

## LIGHTWEIGHT NEWS - 9

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### 'also incorporating news from the Lightweight Group of the V-CC'

There has been some cross-over with items available both on the website and in Lightweight News. Apologies if you have a feeling of Deja Vu when reading text here but not all readers have access to the web, and not all web users take L News, so we feel it is expedient to duplicate some pieces. The website has opened up the availability of copy no end as we often get really interesting contributions out of the blue from people who have no idea that there are other interested parties out there.

May is a big month for Lightweight owners in the UK as the ever popular **Reading Lightweight Ride** (theme this year is single-gear machines) is held on 20<sup>th</sup> followed the next weekend, Sunday 27<sup>th</sup>, by our own Cambridge Section '**Meridian Lightweight Ride**' which is held on a flat route to encourage you to get out on that fixed-wheel road/path ride you never quite get round to riding. You are of course also welcome on any classic lightweight whether on fixed or gears. Whereas Terry Pearce usually gets out 100+ riders for his Reading ride we seem to attract between 25 – 30 but both rides have a great feeling of camaraderie – you heard it here.

June is always crammed with big events, Herne Hill, Bates Weekend (will be held at Little Walden near Saffron Walden), Hetchins/Granby Weekend and on the 30<sup>th</sup>, the first day of the Lightweight Group Weekend. In addition to the 'biggies' there are two Hampshire Section Rides and a newcomer to the calendar, the North London Section's 'Hilly Lightweight Ride'. Any Lightweight owner who doesn't get out on a least one ride this month will be condemned to riding heavy rusty old roadsters for the rest of the year. You will also have to write out one hundred times: "I must remember, some people do this every weekend for fun."

### **Bradford's bikes and builders in the late Forties and early Fifties**

'or such bits as I can remember' by Jim Shaw (Cambridge)

Part Two

#### **A rambling diversion.**

As I have been told it, the Swiss rider Oscar Egg attacked track records using a horizontal (recumbent) bike, and made it necessary to create a separate class. I have no idea if this is true, but somebody will know. I do know that we used to fall in occasionally with the Ilkley CC whose member, a Mr Thornton, rode the only horizontal I ever saw in those days. To the young me he looked quite old and not very athletic, but he always kept up. He explained it as like being able to sit back against a wall then push hard with the legs.

#### **Geoff the engineer.**

I mentioned earlier my Osgear, but it wasn't an Osgear really, it was one Geoff had made for his own bike, and I got it when he decided to make himself another. For those too young to know, the elegant Osgear suspended a spring-loaded arm from the bottom bracket and changed gear with a fork which swung across under the chainstay. I don't remember if the genuine article was positive or not, but Geoff's had a double cable so that the fork was pulled both ways, whereas other gears of the time, such as Simplex, relied on relaxing the cable whilst one hopped, hovering on the pedals, that the spring would push the chain into bottom. Very hit and miss, but the Cyclo 'Benelux' changed all that. The beloved Osgear had to go when double chain rings appeared as it just couldn't cope, but at least we then got *eight* gears.

I am almost certain that Geoff was apprenticed to Parkinson's in Shipley. He had certainly worked there. They were a self-contained medium-sized family manufacturer of vices and machine tools, with their own foundry, so Geoff was able to learn engineering from A-Z, which he clearly did. I spent the last 7 years before I left Bradford working there. Needless to say, Geoff Wood realised an opportunity for profit when

he saw one, nipping out during the morning for pies and sausage rolls which were then sneaked down to the Heat Treatment to await the morning break.

During my time the foundry installed a pneumatic Jolting Table which gave the big sand moulding boxes a good bumping. It was on solid rock below road level at the top of Ives Street. At the other side was Ellis Briggs' shop, from which the stucco started falling into the street. They said the cause was obvious, but our people pooh-poohed it. It's all history now as the whole area has been 'redeveloped' and Briggs long since moved across the main road.

