

# The Speedway Researcher

Promoting Research into the History of Speedway and Dirt Track Racing

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## An Epic Dirt Track Tale

We continue **Ian Paterson's** poetic story of speedway. (A few minor editorial liberties have been taken for which apologies to Ian. Editors) This extract has been kept short as the next section is quite long and can't really be broken up without spoling the continuity of the section.

### A BRACE OF EARLY BIRDS

Now 'Aussie' riders reached our shores  
Trooping of the boats in bloody scores.  
But a local farmer rose to fame,  
And Roger Frogley was his name

The Hoddesdon boy soon got the Knack,  
And master'd Epping Forrest's Track  
He then crossed 'Father Thames' to race,  
As a red hot 'Crystal Palace' Ace!

Soon British champ, but here's the rub,  
He formed the Essex Aero Club.  
They tried to tempt him back (in Vain),  
So speedway's loss was Flying's gain.

From 'way up North, next came Frank Varey,  
As tough as nails, (no Yorksire fairy!)  
His club mates thought his bikes were jokes,  
Being bloody water cooled two-strokes!

With cinders flying, exhaust pipes screamin'  
He rode flat out, (a bloody demon).

This guy just did not close the throttle,  
(Less power, less brains, but loads of 'bottle'!)

The season's end brought him more offers,  
"Now here's a chance to fill your coffers!"

With Belle Vue mates, (there were none keener),

The bunch set sail for Argentina!

Some Yorkshire fans shout, "have a go Joe",

The 'Argies' screamed, "Diablo Rojo".

His thrilling antics made them revel,

This guy was speedway's first 'Red Devil'!

## THE LEAGUE

In West Ham's Jimmy Baxter's dreams,

He'd form the riders into teams!

This met with lots of opposition,

But he bulldozed through his proposition.

Team competition caused intrigue,

(This newly founded Southern League).

To join the set up, clubs were quein,

His foresight saved the game from ruin!

The post war years saw speedway boom,

But 'overkill' brought doom and gloom.

With crippling entertainment tax,

The death knell for some thirty tracks.

But the game survived through highs and lows,

At times our sport was in the throes.

Its lowest ebb, was fifty-eight,

When T.V. almost sealed its fate.

Some ten years passed, till men of vision,

Said "Its time to form a Second Division".

One hundred youngsters seeking fame,

They breathed life into the game.

One thing I never understood,

If first division was so good

It seemed to me, they couldn't wait,

In their hurry to amalgamate!

Now, our sport is helped by 'Sky - TV',

With media skills for all to see.

So, if speedway's to be kept afloat,

Shoot half the people who promote!

## Arthur Forrest

We continue **David Hartley's** story of Arthur Forrest's first full time year in speedway in 1949 when he was a member of the new Halifax Dukes team.

Back at home against Rayleigh Arthur was back to his winning ways picking up a 12 point maximum against Tamworth in a 62 - 22 demolition of the Midlands team.

By now Arthur had collected 173 League points and earned an average of 8.24.

Friday 8 July was the start of a six match away run at Leicester and in the 43 – 41 Dukes win Arthur scored 10 points, He repeated his Blackbird Road showing at the County Ground in Exeter the following Monday as the Yorkshire lads licked the cream of Devonshire by 48 – 36 and in a match along the south coast at Hastings Arthur managed 8 in the narrow 43 – 40 defeat inflicted by The Saxons over The Dukes.

Then Dukes then turned westwards and travelled to Plymouth where Arthur scored just three points in a 52 – 32 defeat. The second last stop on the away tour was Fazeley, Tamworth where in a 52 – 30 defeat Arthur emerged top scorer for his team with 9 points.

The last leg was the match at Stanley Stadium in Liverpool and the Dukes rounded off their jaunts with a 48 – 35 win and an unbeaten 12 points return from Arthur.

The following Wednesday, opening night visitors Yarmouth returned. Again the Bloaters won and their 44 – 37 win was inspired by another youngster – the diminutive Billy Bales who bagged a maximum, Arthur scored 8 but looked like scoring more until he shed a chain in his last outing in heat 14.

Two days later Dukes drew at Leicester then won 45 – 33 at Hedon Stadium, Hull. Both fixtures saw Arthur post a full 12 point maximum.

August Bank Holiday Monday and over 11,000 at The Shay saw Tamworth beaten 50 – 34 but Peter Orpwood beat Arthur in heat 1. However, the pair met again in and Arthur took his revenge. Arthur had 10 paid 11 and Orpwood scored 11 points.

Next day it was down to Caister Road where Yarmouth won decisively 63 -21. In this slaughter Arthur wrecked his bike in a heat 1 crash and had to use borrowed equipment for the rest of the match. As a result he failed to score.

On Wednesday 3 August bottom of the Second Division Coventry Bees raced Halifax in a challenge match which was the Dukes sixth in eight days. In the 59 – 25 victory over the Bees and Arthur, despite an 11 paid 12 return was second top scorer behind Aussie Dick Seers.

A further three days on and Arthur was at Sun Street in what is now Stoke and managed only four points as the Potters beat the Dukes 48 – 35.

On Wednesday 10 August Liverpool Chads visited The Shay and in the Dukes victory Arthur scored yet another full house.

The next fixture for Arthur was an outing for Dukes at Odsal in a challenge match against Second Division League leaders – Sheffield Tigers. In front of a 19,000 crowd Sheffield beat Bradford 47 - 37 and Arthur contributed 11 points. He was unbeaten up to his last outing when he had to give second best to experienced man Stan Williams.

The next few weeks were a bit less hectic as the Dukes faced Rayleigh, Oxford

and Hull in successive home matches. The Dukes won all three and Arthur took three (two full and one paid) maximums.

7 September saw Arthur at Tamworth but mechanical problems kept his score down to just four.

The Halifax – Sheffield return took place at The Shay on 9 September and, in front of a record crowd of 18,000 Dukes beat the Tigers 51 – 32 with Arthur scoring 7 points. This meeting featured match races between two of the veterans Eric Langton [ who had retired a couple of years before] and Frank Varey. The pair used machines from their pioneer days. Langton was mounted on a 1928 Douglas while Frank, who had packed it in a wee bit before Eric, used his famous Scott of 1928 vintage.

