

## News for March 2011

**Thursday 3rd March - report from Bill Balchin:** Into March, Spring is on its way but no rise in temperature yet with a biting cold North-Easterly wind. But at least it was dry as the Rexam starters met with the Severn Bridge starters to form a twenty-three strong group for the trip to Shirenewton under the leadership of Tony Weaver. With half the morning gone just getting to the bridge I sometimes wonder if Aust would be a better place to start for our rides into Wales - something to consider. It would allow more scope to find some different lanes.



As it was, Tony played it pretty safe (just as well with the general level of fitness at this time of the year, plus the cold) and took us up to the Chepstow roundabout via the cycle track, then continued towards the Wye Valley for a short distance before turning left. At the bottom of the descent we turned right onto the lane which I finally recognised as the one from Pwllmeyric to Shirenewton - only four years of doing this and riding on it several times and it has eventually sunk in. The lane was resurfaced not long ago and is still in excellent condition, and pretty clean as well so we arrived into Shirenewton and the Huntsman Hotel just before noon.

After enjoying a spell in the warm, drinking from the choice of three ales or the scrumpy and tucking in to baguettes served with chips and salad we went back out to find the sun making a half-hearted appearance. Not enough to produce any warmth but it always makes the ride more enjoyable in a bit of sunshine. After climbing (or pushing) up the short, sharp hill next to the pub it was the usual return route through Mathern passing by the decorated house and back over the bridge - where for a change we took the path on the other side. Guess what? It is very similar to side we normally use but takes you a little way into Aust. Our joint ober-leader Pete Campbell is suffering from shingles at the moment , hope you shake it off soon.





**Thursday 31st March - report from Bill Balchin:** The seventeen starters from Bitton under the leadership of John Bishop were expecting a breezy day today, but we are cyclists - we can take it! Starting on the cycle track back towards Bristol we took the first exit to Bridgeyate, Abson and into Doynton. There was a pause for a brief history lesson which explains the photograph of a bunch of



cyclists looking at the wall by the Cross House pub. Set into the wall is a plaque containing an extract from the doomsday book of the taxes paid by Alfward, a thane of King Edwards, on *3 ploughs, 14 villagers and 8 smallholders with 8 ploughs. 10 slaves; 2 mills at 10s 10d; 2 men at 5s; meadow 12 acres; woodland half a league long and half wide. The value is and was £8.* I wonder if those doomsday book writers ever had a dream that one day an army of tax collectors would be feeding similar information into giant calculating machines and sending incorrect tax demands to thousands of people.

John chose Dyrham as our route to the high ground and the strong wind at our backs certainly helped us to the top where we crossed the A46 and carried on in the direction of Marshfield before turning left with the plan to pass through West Kingston. Here things went a bit adrift. It was such a buzz to have the wind blowing you along that the official group which contained Lara recording the route on her Garmin took the first right turn towards West Kingston and a similar number containing Pete Campbell (back with us after recovering from shingles) also recording the route took the second turn. Each group then went their own way with John putting in some extra distance for his group. Mike Chouings navigated the other group by a slightly shorter route, and Tony Conibear went it alone on a mixture of the two. The traces from Tony, Lara and Pete should make an interesting comparison.

The Old Royal Ship did us proud as usual. I don't know when the place was refurbished last - but who needs it? A bit of wear and tear lends character to a place I reckon. John did a brisk trade in

programmes for the period April to October and then it was time to leave and pay the price for that wind assistance on the outward journey. We started slowly into Badminton but on the stretch up to Old Sodbury I was down to about six mph at times. I'm just glad that the general trend was downhill after Old Sodbury for the homeward trip. A cold, blustery day but I guess it must have helped to improve fitness for those warm, sunny days that are coming along - they are coming along aren't they?

**Thursday 24th March - report from Bill Balchin:** John Huish has a simple but effective method for choosing routes - take the start and finish points, look at all the best cycling lanes in-between, join them together, job done. Throw in a Spring day warm enough for shorts (although short sleeves were taking things a bit too far) and the twenty Rexam starters were in for a grand day out. Doctor Dave was back on the road with the four broken spokes from last week replaced and John Bishop was showing no signs of last week's fatigue.



We took Swan Lane and Frampton End Road to Iron Acton, then Chaingate Lane and Mapelridge into Horton where we turned left, over the common and onto Hillesley. JR had agreed with the pub to get as many there before twelve as possible so with the time just after eleven thirty the order to break ranks and go at your own pace was issued. Bombing down the hill on the Wotton Road you



can certainly pick up some speed approaching Alderley. But any thoughts of keeping your momentum soon disappear as the road quickly changes from down to up and all that speed gets wiped away in a few yards - some very rapid down-shifting required. Turning right to go up to Tresham the group was well strung out, even Martyn had to push on the steep bit, but he was on a fixed. Once at the top, just a short way to go before we could see what has become of the Royal Oak since we last visited, probably a year ago.