Later Geoff (Wood) started making various accessories in a workshop down an alley off Manningham Lane, the main road to Keighley. How he ferreted out such places I don't know. I can remember the aluminium bodies and levers of the CO<sub>2</sub> pumps, and tools to speed their production, and I think there were handlebar end plugs, but anything else I have forgotten. He employed an off-duty milkman and a pupil from nearby Belle Vue school who brought along a mate or two, all on an 'informal' basis. Someone talked, because Mr Clipboard paid a visit. How or where production continued after that I do not recall. The tie-up with Whitaker & Mapplebeck came after I had dropped out of cycling (*for the first time*). Finally, confirmed bachelor Geoff surprised us all by marrying non-cycling Louise, and I heard that he became a technician at Cookridge Hospital, Leeds. One thing is certain. There would be no 'sorry, it can't be done'. Geoff Wood was the most ingenious and practical engineer of my acquaintance.

### **Whitaker & Mapplebeck**

It was a reference in *Lightweight News* to John Mapplebeck which set this whole cathartic nonsense going but, ironically, I had less to do with W & M than with Walter Greaves, and less to do with John Mapplebeck than Geoff Whitaker. They were of the 'senior generation' of the mighty Bradford Racing Club and their tandem racing reputation went before them, putting me in awe of both, but John more than Geoff because he could be a bit sharp, and gave a feeling of not suffering fools. I did become pretty pally with Geoff over time. It was said that they could ride a tandem out of the saddle but I never saw it for myself, I'd love to know. My brother said last week that the Mapplebeck family belonged to a specialized religious sect. News to me, I'd be interested to know more.

Whitaker & Mapplebeck certainly became the frames to have round Bradford so, in due course, the Greaves moved on (*where?*) and I got my 'Ticker' - with its fancy lugs - and so did my brother Wilfred. 'Re della Corsa' rings a bell. Mine was burgundy with yellow diamonds on the seat and down tubes at my request, kitted out with the latest equipment, but not Campag, which I always thought a rip-off.

The standard BLRC routine in the winter was to remove the gears and go to 66" fixed and a dynamo with a big headlamp on the front spindle, or the forks if you had a mere 'touring' bike with a bracket there. You certainly weren't going to spoil the paint with clamps. This was a twice-a-year pantomime, so in 1951 there was a sudden vogue for 'winter bikes' which could get mucky and be as ugly as sin. It was all a bit of a joke. Suddenly everyone flocked to W&M in an outbreak of 'Europa' frames which were nasty leggy things with lie-back angles, but they were cheap, possibly five guineas.

Having gone, a mite reluctantly, down to Ingleby Road to get one I was drawn to one side by Geoff who said he had just the thing for tall me and much superior to the Europa. It was a 24 inch 'Dilecta', still a mass-production frame but really quite respectable and not a lot more money, probably £6-15-0. It had decent angles, reasonably-feathered lugs just on the fancy side of basic, gear and brake cable eyes, and a gear lever boss on the down tube, reasonably close clearances and a smart metallic green finish. The only 'minus', as I soon discovered, was that both bottom bracket cups were right-hand threads, so that the so-called 'fixed' cup was anything but. Being behind the chainset made it a real pain. I think that eventually I used a loose cup with a lockring, then some genius invented unit bottom brackets. The Dilecta has no place in 'Lightweight News' really, but it is a rarity, and I have never seen another. I discovered years later that they won the first-ever team time trial in the Tour de France in the 1920's. It is now my fixed-gear utility bike.

In 1952 cycling gave way to a girl and a motorbike. The Ticker was sold (*to somebody*) and the Dilecta went out on permanent loan. I had finished with cycling - or so I thought.