Arthur rode in a Best Pairs at Exeter on 12 September where he scored five and the following night he appeared at St Austell collecting a full maximum for Mike Erskine's team in a challenge match.

Despite the long haul back to Halifax for the following night Arthur collected yet another League maximum in a match against almost as far travelled Plymouth Devils.

A few days later the Dukes faced National League Division Two opposition in the shape of Fleetwood Flyers at Odsal Stadium in Bradford. The Dukes calimed a 57 – 27 win with Dick Seers taking a full maximum and Arthur a copule of points behind on 10.

Back at Exeter with his team Arthur scored seven in Dukes narrow 41 – 42 defeat by the Falcons. However, the good Yorkshire air in Halifax a couple of days later beconed Arthur to another League maximum, this time against Stoke. Arthur's next engagement was at Rayleigh where his 9 points helped Dukes ground the Rockets by 44 – 40. He may have scored more but for a Heat 1 fall in a meeting that saw Les McGillivray lower Arthur's track record. Next up at The Shay was Leicester and none of the Hunters eight could best Arthur as he sped to another maximum.

1 October took Arthur and his Dukes team mates to the seaside for the second leg of the challenge with Fleetwood. At Highbury Avenue Sports Stadium Arthur scored 10 points in a 46 – 38 win and 103 – 65 win on aggregate. The end of the season was drawing close but Arthur was still going strong with a ten paid 12 score in the 64 – 20 defeat of Poole on 5 October and a day later at Plymouth he scored 9 before crashing out in his last ride.

In the next home match at The Shay Arthur scored 11 paid 12 in the demolition of Hastings Saxons. The 67 – 17 score was the biggest home win of the season. Despite expecting a win the following evening against bottom team Oxford, the Cheetahs pulled out the stops to win 48 – 36 with Arthur taking a quarter of his team's haul.

17 October took the Dukes to Poole and Arthur added another track record to his collection knocking a massive 1.4 seconds off the record lowering it to 74.6 seconds. In the passage of the evening Arthur took 10 paid 12 in the 48 – 36 win in what was their eighth away win of the season.

Arthur and the Dukes ended the season on a high note as, in front of 19,000 fans, they defeated Second Division leaders Bristol Bulldogs 54 – 29 and he collected 12 of the 54, yet another maximum.

The Black Prince had arrived – what a way to finish his first season and he was now a name to be remembered. He had scored a staggering 22 maximums over the period of his first season.

Arthur's record with the Dukes is impressive.

National League D3 1949 48 matches 420 points 8.75 average.

National League D2 1950 19 matches 205 points 10.79 average.

National League D2 1951 30 matches 302 points 10.06 average.

At the end of the 1951 season Arthur was the holder of the Halifax track record of 66.8 established on 2 May 1951 in a heat of The Silver Helmet Match Race Championship when he defeated Jack Young.

In 156 matches for Halifax he scored 1599 points with an overall average of 10.25 and had score 14 full and 42 paid maximums.

When Halifax closed in 1951 he moved to Bradford, his parent track and from 1952 he topped the points for them until they closed in 1956.

Arthur raced in 5 consecutive World Finals between 1952 and 1956. In 1956 he scored 11 points and finished third behind Ove Fundin of Sweden and Ronnie Moore of New Zealand.

Arthur was always so much the gentleman and was liked by riders and fans alike and I found it a great thrill to have seen the Black Prince in his great years in speedway. I can still see those shiny black leathers.....

## **Totaliser Betting Spring 1932**

**Alex Broadhurst** has abstracted a phenomenal amount of detail about the meetings staged at Lea Bridge which featured betting.

Alex writes – The 4 March edition of the Hackney Gazette and North London Advertiser carried an item stating that the National Speedway Association's ultimatum to the management of the Lea Bridge Speedway, calling upon them to abandon their scheme to introduce Totaliser betting during the coming season expired on midday Wednesday 2 March.

Having failed to give the necessary undertaking the club ceased to be members of the Association.

E.J.Bass, managing director, said they had tendered their resignation alleging

unfair treatment by the Association in allotting Test Matches and unsatisfactory conditions regarding new riders. "In time we hope other clubs will join the scheme and then league and cup matches can be arranged as before."

18 riders had been signed on with another batch to be considered.

Lea Bridge Speedway advertised the events as Tote-Track Racing. "A Bet and a Thrill." Every Wednesday and Saturday at 8.15. Admission 1/- (£0.05p) and 2/- (£0.10P). Thousands of covered seats.

Bets in 2/- units could be made forecasting race winners. Place bets could also be made, paying out on first and second places.

In addition to betting on each race, there was also the totaliser double for forecasting the winners of heats 3 and 5.

**Alex** has abstracted the details and they are now on the web. He would also like us to point out that the riders, contrary to popular myth, did use their own names when they appeared there.

(Names for those of you have not seen the site Roy Dook, Alf Foulds, Gordon Spalding, Spencer Stratton, Fred Ralph, Syd Edmonds are a few known to the Editors.)

### **The Tote Fails at Lea Bridge Speedway Southampton To Take Over**

**Alan Bates** adds to the story with the following from the Walthamstow and Leyton Guardian for Friday 27<sup>th</sup> May 1932.

Totalisator betting as foretold in the "Guardian" when the venture was launched at Lea Bridge Speedway and lovers of the true form of the sport of speedway racing will doubtless be pleased to learn that the sport has been taken over by Southampton, who in future, will hold their home meetings there, although some fixtures will be taken to Southampton.

It is probable that for the second half of the National Speedway League the Southampton management will make application to alter their name to Clapton or Lea-Saints.

The Lea Bridge promoters have tried many methods to popularise their track, but the poor standard of racing, together with the human and machine element which made betting most precarious, has told against them. They have even gone so far as to arrange an exhibition of all-in wrestling.

It is understood that the totalisator meetings are to be discontinued and Southampton, who have secured a lease of the track will take over.

### **Who Invented the Starting Gate?**

**Alex Broadhurst's** Lea Bridge details appeared on the web and the programme used by **Ron McNeil** had Alex in a dilemma. The cover had a different date. However, it is an ill wind as they say and as a result of Alex's trip to Colindale to double check his source information has resulted in Alex coming up with an interesting item.

The reports Alex checked refers to the introduction of a starting gate. Now the date was early 1932 and the inventor was given as the Lea Bridge manager of the day, Claude Langton.

