competed in a 'Sportive' event in France. A young lady, Katy Alexander became the first women star of the club in the new Millennium, breaking records at "10" and "20" miles. Another great Barbeque was at the Home of Kevin and Lorna Hall with slow bicycle race that ran on after dark. A Fun Day on The Strand raised cash for the Mayor's Fund. Rod Harrow, another Wheeler from the sixties re-joined the club. Sean Yates of Tour de France Fame (He rode 13 Tours, finished in 12 of them and held the Yellow Jersey in one of them) was Guest of Honour at the Club's fifth Annual Dinner.

2006. The World's first Cycling Club has gone from strength now there are fifty members enjoying club, racing and social events. The sad demise of the Tenterden Club resulted in 10 new members for the Wheelers. The Evening "10" events run by Tenterden were taken under the wing of Rye's Racing Secretary Gary Booth. This was the year Rye & District Wheelers re-entered the KCA "12" and two ex-Tenterden members, Trevor Bridge and Dave Spice took first and second places in The Club Championship. Jim Hollands was third and veteran Granville Bantick fourth. All the other Championships were won by Barry Goodsell except the "15" where Bill Waters was the very unexpected winner. Liz King broke the Ladies Club "10" record. More Barbeque fun at Rolvendene. The Tuesday rides were running with eight or ten riders. Sadly a new member, Peter Yoxhall, had a heart attack and died on the 15 August Tuesday run. It was only his second time out. Members attended his funeral and a cross, made by Rod Harrow, was placed in the verge where he died. The new Mayor of Rye, Paul Osborne became an active racing member of the club. Roy Manser, an International rider was Guest of Honour at the Club Dinner.

2007. The most successful season ever in club's history. Barry Goodsell, Jim Hollands and Granville Bantick became Veteran Time Trial Association "100" Team Champions when they completed one of the hardest KCA Hundreds in living memory. Heavy rain and wind from the start of the event reduced the field. There were many non-starters and non-finishers but the Rye riders fought the conditions to the end. Despite the elements, Barry beat the Club Record, Jim beat his personal best and Granville finished 'plus five minutes' a great effort. In the same event Liz King took second place in the VTTA National Ladies Championship, second place in KCA Ladies Championship and first place in the Club Ladies Championship, Alison Steed was second. This event was also instrumental in making Barry Goodsell, Mark Nash and Jim Hollands the KCA Best All Rounder Team (scratch times), remarkable achievements. The other Championships were won by Steve Gooch Ten Miles, Barry Goodsell "15" as well as the "100", Jeremy Temple "25" and "50", beating the Club Record in the "50" and the "Club Championship Record in the "25" (He had already taken the "25" record in an earlier event with a 58-14). Liz King won every Club Woman's Championship from 15 miles to 12 hours. No less than 12 Rye Wheelers finished in the KCA Twelve Hour race, four of these were Ladies. Trevor Bridge won the Club Championship and took Bernie Dean's record that had stood for fifty years and one day. Runs were now being organised on four days of the week and the membership had increased to 65. The Mayor organised The Cinque Ports Run. Many Rye Wheelers accompanied him as he rode from Faversham to Hastings, visiting every Cinque Port and limb on the way. It was an historic event that may never be emulated again. Plenty of fun events and club runs, including two visits to France and riding out, in several different groups, to watch the Tour de France when it came to Kentish roads. The year was topped off in style with John Booty as Guest of Honour at the Annual Dinner and Prize Presentation.

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2008

Started well with three prizes being won members in the New Year's Day "10". Bob Burden launched Ryewheelers.co.uk. Club Runs reached a new peak with up to 25 riders meeting up at Appledore Bridge for the Sunday runs. Club Captain Barry Goodsell led thirty riders in the VTTA Reliability Trial which the club won for the second year in a row. Rye members took part in many Charity, Audax, Reliability and Sportive rides and along with the Rye & Winchelsea Rotary Club ran the second Tour de Rye et Romney Marshes Fun Run which raised over £1,000 for charity. Steve Gooch, Barry Goodsell and Jeremy Temple all went under the hour. Jeremy broke many club records throughout the season.

In June Rye Wheelers promoted one of the KCA "50"s, the first association event ever run by the club.

The Championship Champion was Steve Gooch, ending Barry Goodsell's long years of success. Liz King was challenged in the Ladies Championships, although retaining her 10, 25 & 100 titles she was beaten in the "50" by Brenda Davis and a new name appeared in the club when Bronwen Ewing burst on the scene with a great 204 mile ride in the Twelve Hour. Bronwen also lifted the "15" title. 2008 was a year of all round improvements but no one would have guessed what was in store for the club the following year.

2009

Dave Wheeler joined the Rye Wheeler and Wheeler of the Wheelers as he has become known, started the year with a bang, winning the New Year's Day Ten promoted by Southborough Wheelers. Not to be outdone, Bronwen Ewing took first prize in the Ladies and Barney Reed won the junior section. A fantastic start but this was just a taster of things to come.

Dave won the San Fairy Ann "50" and took another club record, he had all but the 30 record by the end of the season. In June he won the KCA "50"

The Woolwich C.C. "10" resulted in a team win for the Wheelers (without Dave Wheeler who didn't get there because of car trouble) Steve Gooch, Barry Goodsell and Bronwen Ewing were the winning team and Bronwen also won the Ladies event.

Dave lowered the club "10" record to 19-54 and joined the very elite few in the whole country who have beaten the 20 minute barrier.

Bob Giles became the fourth Rye Rider ever to go under the hour for 25 miles.

Dave Wheeler won every Club Championship from 10 miles to 12 Hours and took every record at those distances.

