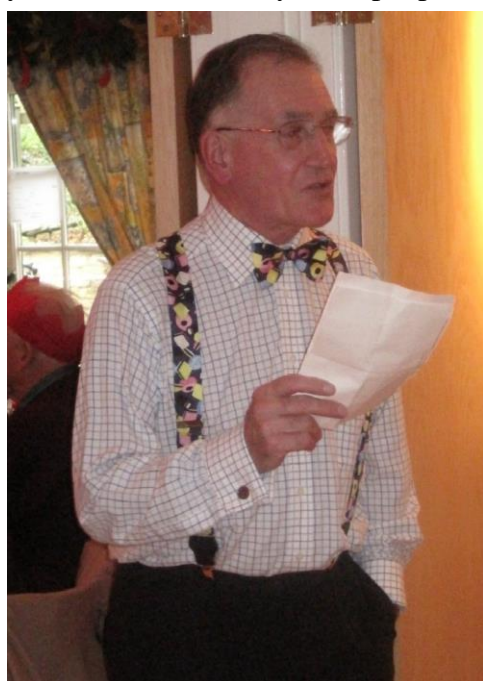


## News for December 2011

**Thursday 1 December 2011 - report from Pete Campbell:** Today's ride was to Luckington and the Old Royal Ship. But today was not just any old Thursday ride, because it is the day of the Christmas Lunch. People were looking for an improvement on last year's weather, when there was ice on the road and a few crashes. Although there were forecasts of rain, it was dry when we were on the road, mild, and very light winds. so a definite improvement this year. Fourteen riders turned up at Mangotsfield Station for Wayne to lead us. Two had made a special effort as it was Christmas and decorated their bikes: Pete Brown had tinsel draped across his carrier, and Lara Day had a chain of fairy lights. I made no concessions for Christmas, you may be shocked to read.

Basically, everyone is looking forward to their turkey, so Wayne planned a direct route to Luckington: Pucklechurch, Hinton, up Cock Lane and across the A46. Then straight on to the Gibb, and turn left at Grittleton. But we were putting in such a fast time that it was likely we'd be at the pub well before 12:00, so Wayne put in an extra loop via Sherston, which got us to lunch at around noon.

Of course, we visit the Old Royal Ship a few times every year and they always do well for us, but their performance at the three Christmas lunches I've attended has been exceptional. This year there were ninety three people, mostly cyclists or ex-cyclists, with a few (in John Bishop's words) friends and friends of friends. John welcomed everyone and the meal was served.



We had a three course traditional Christmas lunch, which I think was the same last year and the year before, but I suspect that if there was even a suggestion that the menu should change there would be an outcry. Anyway, why change a good thing?

The starter was a soup with two types of bread, the main course was turkey, stuffing, sausage, roast potatoes and roast parsnips, sprouts and carrots - all excellent - and to finish we had Christmas pudding and custard. What else could you want?



Lastly, to fortify us before getting back on the road: coffee and mince pies.

I guess about two and a half hours for lunch is long enough. Anyway, Wayne was encouraging us to get back to the bikes. The only rain of the day had fallen while we were dining, so after wiping the raindrops from the saddles, we hit the road. Through Badminton and across the A46 at Old Sodbury, we eventually returned to the morning route at Pucklechurch.

[Today's route map? Click here.](#)

**Thursday 8th December 2011 - report from Bill Balchin:** Gales, rain and snow was the weather for the North of England and Scotland this week while in the South we had bright sunshine on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. But Thursday is our important cycling day and while the country continued to be hammered in the North our sunshine gave way to clouds and a strong Southerly wind. I had such a struggle into it that I only arrived at Ashton Gate as the other seven starters were preparing to set off through the Ashton Court estate for the trip to the Windmill at Portishead. I hope nobody went to Nailsea as printed in the programme. No chance for a rest as we were soon climbing up to the new cafe/mountain bike centre where we picked up Polish Robert. A mountain bike would have been useful on some of the muddy tracks but there is not much that a touring bike can't cope with. Despite the threatening sky the rain was holding off as we got onto the main road as far as the George at Abbots Leigh where we turned left into Manor Road. Malcolm had taken over the leader's role after John reported-in sick. Having a Sustrans ranger lead the way is a mixed blessing. Malcolm knows all the lanes and decided to give us a bonus by taking a track that goes past Abbots Pool - a new one on me and most of the others. After admiring the water and taking a photo we pressed on towards Failand.