Speedway lore has for years given an authoritative support for the starting gate being invented by Fred Mockford in 1933 and the new invention being pioneered at New New Cross.

Has Alex re-written speedway history?

### **Can You Help?**

Please have a look at the items on the web. (If you don't have web access but have a computer that can use a CD running Word – send a CDRW disc (plus return stamped addressed envelope) and I'll put the files on it and get it back to you.) Any gaps you can fill in the records is most appreciated. **Jim Henry Keith Green**, 38 Hartley Brook Road, Shiregreen, Sheffield, S5 0JB Tel: 0114 2402753 email [keith.green97@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:keith.green97@tiscali.co.uk) is able to assist with New Cross information and is seeking details of Tom Farndon's career at Coventry in 1929 and 1930.

**Paul Hornsby**, 1A Otago Road, Whittlesey, Peterborough, PE7 1YJ Tel: 01733 202131 Email: [paul@hornsbyP.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:paul@hornsbyP.freeserve.co.uk) is seeking assistance with details of Peterborough in the various Junior Leagues over the years – Anglia Junior League, Central Junior League, and the Youth Development League. Conference League information Paul seeks is in part in Malcolm Vasey's recent book and more will emerge when Part 2 is published.

**Jim Henry**, Joint Editor, wonders if anyone knows the real name of Red Hamley who rode for Wombwell in 1947 and Rusty Wainwright who raced over in the UK a few years later is another first name mystery to be solved.

**Jim Henry** also asks if anyone has any information about a book on Trevor Redmond. It may have been a very limited run and may have been published outside the UK. Former Glasgow Tiger Bluey Scott has heard of such a publication and is keen to locate a copy.

**Tom Wareham**, 76 Crookston Road, Eltham, London, SE9 1YB Tel: 0208 850 4326 Email [tom.wareham@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:tom.wareham@tiscali.co.uk) is trying to find details of the Wembley Speedway photographic collection. According to Tom many of the Wembley photographs in the 1950s were taken by Ernest Alder but he has

found no trace of Alder's collection.

Tom also asks if anyone can help him find the original of footage shown in a Rerun video called Saints Reunited featuring British Match Race Championship races between Brian Crutcher and Ove Fundin.

**Lightning v Thunder.** A query arose recently about this fixture which took place at Linlithgow (now sadly covered by an abbatoir named after the stadium) a few years ago. The meeting was a late change of plan when it became clear that the expected and programmed Stoke side failed to appear for the scheduled match. Rather than send fans home, the riders there were allocated to two teams called Lightning and Thunder by Alan Robertson and Jim Henry and a match ensued. Lots of programme changes but a good meeting nonetheless.

**Bryan Wilcock** Email [bw1966@talktalk.net](mailto:bw1966@talktalk.net) is seeking to find out if there were programmes published for the following Conference League meetings: Newport v Sheffield 13.10.2002; v Wimbledon & Peterborough 20.10.2002. Sheffield v Reading 23.6.1996; St Austell v Conference All Stars 30.6.1998 and Weymouth GB v Young Australia 9.10.2004.

### Feedback

**Nigel Bird** has done wee dig in to the history of Ed Brink, one of the pioneers from the States. Nigel suggests you have a look at the Brink story on <http://home.ama-cycle.org/forms/museum/biopage1.asp?id=33> .

Nigel also advises that Buck Whitby earned his nickname from being a Broncho Buster in Australia before he came to the UK.

Another from Nigel is the story that Les Marshall, the man who took over Tamworth Hounds and renamed them the Tammies, ripping off the letter B from old Brummies race jackets and recycling them for his new team by stitching on the letter T.

**Nigel** tells that the Oransay – famous for bring so many of the Aussies over to the UK sank off the coast of Liberia in 1942 when in use as a troop carrier. Must thank, albeit belatedly, **Bob Ballard**, for sending a Christmas card and extracts from a book called Wonderful Wembley which was written by Professor A.M.Low and was published in 1953 by Stanley Paul. Bob notes that Professor Low was Vice President of the Federation Internationale Motorcyclists; Vice President and Chairman of the Auto Cycle Union, Vice President and Chairman of the British Automobile Racing Club and Vice President of the British Motor Cycle Racing Club.(JH)

**Colin Chubb** who came across a reference to Hampton Court Speedway has been in touch with a local historian who drew a blank on this. Still think this may be worth further work as so called local historians often miss the obscure

(to them) items like speedway connections. [Not attempting to be critical of a book on the Blantyre area which covers a multitude of local facts and features including the great post war speed men including Tommy Miller, Ken McKinlay and the, members of the Beaton family of riders, Bobby, Jim and the late George and young Gary. However, it doesn't mention the Blantyre Crowd of 1928 who featured as a team at White City, Glasgow (and possibly at Paragon Speedway in Motherwell) in 1930.]

### **Initial Success**

**Gordon Fraser**, Master of The Muse (ever read his items in the Edinburgh and Dale Devils programmes?) 27 Crockett Gardens, Penicuik, Midlothian, EH26 9BB has come up with a few more initials for the daft Christmas edition challenge of a year ago. For example Gordon suggests we should have added AJS as Dicky Case had these on his race jacket in 1933. Gordon also offers CP, PB, CB, NE, NP, JP and FA which represented Cliff Parkinson, Phil Bishop, Charlie Blacklock, Norman Evans, Norman Parker, Jack Parker and Frank Arthur who all lined up for Harringay in 1934.

Gordon asks if Harringay were the only team to adopt this?

(Aside – Joe Owen used the letter V in place of his number five race jacket a few moons ago. Now some may say it was a gesture rather than a number as in his day many a rider would have seen little more of the unfortunate wee man when at his brilliant best. Those of you who have been at Ian Paterson's Museum will have seen Ian's version on a similar theme.(JH))

(A Jim Henry tangential thought – Why all this concern about GM foods and plants? Speedway has had GM engines for years and they seem to work fine. SORRY!!!!(JH))

### **Not All Were Aussies**

**Don Gray**, from Cambridgeshire gives us another insight into pre-war riders. With the introduction of dirt track racing into Britain in 1928 Australian riders, and a couple of New Zealanders, were soon on the scene to show the "Pommies" how it was done. Riders from other Commonwealth (or as it was then The Empire) soon followed them, a trickle at first but in increasing numbers up to the outbreak of World War II in 1939. The purpose of this article is to give these others a mention.