January 1953. Your king needs you in the Royal Engineers. Eventually I stabilized just outside Farnborough in Hampshire in glorious cycling country. My brother, although younger, finished his RAF duty before me, and put me wise to the benefits of having a sport in the Services. Cycling just happened to be the best, as all other teams went out in a lorry with their officer, but we disappeared into the countryside out of camp sight and mind, out of uniform and unsupervised as cycling in those days was definitely not an 'officer' thing. It was also possible to ride service events midweek and civilian ones at the weekend. Ask Ken Russell about it. He was the RAF star then and even got flown to events. They knew a winner when they had one.

I had no bike now so borrowed my brother's W&M, which had the Benelux that I found such a revelation. One lovely summer day half a dozen of us set off down the main road to Dorset (*try that now*) for the Army Massed Start Championship at Blandford Camp. Every time I got out of the saddle crossing Salisbury Plain my bike creaked and it got worse. On arrival we found that there was a crack under the front of the down tube in the heat-affected zone of the brazing - so no ride. Stan Brittain, the Army star of the time, won it. Afterwards we limped down to Bournemouth for the train and then I rode it from Waterloo to King's Cross in the rush hour, thence to Whitaker's, who fixed it. After National Service I retired for the second time (*but not the last.*)

### **W&R Baines**

The building by Whitaker's of Baines 'Flying Gate' frames happened after my time and is fascinating. I did toy with the idea of one for a while. The large Baines shop had a prominent site in the middle of Bradford, and lay somewhere in 'seriousness' between Halfords on the one hand and Eliis Briggs and Whitaker's on the other. It was the place where Joe Public went when they knew that they wanted something better than basic. It was well-stocked and catered for those daunted by enthusiasts' shops. I don't know that either of the brothers cycled. One was trim and slim and looked as if he could, but the other was not built for cycling. I don't recall any local clubmen working behind the counter.

### **Ken Russell**

I can't claim to know Ken well as he was another of whom I was in awe. I did make him and Geoff Wood fall about once when I displayed my innocence of what a 'camp bicycle' was.

One of my clearest recollections of Ken is in the 1949 Yorkshire Championship RR, my first Senior race. It was 96 miles, five laps of the Golden Acre circuit outside Leeds, with five climbs of Pool Bank. Although I can't climb I stayed in for the first lap, and was perplexed to see how Ken was being treated. Bradford RCC had the winner right there but his own clubmates ganged up against him! At Ken's every move there was a cry of 'Russell up' and it was blocked. Eventually he dropped to the back, out of mind, then roared through and away. He didn't win though. The team tactics gave the victory to Stan Hill. A good rider, but not a Ken Russell. (*Ed: Ken has mailed me to explain that his 'team mates' had just switched to another Bradford team and were in fact racing against him*)

I finished, but last. 22nd out of 40.

When Ken won the 'Tour of Britain' a Civic Reception was arranged in front of the Town Hall, so I joined the crowd on my way home from work. Somebody had thought it would be a good idea to get the Sports Editor of the Daily Express, a Mr Rose. He clearly knew nothing about cycling and had also clearly enjoyed a civic lunch, because he kept referring to 'Ken Sharples' despite the shouts of the crowd. All very embarrassing. Yet another aside, Town Hall Square was paved with jarra wood to give hooves something to bite into, like the cobbles, but keep the iron tyres quiet. As motors became more numerous tar had been laid on top, but wartime neglect exposed patches of jarra. On a damp day this was an absolute death-trap for two-wheelers.

***The final piece in James' recollections of the Bradford Scene will follow in Lightweight News 10***

From **Ken Russell** himself:

Laurie Kitchen became a frame builder at both W & M and Ellis Briggs. Today I have received an email from Laurie and he reminded me that when he bought his first frame from EB's, he asked the enameller, who was a very good artist, to finish it like "Bamboo" !!!!, the enameller did this, it was quite amazing and created a lot of interest.

My association with W & M began with a visit by Geoff Whitaker to see me at my place of work, (Martins The Cleaners), late 1946, when he asked me if I would like to join them in their new business venture, I jumped at the chance, I had wanted to be a cycle mechanic on leaving school in 1943 at the age of 14.