Now why are they stopping? Ah, puncture. Not you again John. "Don't you start as well!" came the tetchy reply. By now the rain could wait no longer and we had drizzle with the head-wind descending into Portbury then taking Caswell Lane parallel to the motorway. Passing under the motorway bridge the rain had got heavier and many used the shelter to add more waterproofs. Often when we do that the rain stops soon after - no chance today. Along to Naish Hill we turned right to bring us to Portishead where the first thing you see is a big ridge between you and your destination. We took the left option towards Clevedon then the right turn into Valley road to climb to the coast road and bring us to the Windmill soon after noon and dripping wet.

Just George Martin and Brian Griffiths out on their bikes to meet us (plus Brian Kington drove up just before we left). Our little group was hardly noticeable in such a big pub, apart from spreading wet clothing and helmets around the place. Super-efficient service saw us fed, watered and ready leave by twenty past one. Dropping into town we took cycle route 26 through the new houses onto the Sheepway then the rough track around the docks car park. Although the rain had stopped the potholes were full of water but we could forgive that as the wind was now in our favour. At the foot of the M5 bridge some took the Pill path while a bigger group crossed the bridge to get onto the Portway. I rode alone through Lawrence Weston on cycle route 41 crossing the new bridge that has replaced the previous one damaged by a lorry. Back came the rain for the rest of the trip as I got home almost in the dark at three - double glad. Glad to have got out on the bike, and glad to get back indoors in the dry. If you stayed home today you missed a wonderful opportunity to test your wet weather gear.

[The wet route out, and home via the Pill path - click here.](#)

**Thursday 15th December 2011 - report from Bill Balchin:** Weatherwise this week has been a reversal of last week. Instead of dry sunny conditions followed by a dull, wet Thursday last week, this Thursday was cold, bright and dry after three days of rain, wind, hail, thunder and anything else that the weather could lay it's hands on. John Bishop had to pass on leading today to go to a funeral so Martyn stepped in to lead the way from the Swan at Winterbourne to the Pear Tree at Charfield with a dozen in tow. Incidentally, a footnote to last week. We know that John Turton had another puncture but maybe you don't know that he had to borrow a tube from Wayne. On the way home as Martyn, John and Wayne headed for the Portway after crossing the Avonmouth bridge Martyn had a blowout. He put in a new tube when that blew as well. Now, by this time, sitting in the warm you are probably thinking "split tyre" but out in the cold and wet and being harrassed it is not so obvious. As the third tube was being pumped up that bubblegum bulge appeared. "Ah look there it" <BANG> "is". Damn, all tubes now used by all cyclists. Nothing else for it but phone home and beg for a lift.

Anyway, back to today we set off down the main road towards Frampton then School Road and into Frampton End Road. Despite all the recent rain it was wet but not flooded, in fact the rain may have helped by washing the mud away. At Iron Acton we crossed the main road and took Chaingate Lane and on to Mapleridge then over the common enjoying the sunshine and the company and the chance to get out riding again.



Into Hillesley and we took the roller-coaster road through Alderly where Mike and Roger on their fixies were impressive with legs flying on the downhill and then standing on the pedals to climb the other side. We regrouped at the top of Nind Lane and had a quick photo session before plunging down and through Kingswood. There was a brief shower as we rode the final section into Charfield to arrive a few minutes after noon.

I remember when Andy Starling took over the Pear Tree a few years ago. He seemed like a man who would do well and he certainly has. He put on a special cyclists menu with our regular choices - ham and egg, battered fish, filled chiabattas all served with Pear Tree chips which are chunky, crisp on the outside and soft in the middle - delicious. It is not only policemen who are getting younger, now it is also pub landlords. I can't think what the reason could be.

Leaving the pub by one thirty the sun was still out so we took New Road and past Huntingford Mill to Damery and Tortworth to put in a loop of lovely lanes rather than taking the main road. After Tytherington we took the Old Gloucester Road back towards Bristol for the homeward split up. Later that evening the rain came hammering down again. Fantastic, the one spell of good weather all week and it coincided with our cycle trip.

