

# The Speedway Researcher

**Promoting Research into the History of Speedway and Dirt Track Racing**

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**Welcome to Volume 16**

## **Dirt Track in Dunfermline**

The People's Journal, Glasgow edition carried a couple of stories about a proposed dirt-track at Dunfermline at the home of Dunfermline Athletic which is known as East End Park. A trip to the Carnegie Library in Dunfermline shed a bit more light about the proposals.

In the event it turned out that the promoters were not proposing a dirt track venue, rather, they wanted to run grass track racing round the football pitch. The promoters, headed by the then Airdrie goalkeeper, Bill Paterson, visited the stadium in early April and expressed satisfaction that the turf was firm enough to stage events.

A deal must have been struck with the football club as the first meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> May under the auspices of the Dunfermline and District Motor Cycling Club. Admission was set at 6d (2.5p) for adults, 3d (1.25p) for children and the stand cost 6d extra.

The weather played its part and the meeting was postponed for a week to 20<sup>th</sup> May when 1,500 folk turned up to watch 30 riders. Dirt track riders were on show with the best known being George "Scotty"

Cummings who rode at many pioneer venues but is probably best known as the man who helped build the Sheffield track at Owlerton.

The special race for dirt track riders finished A.Barclay (Glasgow), won in a time of 90 seconds for four laps from A.Dick (Rosyth), Cummings and A.Ritchie (fell).

Hard on the heels of the report was another intimating that the football club had tied up a deal with a William Beattie of Airdrie to stage greyhound racing at East End Park and this started in early June. The lack of further adverts and reports for grass track racing at East End Park (up to the end of July) suggests that the greyhound venture took up the track space used by the bikes.

The Dunfermline Press also reported grass track action at nearby Inverkeithing at venue named as the Games Park. The meetings were staged by the Hedgehog Motorcycling Club and some feature George McKenzie, Scotty Cummings and messers. Barclay, Dick and Ritchie. Davie Lamb, a who second halfed at the Scottish tracks before and after the war and was a member of track staff at Old Meadowbank and Powderhall, appeared in the Inverkeithing meetings. They also featured Stanley Gargan who raced at Marine Gardens and a well know Edinburgh garage owner, Eugene Lampard.

George McKenzie advised that the club name came about after a founder member, one of two Pattison brothers who had raced at Marine Gardens in the pioneer days, had crashed off his road bike and ended up in a roadside hedge.

**Jim Henry**

### **Round The World With A Barber's Pole**

The People's Journal also did an article about Billy Galloway on 11.5.1929. Like the previous article it is a flight of fancy but interesting nonetheless.

A young Scot, Williams, Henry Galloway, may very well write "Round the World with a Barber's Pole". Though but 22 years of age there are very few corners of the world this adventurous young Scot has not visited and I saw him at a friend's house at 131 Preston Road, he was preparing to visit his native city of Glasgow.

"My father, James Galloway, was a Glasgow man and my mother came from Edinburgh. I was born in an old house in the Cathcart district of Glasgow, and was but a boy when my parents took me to Australia. My people settled down in the town of Newcastle, near Sydney.

"When I left school my parents apprenticed me to the trade of a ladies hairdresser. I learned the business right enough but I suppose I must have inherited the wanderlust from my father for at the age of 18 I made tracks for New Zealand. Six months at Canterbury saw me accepting a contract to go to of all places in the world, one of the South Sea Islands. At Vanua Leva in the Fijis I opened a salon, but I may say the business saw very little of me.

On one occasion, in the company of a missionary, I went into bush country. Of course each of these islands and sometimes each village on the island, has a king of its own, and the missionary and I were invited to a feast by one of these potentates.

Somewhat reluctantly we accepted and were obliged to drink from coconut shells a mixture of dried roots ground to powder and mixed with water. The drink is known as Kava and after one or two sips we found that we could not get our feet. Kava we soon learnt, affects the feet but not the head, and it took us an hour or two to regain our landlegs as I may say. And glad we were to escape for the natives were working themselves into a state of frenzy and throwing ominous glances at the pair of us.