#### New Zealand

Stewie St.George and Spencer (Smokey) Stratton toured the British tracks in 1928 and 1929 in a freelance capacity. Stratton appeared in a woefully weak

Nottingham Leage team in 1930 and later at Sheffield. He became interested in promoting when he gave up riding but was involved in a fatal road traffic accident near Workington in 1938 when he was the manager at Newcastle. St. George appeared at Manchester White City and Cardiff in 1930 but faded from the scene after a meeting at Leicester Super in 1931.

Wally Kilmister and Reg Ranby signed for Wembley in 1930. Ranby failed to make the grade in the UK and had a few outings in Spain under the Hoskins banner. Wally improved rapidly and for most of the pre-war years was a world class rider with the Lions.

Charlie Blacklock, Alf Matson and John Garmson were newcomers in 1931 but sadly John was killed in a track accident at Nottingham soon after his arrival. Charlie stayed for a few years riding in turn for Stamford Bridge, Nottingham, Harringay and Birmingham. Charlie was killed in a track accident in his homeland in 1935. Alf began at Lea Bridge and moved to Leicester Stadium and Coventry for the 1932 and 1933 seasons. He was joined at Coventry by Mick Sillich, another Kiwi who failed to progress from second half racing.

In 1935 Jack Hobson came to England and signed for Wembley but quickly transferred to the new Hackney Wick team. He saw service with Plymouth and Harringay in his three year stay in this country.

Two further Kiwis arrived in 1936, Charlie Goldberg at Harringay and Reg Hyde at West Ham. Just one season over here sufficed for both of them.

We had to wait until the late 1940s before the next batch of New Zealanders arrived to blaze a highly successful trail of international class riders and world champions.

### South Africa

The speedway bug caught on in South Africa almost at the same time as in Britain, the first riders of note being Joe Sarkiss. He never made the trip to England but one of his compatriots, Les Barker, did appear at Exeter in 1929. He was followed in 1930 by Keith Harvey who appeared at High Beech, Stan Collins who appeared at Warrington and Alan Reeve and Will Nichols who both featured at Crystal Palace.

Reeve and Collins spent only one season here but Keith Harvey proved to be a popular, middle of the road team man throughout the 1930s with various teams including Stamford Bridge, West Ham, Nottingham, Walthamstow, Cardiff, Buirmingham and Crystal Palace. Will Nichols was killed in a road traffic accident while on his way to fulfill a booking at Exeter in 1930.

In 1936 Wembley signed a South African bearing the colourful name of Cecil D'arcy de la Porte. He failed to pull up any trees but found a place in the Birmingham team the following year. In 1939 a South African named Godfrey

Rabie tried his luck at West Ham but failed to make the grade because of frequent minor injuries.

### Canada

Following the tour of the USA and Canada in the mid thirties, Johnnie Hoskins was largely instrumental in bringing over Eric “Ricky” Chitty, a talented Canadian to join his West Ham team. Within one season Chitty had progressed to be amongst the elite band of world class riders and he remained loyal to West Ham throughout his pre-war and post war career. Other Canadian riders, George Pepper, Johnnie Miller, Harold Bain and Charlie Appleby decided to emulate Chitty and try their luck in Britain in 1937. Miller and Bain both started at Bristol but each transferred to Birmingham where they joined compatriot Appleby for just one season. Charlie was with Hackney Wick in 1938 and 1939 and he rejoined Birmingham after the war. Poor Charlie was killed in a track accident at Newcastle in October 1946.

Hoping to find another Chitty, Johnnie Hoskins brought over a bunch of unknown Canadians to join George Pepper including Elwood Stillwell, Bruce Venier, Bob Spark and Eddie Barker. In addition to being a speedway rider, Eddie was an all-in wrestler who fought under the pseudonym “Flash Gordon” when not riding his bikes. Elwood, Bruce, Bob and George Pepper were all attached to Newcastle, another Hoskins promotion and became regular performers in the north of England and Scotland in the company of another Cannuk, Clune Johnstone. (Clune’s claim to fame was his run up the fence at Marine Gardens which reportedly ended up with the track manager nursing a big bruise in his corpulent front, caused by the pits gates closing and nipping him. Bruce came back after the war in 1947 and, after two meetings and eight pointless outings at Glasgow White City, he called it a day.)

Meanwhile not to be outdone, New Cross promoter Fred Mockford, signed Godwin “Goldy” Restall who became a valued member of the team throughout 1938 and 1939.

The fateful 1939 season witnessed a further influx of Canadian riders, one of whom quickly acquired world class status. Jimmy Gibb, who was well known on the American east coast tracks, joined his compatriot, Eric Chitty, at West Ham. He was accompanied by “Sandy” Sturgess, Fred Belliveau, who went north to Middlesbrough and Glasgow, and Emerson “Crocky” Rawding who spent his time with Wimbledon and New Cross.

It is possible I may have overlooked one or two others, Bob Bauskill comes to mind and he raced at Glasgow in 1939.

**But Some Were!**

**Don Gray** has penned an item headed “**Australian Riders in Pre-War Britain.**” It runs nicely with the article above.

Grass track racing in Australia became popular in the early twenties and, due to the climate, the grass rapidly disappeared on the racing surfaces which swiftly became dirt tracks. The circuits varied in length for a quarter to one mile per lap.

In 1921 grass track racing was held at the Victoria Park race track in Sydney and became popular at many venues in New South Wales and Queensland. In 1923 Johnnie Hoskins organised a meeting under electric light at the West Maitland agricultural show. This event is generally regarded and accepted as the birth of speedway racing as we know it today, and, it was quickly followed by the construction of conventional tracks in places such as Newcastle, Cessnock, Dungog, Toowoomba, Maitland, Melbourne, Adelaide and, in West Australia, at Perth.

From the outset skilful riders such as Billy Connaulty, Les Reynolds, Tommy O’Dea, Gus Clifton, Jim Sladden and the American Cecil Brown thrilled the spectators. In Brisbane the Davies Park Stadium was constructed in 1925 as a successor to the near-by Exhibition Grounds circuit. It was here that the big names, later to become well known in Britain, such as Frank Arthur, Vic Huxley, Charlie Spinks, Dick Smythe, Max Grosskreutz and Hilary Buchanan honed their broadsiding skills.