Well plenty of time, effort and money have gone into the place. It has had a makeover from top to bottom and looks very clean and smart. Posh coffee machine, linen napkins, new furniture, the works. It has certainly moved up-market in the catering stakes with prices to match, but hey, what's a couple of quid when you can have such a fine day out with your pals. As Berry remarked, they had not yet been "cyclised" but they managed to cope with our numbers which were up around the forty mark. The car park is covered in shingle so it was a bit like riding over the beach with the tide out but no problems.

After delaying the departure for yet another photo, John led an even larger group on some really lovely lanes under a clear blue sky through Didmarton, Sopworth and Starveall into Hawksbury Upton and back into Horton where we picked up the outward route and people could start branching off for home. Probably our most enjoyable day out of the year so far - let's hope there are many more to come. Some pictures in the photo gallery.

**Thursday 17th March - report from Bill Balchin:** Although Spring does not officially start till Sunday there were signs of it today - blossom on trees, daffodils out and a few BTOTC knees on display. The vast majority of the sixteen starters at Ashton were in longs though as John Upward led the way through Long Ashton for our trip to the Ring O'Bells at Hinton Blewitt. The climb up Wild Country Lane proved to be a bit of a test for back-marker John Bishop who dropped off the back of the pack. Catching up with us further along the lane he confessed to a serious lack of energy. Despite many offers to keep him company, John insisted that we press on without him while he decided whether to continue or abandon. Turning up the A38 then left towards Winford there was another wait until recent conscript Doctor Dave came into sight struggling with a buckled rear wheel that did not want to rotate. After a bit of BTOTC tinkering to slacken the brake we decided that it would be too dangerous to risk the Chew Valley hills with only one brake so Dave turned back for home. By this time John had caught us up so a group of six continued some way behind the main party in the bright but cool sunshine.



Sometimes you can overdo the exercise element on a cycling day out, so with a devil-may-care attitude we took a direct route towards Hinton Blewitt with a detour into Chew Valley picnic site for a coffee on the way. Should I feel ashamed about drinking coffee while my friends are cycling the hills around East Harptree ? Nah. We had a group photo then continued the short distance into Bishop Sutton and up the hill arriving at about the same time as the workers. Berry described this as a "jigsaw" day to me. Lots of people all doing their own thing but all coming together at the Ring O'Bells for a social gathering. John counted thirty eight in total at the pub including groups from Bath, Clevedon and Winterbourne.





Back out into the sunshine for the trip home, the policy was "go whichever way suits you". I was part of a pretty big group going down Stowey Hill, through Stanton Drew and over Norton Malreward. It was not John Bishop's day as leaving the pub he discovered a puncture which caused a delay, thanks to John Turton for staying with him. About ten of us called into Bitton Station for a cup of tea and lump of bread pudding the size of a house brick to make a fitting end to an excellent day out. I am going to get down to the serious training next time, honest.

**Thursday 10th March - report from Mike Chouings and John Bishop:** The run today was to a venue that is becoming a regular feature and being perched atop of a hill as usual, it is always a challenge for a 'gentle' approach. Twelve enthusiasts set off from Bitton on a route which was a mix of the old Somerset & Dorset, Great Western coal railway line ways. At Saltford, three of the group opted for an easier direct route via Bath, while the seven remainder were hanging on to the Petticoat Tails of the two maternal leaders. This led us through Stanton Prior, Marksbury, Farmborough, Priston, Nailwell, Combe Hay, Midford and Midford Lane up to the A36. At this point, three more opted for the direct route along the A36 for the pub. The remnants now really hanging on to the leaders for a diversion through Freshford (good another hill) and back to the A36. Now the final leg up to Hinton Charterhouse is just a drag normally but today it was a real test facing a gale and after a few sips of the Happy Brew, a few pairs of lungs were still going like the proverbial Blacksmith's bellows.

*Additional material from John:* PHEW! was I glad to reach the Rose & Crown. Mr. Chouings led us

hither & thither, uphill & uphill again through some lovely countryside, along idyllic country lanes, some familiar, others not so. I have to say that the Hinton Charterhouse ride is one of my favourites, even if one is obliged to cycle (in my case crawl) up lots of hills. I think that after today my position as "Tailend Charlie" is assured. We were joined at lunch by a large number of Bristol South riders, all of whom seemed to be enjoying themselves. Food was spot-on & served quickly. A pint of Ashton Clear went down a treat. However, after sustenance ably supplied by the hostelry to the 25 takers that were there, the various groups were set to let battle recommence. It was good to see Ted King there still keeping a finger on the pulse of the Old Timers.

*Back to Mike to close:* As a saying goes, it can only go down hill from here-on. The return was via Wellow where it was almost obligatory to pedal DOWN the hill, such was the force of the wind. From there, it was on to the two old rail routes to Midford, Tucking Mill, Monkton Combe and on to the canal path at Dundas. Flat to the end via Bath to Bitton but the head wind made up for the lack of any climbs!