I started as a mechanic but learnt the whole business including wheel-building, servicing Sturmey Archer gears etc. etc. and later, frame building, assisting with the building of their first frame, a welded frame which was given to me for my competitions, the frame was completed just in time for our club's 1947 August Bank-holiday long weekend which started at Alston, Cumbria.

Because Geoff and I were working on the Saturday we did not leave for Alston until mid afternoon on the Saturday. Johnny was left to look after the shop !!! . About 5 miles before Alston I noticed that one of the front fork ends had broken loose, the brazing had failed !!! As the bike was still safe to ride with care, it was decided that I would ride it through the following week ( I was taking my week's holiday that week along with two members of our club). The following Sunday I had entered the " Shropshire Hospital 3rd & Jnr. RR". Geoff had arranged to make another pair of forks. He arrived at the changing rooms a couple of hours before the start complete with a new pair of forks, enamelled and chrome plated which were discreetly changed. Cff I went feeling quite elated and winning my very first RR.

In early 1948 we discovered a hairline crack in the welded frame and by this time W & M were building lugged frames so, a lugged frame was built for me. In numbers of wins and places this was to be the most successful frame I ever had, including 3 RAF championships, 50-mile TT, 100-mile TT, and Massed Start, plus three of the BLRC's toughest road races, the "CJ Fox Memorial Road Race", the "Severn Valley GP", the "GW BELL Memorial Road Race (three times round the Nidderdale course) and, in 1949, the top BLRC. Road Race, "The Tour of The Peak". Unfortunately, the whole bike was stolen Dec 1949. I had just arrived home on leave from the RAF and parked my bike in the yard at the side of the W&M shop, 3 mins later it was gone I never saw it again.

The next frame was another lugged frame, built with the latest "Nervex" lugs and was one of the first to be named, "Scelta dei Campioni" (choice of the champions). Perhaps my best performance on this was 2nd place in the 1950 Brighton to Glasgow, beaten by the late, great George Lander. I used this bike until late 1951 when I joined the Ellis-Briggs company.

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**John Basell** mentions his RAF (Egypt) CA club, the Exiles CC, and the fact that 15 of them still meet and ride together four times per year, some 53 years afterwards. He attached a picture, taken last year up at Woolsthorpe, of one Cyril Wagstaff attired in his Exiles jersey and leaning on his magnificent Mercian. On demob, Cyril went to work for Mercian and stayed with them right until retirement - about three years ago. His made to measure Mercian, built in Reynolds 853, with carbon forks, Cinelli 'Angel' combined carbon stem and bars and fully Campag Record equipped, was his retirement present from the firm. When I told him about your LN News No 5, with the resume about Dave Keeler, he was most interested. He remembers Dave's visits well and can recall giving special attention the the machine that Dave rode the End to End on.

In Lightweight News 8 mention was made of the **Clarion CCs**. I have since found that a short history of the 'Clarion' clubs exists. *FELLOWSHIP IS LIFE* by DENIS PYE - Published 1995 by Clarion Publishing. The Spartacus CC was also mentioned and I wondered if anyone out there has any information on this club which was for committed communists. Whilst I was looking for information I also came up with a club for Catholic cyclists - London St Christophers Catholic CC. It seems as if this was another example of a nationwide set-up like the Clarion and Vegetarian clubs. A Manchester St. Christopher's Catholic CC

certainly existed and the London club was still going in the 1930s – it was reported to have made a pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1938.

*Ed:* I have talked before about the habit of getting a tow behind lorries in the 50s. Gerald Finlay sent this 1953 image which is interesting in two ways.