In 1926 the one third of a mile track at the Speedway Royale first anchored the sport in Sydney where Tommy Benstead, Lionel Van Praag, Dick Sulway, Bobby Blake and Billy Lamont operated. Up country at Newcastle, a half mile track, the big names were the Datson brothers, Charlie and Jim, Arthur Wadell, Ern Buck, Stewie St. George, Paddy Dean, Ted Rees, Tommy Sharpe, Irvine Jones and Pat Hamilton, while at Perth, in West Australia, Ron Johnson, Sig Schlam, Reg West, Ray Taylor, Wally Little, and, a certain “Cyclone” Mookey, thrilled the spectators.

When Jack Hill Bailey organised the first dirt track meeting at High Beech in February 1928, three experienced Australian riders, Keith McKay, Geoff Meredith and Billy Galloway were already here in Britain to demonstrate their art, Galloway in fact actually participated in the historic meeting. They constituted the advance party with numerous Aussies arriving in the weeks following.

In the twelve seasons up to the outbreak of World War 2 about three dozen Aussies became household names and important members of British league teams, although of these three dozen only a few were international class. Accordingly, due to the limited number of top quality riders the Australian selectors found it difficult to field complete teams capable of winning a Test

series against England, a situation which brought about the demise of such contests in 1937.

It therefore is surprising that a check disclosed that at least one hundred and twenty Australains appeared on our tracks at one time or another in the pre-war era, most of them staying for just one or two seasons and generally attached to teams operating in a lower division league, or, indeed, failing to make the grade at all in the UK. It is pointed out, however, that there was an influx of newcomers at the start of the 1939 season and it is a matter of conjecture how many of them would have become well known favourites on our tracks had Hitler behaved himself.

To list the names and details of all the ten dozen riders is beyond the scope of one article but I set out below the names, year and track of just a few of the men who spent just one season over here and whose names are rarely, if ever, mentioned in any of the history books.

Bruce Caswell 1932 Southampton & Coventry; Dave Kemp 1930 Southampton & Stamford Bridge; Ken Kirkman 1934 Wembley; Keith Litchfield 1929 Freelance; Harry Mangham 1930 Lea Bridge; Frank Randall 1931 West Ham; Alan Rout 1930 Nottingham; Moff Jones 1938 West Ham; Fred Tracey 1934 Lea Bridge; Cecil Walker 1930 Coventry. (Jones and Litchfield do get a mention in the pre-war histories of the Scottish tracks and Jones was programmed as Mutt. JH)

## The Name's The Same

**Eric Watson**, our artist in residence who has produced the superb club badges that feature on the web site and the rider sketches that adorn each of the team pages on the web, has sent in details of riders with the same name.

Buster Brown No.1 rode for Nottingham in 1930 and 1931 whilst Buster Brown No.2, featured in an earlier edition, was the Wembley junior who went on to race for Oxford in 1950 and Swindon 1951 – 52.

Fred Williams (the English one) rode for Salford in 1929 and Preston in 1930. Fred (or Freddie, the Welsh one) rode for Wembley his whole career from 1947 to 1956 and in the process won the World Championship in 1950 and 1953. (As an aside **Eric** sent an extract from his very impressive list of riders who raced 1928 – 1939 and is seeking the christian name for an A Wainwright who featured at Southampton in 1928, ? Waln (Minnie? [but assume that Minnie was a nickname]) L.W. Walton who was at Manchester White City in 1929 and A.J.Ward who was at Salford in 1929.

(As another aside A.J.Ward appeared in the first meeting at Middlesbrough in 1929 in the Salford team along with Cliff Watson, F.Williams, T.Mason, Stan

Wynne and Sam Higgins. The proto Bears (in White) were Charlie Barratt, Jack Ormston, Frank Harrison, Alec Hill, Charlie (Tiger) Sanderson and Norman Evans.)

## **The Names is Different but It Is The Same Organisation**

Up until the start of October old riders who didn't fade away joined the Veteran Speedway Riders' Association (VSRA) which had emerged from the Veteran Dirt Track Riders' Association. The VSRA has, for years, had difficulty in recruiting lads who have hung up their leathers and kevlars because in the UK context they did not consider they were old enough to be considered as veterans.

The idea of a name change has been on the go for a while and at last the VSRA is no more. It is now The World Speedway Riders' Association. Same body but a new name which will hopefully encourage the "younger" lads, (and a few of the lassies too) to join.

The newly named association is starting work on the new speedway museum and it will be interesting to see how this progresses. The web site will be accessed from the museum as an archive for visitors.

## **An Early French Invasion?**

**Alan Bates**, sent in an item some time ago which recorded the visit to the Folkestone Heights Speedway (grass track) on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1947. Sides from the Heights Speedway and Moto Club du Nord de la France staged an international over six heats which was won by the home side 26 – 10.

R.Barbara was top visitor with 6 points while J.Shenston was top Brit with 5. The report suggests the French side brought a number of very poor machines and some needed spare parts fitted before they could race.

## **Publications**

**Booey – Round in Circles – The Eric Boocock Story by Eric Boocock with Neil Martin. Retro Publications. £15.99 plus P&P.**

I've been lucky to see Eric from his early days as a Bear and a Duke and to have met him when he was a team manager at Powderhall and as a visitor to Armadale in the same capacity. I enjoyed watch Eric in action as a superb rider who gave it 100% plus and I have a lot of time for him as the man. An anecdote not recorded in the book – probably one Eric has forgotten – happened at the lamented County Ground when Hull was racing the Falcons.

Interspersed between the main match the Exeter Conference League team was racing Linlithgow and I was in the pits helping (probably hindering) Brian Turner. Brian was having a torrid time with bike problems. As Brian returned to the pits, Eric, who was standing at the pits gate, turned and followed Brian into the pits. Quick as flash Eric told Brian he thought the trouble was broken rocker. Eric was spot on. It struck me that Eric didn't need to bother about Brian, but he did. To me that sums up the man and the book, which I can commend to you, confirms this.

It is interesting to read the story from the rider's side of the fence and the other parts of the scene as team manager and promoter.

However, a couple of clangers Eric.

Barry Briggs – Wayne's dad? – a wind up? Wayne and Barry are brothers.