[The road out to Charfield and back - click here.](#)

**18th December 2011, Message from Alan Bracey. Subject: My Non Appearance** For those that are unaware, the left hip I had replaced two and a half years ago, dislocated on November 22nd. It was put back in at Frenchay, I saw my consultant physio on Monday 12 December with the result that I am off the bike until mid February. In the meantime I hope to see as many of you as possible on Thursday 22nd December at the Dolphin (by car) also further lunchtime venues, also by car.

**Thursday 22nd December 2011 - report from Bill Balchin:** Starting from Bitton with the Dolphin at Bath as the destination how are you going to make it into a ride lasting more than half an hour? Well John Bishop knows. He must have spent that fortnight off his bike working out the plan for today. Turning away from Bath the ten strong group rode the cycle track to Warmley and were then treated to a guided tour of Kingswood. Is John in training for a career as a guide, or maybe looking to become Kingswood mayor? Whatever, we wriggled around a mixture of cycle paths and back roads to be introduced to Grimsbury Farm, Cock Road where the highwaymen used to rob their victims, and then the view of Hanham Hall - the zero carbon village under construction that you can see from the ring road cycle track. After taking a photo from the viewpoint we carried on towards Keynsham only to discover that Stuart on the trike was missing. Puncture - but then he did have 50% more wheels than everyone else. Back on the road we rode up the hill out of Keynsham then down Redlynch Lane and into Compton Dando. A bit of sunshine, no rain and light winds made for pleasant riding although the recent wet weather had left the lanes wet and dirty.





For a bloke without much riding in his legs, John was not afraid of hills taking us over Fairy Hill into Compton Dando then left up Bathford Hill. Taking the left fork on the Avon Cycleway route to Burnett we had another big climb that John had forgotten about. So by the time we had crossed over the Keynsham road into Middlepiece Lane at a quarter to twelve he decided to curtail the ride a bit and turn right at the end then left onto the main road by the Wheatsheaf pub to bring us out at the roundabout on the A4 - thus giving us a downhill ride and leaving out another climb on the way to Corston. A quick trip on the shared path alongside the main road and we got to the Dolphin soon after noon to find a dozen or so already arrived, including Tony with grandson Tom.



The Bath boys arrived at one to bring the total to around thirty which was about as many as the pub could handle for lunchtime meals. A few little groups drifted off before the main bunch dragged themselves out sometime after one thirty. Although overcast it was still dry and with the flat cycle path available it was an easy trip back to Bristol, just what I needed to get home before dark at about quarter to four. Still, with the Winter Solstice passed (just) it will be getting dark later from now on.

[Click here for the route from Bitton and back.](#)

**Thursday 29th December 2011 - report from Bill Balchin:** Christmas has come and gone, New Year is on its way and the temptation is to loaf around eating, drinking and spending time with the family - unless you cannot do without your regular dose of cycling. A dozen set out from the Swan at Winterbourne for a ride to the Beaufort Arms at Hawksbury Upton. On the corresponding trip a year ago there was snow and ice everywhere and everybody went by car. No such problems today with the mild weather continuing and the sun even making an occasional appearance. Plus we had the added bonus of a tailwind helping us along the main road though Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell up to Mayshill where we took to the lanes - Tanhouse and Mapleridge - ending up over the common to Hillesley. Not much distance covered and wind assisted it was approaching eleven thirty and time to make a decision - turn right up the main road to go directly to the lunch stop or left then take the scenic Kilcott valley with the killer climb at the end. The fixed wheel guys, Martyn and Mike, had no hesitation before choosing the main road. After a bit of faffing around just Andy Baker, Bill Balchin and Ian Sparrow went for the hard route. It is a lovely ride but I had to thrash granny without mercy to get up, and we still got to the pub by noon.

I don't know what level of business the Beaufort normally gets on a Thursday lunchtime but our group of forty cyclists and motorised friends filled the skittle alley. I do know that most of our pubs are my favourite and this one is right in there - unpretentious, meals available in large and small sizes, traditional cider and a selection of real ales (I had my first Codrington Stunner and it was superb) what more could you ask for?

No lingering allowed with these short days and we were back on the road before one thirty. It was not exactly raining, more like drizzle blowing about in the wind which was now against us. Luckily the general trip was downhill as we took Sandpits Lane, along to Little Sodbury End, over Sodbury common and into Chipping Sodbury high street ready to go our different ways home.

[Click here to avoid the killer climb of Kilcott, and back to Bristol.](#)