*Gerald Finlay (Leeds Atlas CC) competing on the A1 in a 30-mile time trial in 1953  
Note the 'flowing' brake cables on this Bates BAR which was the fashion in the early 50s.*

He remembers well catching the lorry, passing it and dropping it about two hundred yards from the finish. First, it shows the trundling old BRS lorry which was the norm those days as transport was nationalised and lorry design in the UK hadn't moved on much since pre-war days. Second, it shows just how busy the A1 was in those days! This is how the main roads were. If one wanted, for example, to cycle from King's Lynn to London and get there quickly then one simply followed the A10. I always knew we were just about in London when I saw Tottenham Hotspur Football Club on the left. We usually carried on through London and down to Herne Hill to see everyone's hero, Reg Harris, racing against the top continentals. Once you got South of the river it was easy to follow all the cyclists heading for the track, where there would be crowds like a modern-day football ground.

We had an amazing coincidence on the website recently. First a message from someone asking about his bike, a **Theo Parsons** built in Cheshire. He gave some details and said that he only knew of one other. A few days later, a message from Dallas where someone who also owned a Theo Parsons made in Altrincham and wanted to know more about it. Both owners had various pieces of information so we were able to make up a page for this builder.

Earlier this year we did the Mad and Foolish Ride near Hereford: I took my ex-Dave Keeler 1954 Mercian Vigorelli and Patricia took her 1964 Pennine. Both had fairly low gears which are useful for this event which is quite hilly. We met a local rider, Philippa Wheeler who did the ride on a 76" fixed-wheel track machine as she couldn't move the rear wheel any further forward in the track ends in order to fit a larger sprocket. She discovered this at 11pm the evening before so decided to tough it out. It was a **Jim Broome** frame, again a northern builder. Thanks to Philippa we now have a Jim Broome page on the website.

My current bike-building project is a post-1964 Pennine Italia (the Italia was introduced in 1964) which has a braze-on lever boss on the right hand side. I am copying an idea from Martin Vincent in fitting a single bar-end lever on the left to change the Campagnolo front changer which doubles up with the Nuovo Record rear changer. Martin had done this on his Bates. The one component which is holding me up is a single clamp-on cable stop to go near the top of the down tube. This needs the stop to be on the left and for the entry of the outer cable to be on the top. I wonder, does such a thing exist?. Once this is sorted out the build will be just about finished apart from taping bars, etc. I hope I like it as much as Patricia likes her Pennine. She rates it very highly.

I also recently acquired a 25" 1948 Rotrax Super Course frame, ostensibly to replace the Rotrax La Premiere I already have which has Sturmey FM gears. I am debating whether to fit the new one with a Simplex or an Osgear. I already have an Osgear on my Stallard and really need to get out on it (I am planning a ride this weekend) to get to grips with it. I can remember using an Osgear in my youth but in those days I could happily use a very close-ratio block on the rear with one tooth difference whereas these days I have to have lower gears to use. I did manage to rig up a Regina block with two-tooth difference, 16-18-20-22-24 especially for the Osgear. The idea being to keep the gaps fairly close and the gears evenly spaced as they were when the Osgear was introduced. . I have tried to duplicate this sprocket set but have had no luck so far. I suppose I could use the same wheels for both bikes but I really like to have all of our machines ready to take out.

In my brake box I have a rather unusual pair of GB Sport brakes. They have what look like the old style levers (pre-Superhood) and GB Sport stirrups. The difference is that the cable at the stirrup end has a nipple rather than the bare cable normally locked by a nut on a clamp. This of course means that the cables are made up in one piece with a nipple either end and the outer cable and adjuster all constrained between. There is a good side to this, it is not so easy to lose the adjuster! I can email an image of the brakeset if anyone would like a visual aid.



While we are talking brakes, here is an image (*left*) of one of a pair of levers owned by Mick Madgett who is not sure what make or date they are.

The levers came with Universal stirrups and are unusual in having what looks like a 'capstan' above the hood for adjustment.

I am in need of some 'Large' Christophe toeclips to finish off our latest builds. Would like NOS or ones in VGC, not the rusty ones the 'patina' boys love so much!

If you are a fixed-wheel enthusiast have a look at the site at:  
<http://www.fixedwheel.co.uk/medium%20gear%20history.htm>

*Peter Underwood*