The Edinburgh – Belle Vue match of 1963 did not feature the steel plate starting gate method. It was an Ian Hoskins idea from his Tigers' days (reported previously in the Speedway Researcher) he tried to bring back in the 1960s without anyone taking him up on it. Another thing – it is questionable whether George Hunter's bike could not have spun on the clutch as the engine seized solid.

Review by **Jim Henry**

**Midget Car Speedway following the Fortunes of Stoke Potters by Derek Bridgett. Tempus Publishing £12.99 Tel: 01453 883300** We don't have much coverage of 4 wheels but books on midgets are rare and, unlike stock cars, seem/ed capable in track terms of sharing venues This book by the brother of the late Bill and uncle of Alan, tells of the four wheel action before the war and the men, some ex speedway (including Frank Chiswell and Spike Rhiando) and grass track men, who raced and built these rivals to the two wheeled track rivals. The book has good reviews in the motoring press.

**“Plymouth Speedway” by Paul Eustace (Published by Tempus) £12.99**

When speedway stopped at the Pennycross Stadium in 1970, the County Ground in Exeter became the only track in Devon. Now the situation has been reversed because the County Ground closed in 2005. While the Exeter Falcons are in recess, arranging for speedway to be held at Haldon Hill, Plymouth City Council have given permission for a site at Marsh Mills to be used initially for three years for a new team to race in the Conference League. Towards the end of their first season, Paul Eustace (who wrote a similar book on Southampton Speedway which was reviewed in Speedway Researcher Vol. 5 No. 1 - June 2002) has compiled a photographic history of Plymouth Speedway, which is another book in the “Images of Sport” series.

To complement the pictures, a written history covers 13 pages at the start of the book. The pictures are arranged in five chapters covering the years 1931-37 (including the time when Plymouth competed in the top division); 1947-50;

1951-54; 1959-62, and 1968-70. Tragedy at Plymouth is remembered with a picture of Noel Johnson who lost his life at Pennycross in 1931, and a press cutting reporting the death of Ted Stevens in 1953. There are various action pictures, team photos, programme covers and rider portraits throughout the book which should interest anyone who wishes to broaden their knowledge of speedway in Devon. And how many speedway books have a reference to Dick Barton Special Agent?

At the back of the book is a list of league match results and season summaries of riders' total scores. My only criticism would be that cup matches and other official competition results are not included, but bearing in mind that the book is intended to be picture based, the lack of complete statistics should not spoil the reader's enjoyment.

The book is highly recommended, especially to anyone who has bought any of the previous books in the "Images of Sport" series. It can also be read in conjunction with the brief history included in "Speedway In The South West".

**Review by Colin Pike**

### **Nigel's Nostalgia**

We don't mind acknowledging that **Nigel Bird** is probably amongst our most active contributors by publishing some of his items under a separate heading. We've always said we want to edit – so good on you Nigel.

#### **Trophy (1929)**

The Manchester Sunday Chronicle D.T. Silver Trophy; this was in the form of a model speedway bike mounted on a wooden plinth, it appears to be of solid silver, very detailed high quality casting immediately recognisable as being based on a BSA 'red star' DT bike. Where is it now? Does the newspaper company have it locked away for safe keeping? as does the Daily Mail with the National Trophy.

Many of these quality items must survive? It is doubtful if any were melted down, as the value of the silver would be less than the value of the trophy. [JH – A video showed John Chaplin at the newspaper offices with the old National Trophy so it seems that was kept. The bit about the Manchester Trophy is of interest as the 1929 Scottish Championship, won by Drew McQueen appeared to be a model speedway bike on a plinth from the photo of the presentation party at the end of the meeting. What happened to that trophy? Was it used again and is one and the same as the one mentioned by Nigel above. Finally three solid brass trophies were presented at a Wartime meeting at Belle Vue featuring a leg trailing rider on a bike. This trophy was not so detailed as the one won by Drew McQueen. One turned up later at

Wimbledon (I think) to be won outright by Bob Andrews. One was won by Frank Varey and another was won in a raffle by a fan named as Mr Alexander. NOW one of these two unaccounted trophies, or one very very like it, was held by the Scottish ACU when they were based at Bathgate but it is not known if it is still in their hands now they have moved to Broxburn.]

### **Collectors Corner.**

Seemingly neglected and forgotten “The Modern Boy” comic contained articles on speedway. In 1929 it ran a series of rider profiles, Gus Kuhn, Colin Ford, Sprouts Elder, Roger Frogley, Art Pechar, Billy Lamont, Vic Huxley and more, speedway articles were also featured in 1930 editions, other years may well have speedway features. Something collectors should check out?

### **Bill Allen, Mystery**

Coventry team rider Wilfred ‘Bill ‘Allen of Kidderminster, the man involved in the accident that resulted in Noel Johnson’s death at Plymouth Aug 1931, was it seems not an inexperienced novice, for he had ridden in New Zealand and Australia. According to the coroner’s report, Bill stated he had experience of riding speedway in the antipodes. Globe trotting Bill must have immigrated to Auckland New Zealand? where he raced on the grass, crossed the sea to Australia during 1928 and raced on the speedways. He took part in the first ever dirt track meeting in NZ, at Kilbernie, March 9th 1929

He was later involved with the then fledgling sport of midget car racing which lead him to race in the USA. He was racing midget cars in 1936 one of his opponents was former speedway rider Laurie Packer. {Nigel thanks Graeme Frost and Ross Garrigan and wonders if anyone has any information on the movements of Bill Allen.}

### **Colour supplements**

The magazine ‘Motorcycling’ 1928 issued 4 coloured Dirt Track supplements, has any one got or ever seen them?

### **Monmore Speedways (1929) Ltd. (Wolverhampton)**

It appears that the only shareholder and director was Arthur Westwood. On the day the company was registered Westwood either had a change of heart or could not use the name Midland Speedways because Dirt Track Speedways Ltd owned that title, and the name was altered to Monmore Speedways Ltd. Set up in July of 1929 with just £500 in shares, the under capitalised company (Westwood on a wing and a prayer?) quickly went bankrupt and by the 25<sup>th</sup> of Sept winding up procedures began with the company being wound up on 8th October 1929. It was finally dissolved in Feb.1932; a notice was placed in the London Gazette to that effect. (Ref. *Documents of H.M. Government, ‘Company registrations’*)

### **Dick Ince**

American Dick Ince who came to Britain in 1936 was a millionaire before he rode speedway. At home in the States he would turn up at meetings with 6 brand new bikes on a trailer, towed by a 12 cylinder luxury saloon.