### **With Bootleggers**

A few months in the South Seas were enough. I decided that the climate was altogether too hot. So, for a change, I went to the United States and found a job at my trade in the Rocky Mountains, where I thought, if the Fijis were too warm, the Rockies were a long sight too cold. I held that job for exactly 10 days and then made my way to Vancouver., British Columbia where I kept snipping, bobbing, shingling and shaving, for I had to attend to both sexes for six months.

Then once again I got going and reached San Francisco where I entered a college and gained a diploma in hairdressing.

While at San Francisco, out of curiosity I visited a number of the bootlegging joints” or “speakeasies” as the Yanks call the places where liquor can be obtained. And I came away from that city with the firm conviction that prohibition in the United States is little more than a farce.

From San Francisco I went to Los Angeles and during the four months I worked in that town I met every film star of any note.

### **Narrow Escape**

At last I thought it was time I saw my folks again so I packed up and made tracks for home. I had been in Australai two days when I heard that the post of ladies hairdresser on a big liner coming to Britain was vacant, I had always wanted to see Glasgow again. I applied for the post and was selected from 150 applicants.

On our way we touched at Rangoon and Bombay and one day when we were in the Indian Ocean a sailor came up to me and made some remark.

I was standing by the rail and, as I turned to answer, the man suddenly clutched hold of my coat and leapt overboard. I only saved myself from going with him by seizing the rail. Before the ship could be brought to or a boat lowered the man vanished. The poor man must have been

driven out of his senses by the terrific heat and taken his life in a moment of frenzy.

When I reached Britain I visited Glasgow and of course my mother's birthplace of Edinburgh, a mile or so from the Scots capital I met with the most thrilling experience of my career.

I got out of a bus, and, turning a sharp corner, found a man on fire. The poor fellow had poured two tins of petrol on his clothes and set himself alight. I called for help and the bus driver came running with a fire extinguisher and the flames were put out but the man was, ofcourse, dead.

Last winter I hoisted the pole of my profession in Cairo and came back to Britain by way of Turkey and the Balkans, Italy, Switzerland, and France, for, as you may guess by now, I like to see as much as I can for my money.

I shall, if I can find a suitable place, settle down in Glasgow and get the old folks to come home. **Copied by Jim Henry**

### **Masked Rider's Secret**

This article about Col Stewart appeared in the People's Journal, Glasgow edition, in 1929. It is not quite accurate on a number of counts but it is a good story nonetheless.

Who is the masked rider?

The question has been on the lips of thousands of London speedway fans during the past three weeks as they saw this daredevil of the tracks go from success to success beating the best riders in the country. It was with some difficulty I persuaded Coin Stewart, a tall sturdy, blue-eyed son of Scotland to reveal his identity to me, which for many months he had kept a close secret.

"I am a Scot" he confessed "and proud of it too. You see my father and mother were both born in Aberdeen and later went to live in Forres. It was there 25 years ago I was born. Then we emigrated to Australia, where Dad, who had been an artist, engaged in sheep farming at Colac, in Western district of Australia.

It was there I grew up with my two brothers and it was on a road through the bush to the nearest town six miles away that I first learned to ride a motor cycle.

My parents were both very keen on me becoming a Presbyterian minister but I had other views. I had heard that dirt racing had started at a town 50 miles distant and I decided to have a try at it.

### **First Success**

On my old machine, a 1916 model, I travelled by road to the speedway, won the handicap event, and was riding back along the bush road highly pleased with myself when my machine ran into a pot hole. I was pitched off, and hitting a tree stump head first was knocked unconscious. I also broke an arm and when I came to in hospital I learned I had lain over twelve hours in the road before being discovered.

That very nearly put n end to my speedway ambitions for I was not allowed to ride for eighteen months. I'm afraid that accident put paid to another idea for it convinced dad I was not cut out for the ministry.

I had another try at speedway racing when I was 23 at the Geelong track near Melbourne where I won 28 events. It was there I met my great friend Maurice Bradshaw, with whom I toured the whole of the Australian tracks as masked rider with great success.

When I left Melbourne for Britain no one knew who I actually was except for one or two officials and riders.