Bronwen Ewing won the 15, 25, 50 and 12 Hour Championships. Bronwen now holds every Ladies Record except for 30 miles which she has never ridden.

Liz King won 10 mile and 100 mile Championships.

But the best was yet to come. The stunning news that Liz King, Bronwen Ewing and Ali Steed had won the National Ladies Team Best All Rounder Competition. This is the first Scratch National title ever to be won by Rye & District Wheelers and is another outstanding landmark in the club's history. Most success was recorded in time trialing, but members took part in many other events, including, for the first time since 1968, road racing. Many members enjoyed the Charity Fun Runs, Audax, Reliability and Sportive Events, including the third promotion of the Tour de Rye et Romney Marshes runs organised by the club and the Rye & Winchelsea Rotary Club. The Wheelers won the VTTA Reliability Trial for the third year in succession.

With Dave Wheeler, Steve Gooch, Barry Goodsell, Barney Reed, Bronwen Ewing, and Liz King, the established 'stars' and riders like Andy Croft, Tim Larkin, Rodney Harrow, Dave Bryant, Dave Spice, David Page, Paul Simpson, Bill Waters, Alex Belfour, Alfie Goodsell, Pip Carey, Bob Giles, Trevor Bridge, Mark Amon, Carmen Kubisa, Julie Bryant, Sue Spice, Brenda Davis, Ali Steed, Jane Reeve and many others waiting in the wings, the 2010 season promises to be very exciting.

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2010

What a long way the Club has come since it was reactivated in 2000. In those early days, those that got the Sprocket turning again were old timers, track racers from the 1950's and 60's. who rode time trials for fun and had the occasional dabble with road racing.

By 2000 they thought they were too old to race but there was so much talking and reminiscing about the past, even in the time that the runs were only of 12 mile duration with a stop for refreshments at Appledore, that the competition spirit was re-kindled in them again.

New, younger members, joined and suddenly they had all talked themselves into it, "To make up the numbers!"

As fitness slowly returned to the old bodies the whole thing turned from being a chore into being a challenge and then even as far as enjoyment in that strange way that suffering turns into pleasure when good results go up on the Result Board.

And so, as these ten years have passed, new names and legends have been recorded in the annuals of the Rye & District Wheelers. Records that stood for 50 years have been broken by many minutes and miles.

New names like Roy Fritchley, Barry Goodsell, Steve Gooch, Dave Wheeler, Nick Wilson, Gary King and Bob Giles had burst onto the time trial scene representing the club with fast times.

Rod Harrow an old stager from the 60's was amazing everyone, including himself, by turning in faster times than he ever did in his youth. Dave Page was back and threatening to go even faster than he did when he was 18!

Then there were three other riders, not mentioned thus far, who this year took the KCA Long Distance Best All Rounder Competition by storm. winning the team event for only the second time in the club's history. The names of Mark Amon, Andy Croft and Steve Maxted will be for ever remembered in the pages of club history.

It was even better with the ladies in the club. Bronwen Ewing had set standards at the very highest level, winning the short distance KCA Ladies BAR Competition and the team event with Sue Spice, taking most of the ladies club records and encouraging a group of women who showed great promise this year to ride with her and take the ladies time trial scene by storm next season. Julie Bryant, Carmen Kubisa, Rebecca Wilson, Keeley Chalk, Sue Spice, Amber Carroll, Brenda Davies, Claire Reed and Ann Marchant have appeared on many start sheets in Open events and Club Evening "10"s throughout the season and were only beaten by a few seconds in their Inter Club Event against San Fairy Ann, emphasising their strength in depth and enthusiasm.

Bronwen raced against the best in Britain at the National Time Trial Championships, taking 15th. place in a field of forty top riders including the likes of Olympic Champions and other national stars including Emma Trott, Sarah Storey, Nicole Cooke, Wendy Houvenaghel, Sharon Laws, Julia Shaw and Emma Pooley. And she did all this with terrible pain in her right knee from which she suffered throughout the season.

But for all the great rides Bronwen had ever done in Rye Wheeler's colours there is one legendary ride that will be remembered and the story told and retold, even if the Rye & District Wheelers last 1000 years, as exceeding any performance by a Wheeler throughout the history of the Club.

In the June 2010 KCA "50" she crashed after two miles and was scooped off the road by marshal Bill Waters. He was astonished to hear her demand to be put back on her bike, riding the last 48 miles with more injuries and abrasions than the legendary Ian "Spotty Muldune" Sinden suffered after a spectacular crash at Preston Park in 1963. Bronwen was more concerned with spilling her sweets and raisins and did not realise that she couldn't change gears because her top tube was smashed and just carried on as best she could in the gear she had. 'As best she could' was better than any other lady could do and as she sat in the hall at Brenzett with her arm in a sling and covered in bandages it was announced that her 2-11-44 was the winning time.

The club had never had an Individual National Champion but members hoped that this could change in 2011 when the National "24" came to Sussex. Bronwen and a team of Rye ladies were making plans and as Wheelers had learned as this lady meant business and would not be satisfied with second place.

There was far more to Rye & District Wheelers than racing during that Summer of 2010. Club Runs had been the backbone of the Club throughout its history. Each time club runs ceased in the past the club became inactive. Fortunately there are few clubs in the country with a more active club run programme. There were two runs, fast and moderate, on Sundays, a slowish run on Tuesdays (this run headed off to France on occasions), Chain Gang Wednesday evenings, Fast Run Thursday mornings and a gentle run on Fridays. They were all pretty well attended, even when some members were racing or taking part in Audax, Fun Runs and Reliability events.

The real social side was not been neglected either. As well as the Annual Dinner, (for which this year Carol Gandy was Guest of Honour), members enjoyed a Christmas Ride and Luncheon and a Summer Barbecue.

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