### **The shortest and saddest career in speedway**

Riding for the very first time at the Tiger Stevenson training school at Perry Barr Birmingham (Sat 16<sup>th</sup> Nov 1946) Hugh Watkinson of Ilford Essex, on only his second lap did not make the turn and rode straight into the safety fence at speed and was killed, Stevenson who was on the track guiding riders, had to leap out of the way. It was only the second day of the newly opened training school.

### **Skidding on the beach**

Was there broadsiding in the UK before speedway? It is assumed that the technique was introduced into this country by dirt track racing, but what of beach racing? Sliding a bike in sand is relatively easy, There is a photo in "The Motor Cycle" 1927 taken at the Scottish sand racing championships, TT rider Jimmy Guthrie can be seen, travelling in an anticlockwise direction in a full broadside, leg trailing. Was anyone in sand racing broadsiding the bends in earlier years?

[ Minor correction Nigel. Suggest the photo was probably of the Scottish Speed Championships at St Andrews which appeared in the press every year. These events were staged up until the 1950s before the event moved over to a tarmac surface – I think from memory it was at Charterhall in the Scottish Borders. Sand track racing did take place on a lot of Scottish beaches but often it was a straight run. Jimmy Valente and Larry Lazarus were recorded as racing on the sands at Troon, Prestwick etc before WWII. John Jarvis' list of some venue are included in Homes of British Speedway. ]

## **Web Whispers**

Needless to say those of you with access to the web are happy to see the way that it grows. Those you don't have access must wonder what gives. Anyway, **Ron**, is prepared to help those of you with a computer and can look at CDs. If you are a subscriber and want to see what is on the web you can send a CDRW and a stamped self addressed envelope to **Ron McNeil** at 81 Stafford Grove, Shenley Church End, Milton Keynes. Ron will 'burn' the site to your disc. You can get a quarterly update provided you supply the disc and self addressed and appropriately stamped envelope.

Ron and I have discussed extending this service to non-subscribers for a nominal fee (which would be used to off-set web site running costs). However, we will not start any such service to non subscribers if those of you who have

submitted information have any objections to us doing this.

If you haven't looked at the web for a while you'll see it has grown with the start of **Roger Beaman** and **Nigel Nicklin's** Cradley material, the complete record of Marine Gardens, Edinburgh meetings from **Jim Henry**, **Ian Moultray** and series editor **Mike Hunter** and Poole material from **Richard Hine**. Division Three 1947 is well represented thanks to **Hugh Vass** and many more who are listed on the web contributors section. Work is starting on 1948's Division Three. The list of contributors continues to grow and we thank everyone for their input.

We also must thank **Mark Aspinell** for his very thorough checking and correcting of track year files. The process now involves Mark checking material and the first update will follow his going over of the file.

Finally we must also thank **Tony Southwart** for the bits of information which have all but completed the record of Halifax home meetings compiled through the good offices of **Barry Stephenson**. If you have the missing details for Halifax 4<sup>th</sup> October 1950 v Fleetwood – we'll have completed a "home track record".

Can't forget **Colin Pike's** cumulative index which features on the web – a labour of love that's for sure.

Finally for now, can't finish without congratulating **The Pre-War Crew** on their progress and the quality of the material as it appears on the web. The heat details and the wee snippets about the match are really worth a look.

## Film Clips

**Alex Broadhurst** has been using his computer to look at speedway footage on the Pathe Newsreel web site. He has looked at items including a 1933 Test at Wembley in 1933, a meeting at Belle Vue in 1942, Rye House footage from 1949 and 1969 World Final. In addition Alex has been looking at the Movietone site which also has a fair amount of speedway footage. We understand that you'll need to have a pile of dosh if you want to purchase copies of this footage.

## Les Blakebrough - Setting the record straight

**Brian Collins**, AKA Mr International Speedway has sent us the following: This well-known London-based rider was active in the early days of the sport, from 1928 to 1933, notably for Crystal Palace and Stamford Bridge. It has previously been stated in print that he adopted his mother's maiden name of

Blakebrough, rather than using his own name of Bottomley, when riding, and also that he died of diptheria in 1933.

I was recently contacted by Les' daughter, Jennifer, asking for any information on his speedway career. When I related the above "facts" to her, she was somewhat surprised, since she wasn't born until 1941!

Les Blakebrough (NOT Blakeborough) WAS his true name. The family does not recognise the name Bottomley at all. Les retired from speedway because he shattered his right knee in a crash. Because of this, he was turned down for active war service, but worked on radar development as a civilian during the war years, then later in the aircraft industry. He retired in 1973 to Crackington Haven in Cornwall, where he died on Jan 26, 1978. He is buried in St Gennys churchyard.

His oldest son, Gordon, adopted his father's christian name when he emigrated to Australia, and became a world-renowned ceramic artist (see [www.lesblakebrough.com.au](http://www.lesblakebrough.com.au))

Brian also sent copies of a couple of photos of Les – one is the famous photo of the heavily masked man from the very pioneer days of 1928 – with which some may be familiar. The other shows Les sliding round on what appears to be a bit of waste ground using a machine fitted with a very unusual looking rear wheel which has a series of tennis ball sized balls in place of the tyre. [Does this ring any bells? It rings a bell with me – something to do with indoor speedway. (Now featured on the web site.) (JH)]

## **The Jack Crawford Mystery**

Those of you who have a copy of the Glasgow 60th Anniversary meeting programme will see a list of Tigers compiled by Robin Goodall. Included in Robin's list was one, Jack Crawford, and like me, Robin had his concerns about the authenticity of Jack's claim for inclusion. Jack was supposed to have turned out for Tigers once in 1946 but a programme which turned up recently shows Joe Arlett at number eight (second reserve in those days) and Jack in the Novices Race. Mystery solved – well – almost. Another programme from the same meeting is needed to resolve this one. **Jim Henry**

### **Second Halfs**

Back in the dim and distant past the speedway meeting was often an event of two halves. We now have fifteen heat match fixtures but one time we had fourteen or thirteen heat matches with five plus second half events. The first half was usually the League or Cup business when the lads rode for their team. The second half was, by and large, every one for themselves with a

Trophy for the winner to parade round the track.