I hold all the records and trophies for the Melbourne track and am the Champion of Victoria. Curiously enough, there were two other riders with the same name as mine - Clarrie Stewart, who has relatives in Edinburgh, and Len Stewart, another Scot – and more often than not the Final of the scratch races would result in a scrap between the three of us.

Bradshaw and I arrived about a month ago and I have done well up to now. I must say I have had more than my fair share of luck, for during the whole of my career as a shaleshifter I have never had a serious fall on the track.

A week ago I paid a flying visit to Glasgow and Edinburgh to look up some of my relatives at the same time visited the speedways. The home lads can certainly shift and I am looking forward to some exciting duels with Norrie Isbister, Dick Wyse, George McKenzie and company when I start my Scottish tour.

**Copied by Jim Henry**

## **Hounslow Speedway**

**Arnie Gibbons** has kindly researched this very obscure venue which only came to light when a programme available on EBay.

In January a listing appeared on e-bay for a programme from the second meeting at Hounslow speedway on 7 July 1935. With no listing for Hounslow speedway in 'Homes of British Speedway' (Bamford & Jarvis), cue much speculation.

The 1930s was an era when there were many 'grass speedways', usually marked out in fields afresh for each event, but often described as speedway. The Sunday staging date and the fact that the programme gives the organisers as a local club (the Hounslow Motor Cycle and Car Club) give credence to this hypothesis.

The e-bay listing also shows part of the race card. The meeting format appears to be a series of scratch heats with riders progressing to a final and a similar handicap competition with a couple of match races thrown in.

Of the riders listed the most easily recognisable of the names is Fred Tuck. J Adams would probably be the rider active at California around this time. (California is just 25 miles away from Hounslow.) G Liddle and F Cooper are also names that I have seen in California meeting reports. The other riders listed are S Manning, F Wilkins, W Skilton, C Brown, B Bumstead, R Clark, E Gower, S Lemon, R Wilson, R Adams, L Burger and G Nicolson. On the oldtimespeedway discussion group Mike Terran provided further information on some of these riders:

*'Fred Tuck rode for West Ham in 1933 and would appear for Plymouth in 1936. Syd Manning would also appear for Plymouth in 1936. George Liddle rode for Romford (ICL) in 1938, and Crystal Palace in 1939. Stan Lemon rode for Wimbledon 1933-34, and would ride for Birmingham in 1938. Lou Burger rode for Harringay and White City in 1929. J. Adams is probably Jack Adams a junior rider that was with Southampton in 1937-38. R. Clark may have been Ron Clarke that rode for Lea Bridge in 1938.'*

The main local paper of this era covering Hounslow was the Middlesex Chronicle. There are a few brief references (all less than 3 column inches) to the mystery track. The first of these is in the 29 June 1935 edition. A small advert (approx 2 inches by a single column) and an even shorter news story on page 9. These alert the reader to the 'Grand Opening' Speedway Meeting on 30 June. The ad invites applications to ride and gives the contact address as Mr H Mathews of 16 Spring

Grove, Kew Bridge. The article states that 'among the riders is local motorcyclist FHG Tuck'.

From these we can also establish a little more information about the location. Given as Dockwell Lane, Staines Road on the front page of the programme this initially proved confusing for two reasons. Firstly Dockwell Lane no longer exists. (There is a Dockwell Close about 400 metres south of the Great South West Road.) This area has been extensively developed in the last 80 years and forms part of the hinterland of Heathrow airport. Swathes of what would now be termed greenbelt were in the process of being transformed into suburbia in the 1930s (and this is reflected in the numerous ads for new homes in the Middlesex Chronicle of the period).

Some examination of old maps by fellow members of the oldtimespeedway discussion group locates Dockwell Lane as a road heading north-east out of Hatton Cross towards the A4 (Bath Road). According to contemporary maps by 1935 Dockwell Lane had already been subsumed by the Great South West Road.

The second difficulty in making sense of this information is that Dockwell Lane and Staines Road did not meet, both running south-west to North east, but about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile apart.

Returning to the information in the Middlesex Chronicle of 29 June 1935 gives us two more clues:

- the venue is described as being opposite Hounslow Heath; and
- 'Buses 37,116,120 and 137 pass the door.'