The names of the events in the old programmes were weird and wonderful – some celebrating local names and others on a more countrywide basis. Some saw trophies presented by one of the then many Branches of the team's Supporters' Club and some were awarded by fans who were a bit flush and could buy a pot. In some cases the trophy would look remarkably similar to the one that was won the week before and you may have a bout of déjà vu as you would probably see it again the following week with another name.

The format was, mostly, heats and a final but sometimes they would indulge in heats, semis and a final. Four heat and a final events, from a historian's perspective, are the best. The winner of each heat made it to the final. Three heats and a final are a pain as they invariably saw the winners and the fastest second of the three in the contest. The trouble is not many marked down the times for the second men as you will see from the needs sheets on the web. It is also quite surprising the number of tracks in the top flight that utilised three lap events – saying that, some of the times for four laps were a lot longer than many tracks would ever see now.

The second halves did serve a purpose in that they gave the promotion the chance to give promising youngsters a spin in front of the paying public. The winner of the Novice Race was often promoted to a Discovery Race which gave the novice a chance to gauge his progress against the guys chasing the reserve berth. From the Discovery Race the next step was the Reserves Race, again good experience where you faced the men in the tail end of the team. Some tracks used the four heat and a final event to give reserves an outing together with a Final place beside the big boys as a reward for winning it. The second halves were a chance to breed talent and local fans delighted in watching their lads progress from a raw novice to heat leader. Equally, some didn't make it but their often gutsy performances kept the crowd on their toes before, what was, in theory, the highlight of the night – The Second Half Final. Did the UK produce more home grown riders when we had the old second halves? There is a task for some of the stats fans to give us an answer to.

Not a moan but this is the race with most times missing in old programmes. Lots of people were on their way to the car park, bus or train, or, dare I say it, bar, and by the time the announcer had given out the vital information, the programme was packed away for transit home.

Whilst a lot of stats fans are interested in the match data – second half information is also of interest as it “tracks” the rise of the future stars and captures someone's moment of glory when they hit the zenith of their career. Many riders had outings all over before becoming regulars at one venue.

Am I calling for a return to the old second halves – no – just giving a wee bit of

information about what I remember of them and the interest they have to me as a historian.

**Jim Henry**

## **Bump Burnhills**

A short visit to the Newcastle area provided the opportunity to have another look at data for the Burnhills circuit listed on the Newcastle History Web site. An item from the local paper in March 1930 advises that despite the competition from the speedways in 1929, the Newcastle based motorcycle club will run their Sunday race events again in that year. The local paper does not carry any meeting details but two other items advise that the local church groups have protested about the events being staged on a Sunday and want the events halted. Another later item advises about the local Police having a clamp down on those attending the event who race from the city to and from the events. Seems 32 poor souls were arrested and all were fined ten shillings (£0.50p) for having defective brakes on their cars and motor bikes. This, together with previous items on the club raising money to build extra bends suggest that it was a scrambles type track, which, in these days were often called dirt tracks, and maps of the area showing it sloped quite steeply, add up to not being a speedway type dirt track. A look through local papers in Durham to mid 1930 didn't turn anything about Houghton Le Spring. **Jim H**

**Deadline for items for next edition is : 31st January 2007**

**Web Master Ron McNeil**

**Contact at [info@speedwayresearcher.org.uk](mailto:info@speedwayresearcher.org.uk)**

**The Speedway Researcher is edited and published by :**

**Graham Fraser  
7b Bruce Street,  
Stirling, FK8 1PD  
Tel : 01786 471992**

**Jim Henry  
90 Greenend Gardens,  
Edinburgh, EH17 7QH  
Tel : 0131 664 7185 24**

### National League Division One 1948

	R	W	Home		For	Against	W	Away		For	Against	Pts
			D	L				D	L			
New Cross	24	11	0	1	656	349	6	0	6	478.5	525.5	34
Haringay	24	10	0	2	583	418	6	0	6	477	527	32
West Ham	24	11	0	1	625	381	3	1	8	425	576	29
Wembley	24	6	0	6	549.5	453.5	6	1	5	491	513	25
Belle Vue	24	10	1	1	570	437	2	0	10	398	600	25
Wimbledon	24	5	1	6	508	492	0	1	11	373	631	12
Bradford	24	5	1	6	522	474	0	0	12	362	641	11

### National League Division Two 1948

	R	W	Home		For	Against	W	Away		For	Against	Pts
			D	L				D	L			
Bristol	32	16	0	0	923	419	7	0	9	612	726	46
Birmingham	32	13	1	2	884	458	7	0	9	605	737	41
Middlesbrough	32	13	1	2	855	485	5	1	10	590	752	38
Sheffield	32	14	0	2	809	530	3	1	12	546	794	35
Norwich	32	13	0	3	811	529	4	0	12	560	782	34
Glasgow	32	10	2	4	763	577	4	1	11	526	813	31
Newcastle	32	10	0	6	725	616	1	0	15	489	852	22
Fleetwood	32	8	0	8	699	642	2	1	13	555	783	21
Edinburgh	32	9	0	7	678	661	1	0	15	434	908	20

### National League Division Three 1948

	R	W	Home		For	Against	W	Away		For	Against	Pts
			D	L				D	L			
Exeter	44	21	0	1	1275	569	11	1	10	877	954	65
Cradley Heath	44	20	1	1	1181.5	663.5	9	1	12	798	1039	60
Southampton	44	20	0	1	1227.5	610.5	8	0	14	886	958	58
Tamworth	44	19	1	2	1152.5	688.5	4	3	15	802	1037	50
Hanley	44	19	0	3	1138	703	5	1	16	787	1050	49
Hastings	44	18	0	4	1074	763	4	0	18	681	1161	44
Plymouth	44	18	1	3	1109	721	3	0	19	748.5	1089.5	43
Coventry	44	16	1	5	1004	830	3	0	19	666.5	1168.5	39
Hull	44	19	0	3	1104	724	0	0	22	653	1185	38
Poole	44	16	0	6	1069.5	768.5	1	0	21	692	1148	34
Yarmouth	44	13	1	8	984.5	844.5	0	0	22	622	1214	27
Wombwell	44	10	1	11	933	907	0	0	22	579.5	1248.5	21