Ordnance Survey maps of 1935 show Hounslow Heath as largely south of the Staines Road with an extension to the north of the Staines Road following the path of the River Crane. The 116 still travels through Bedfont straight up the Staines Road to Hounslow implying the speedway was fairly close to the Staines Road.

This would suggest that the site of the track was in the strip of land between the Staines Road and the Great West Road and within 400 metres of the River Crane. Most of this is now built up but the northern spur of Hounslow Heath Golf Club occupies part of this area. The 1935 map show a sports ground and sand and gravel pits in this part of the site. However it doesn't explain the use of the Dockwell Lane address – so the exact location is still open to debate.

The following week's Middlesex Chronicle has no report of the opening meeting or any advertisement for the second meeting. But coverage is resumed the following week. As well as an advert promising 20 thrilling races for 10d admission (children 6d) there is a brief report on page 9 of the 7 July meeting.

We are told that a large crowd saw several very exciting races and that track record holder Fred Tuck won both scratch and handicap finals. The report also promises several new riders at the next (14 July) meeting.

The third meeting, held on 14 July, is briefly covered in the following week's paper. Unlike other reports on Hounslow speedway this one is in the sports section rather than the news columns. It gives the winners of the scratch and handicap competitions (in front of 'another large crowd') as S Manning and Ronny Adams. Incidentally it was the only one of the known Hounslow meetings to run against California who reported a lower than normal crowd for that afternoon.

However what really catches the reader's attention, and perhaps hints at the imminent demise of this obscure venture, is the announcement at the foot of the page. Headed 'NOTICE' the text reads:

*'The Hounslow Motor Cycle and Car Club wish to notify their supporters and all members of the above club that on and after Sunday 14 July 1935 they will have no further connection with any speedway meeting held at Hounslow speedway, Dockwell Lane.'*

The implication is that there was some form of bust-up amongst those running the speedway followed by a parting of the ways. The match report further up the page does mention another meeting for the following day (which would be the 21st July), and it is advertised later on in the paper as the 'Track Championship'.

We know that this meeting did take place from the following week's report, but it does suggest that the management shake-up had not been a success. Under the headline 'Speedway Thrills' the report opens on a downbeat note: *'Unfortunately the management had to postpone the open track championship as some of the best riders failed to appear'*. Four of these were listed: T White, S Manning, H Dawson and D Hore. Instead a programme of scratch and match races was held. No details of winners are provided but competitors mentioned in the report include Nobby Brown, Ronny Adams, R Amos (another rider who crops up at California) and W Gratten.

And that is the last time that speedway makes an appearance in the Middlesex Chronicle during the 1935 season. It is possible there may have been further meetings after the 21 July but the departure of the HMC&CC from the scene and the collapse of the track championship suggest that the project was unravelling fast and close to expiring.

### **The First UK Fatality**

The name Charlie Biddle might not mean much but, sadly, this young 19 year old was the first rider to be killed in the UK. Why news of the event did not hit the headlines at the time of his death on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1928 is not known. Conspiracy theories could be put forward to justify the press being asked to keep it quiet but it did not gain the coverage the sensational reports of the then new sport was receiving.

Charlie, it seems, was practicing at Stamford Bridge on 23<sup>rd</sup> May when he was fatally injured and he lingered for a week before passing away. Thanks to **Colin Pike** for passing on this information which he found in an Australian newspaper called The Argus in the edition published on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1928.

### **The First Dirt Track Film**

#### **Money for Speed – (Also Known as Daredevils of Earth)**

The Midland Daily Telegraph dated Saturday May 27<sup>th</sup> 1933 said that Money for Speed was being presented at the Alhambra theatre in Coventry that week.

The movie was said to strike a new note in screen entertainment and was the first picture in which the thrills and natural drama of Dirt track racing had been adapted for the screen. The movie running time was 73 minutes in black and white with mono sound. The filming was done at Wembley studios in London.

The credit for seeing the possibilities of screening this most popular sport were due to Bernard Vorhaus who was a young man with

considerable experience of films and who had recently formed a production company called Hall Mark Films.

Bernard Vorhaus wrote the original story for Money for Speed and also directed the picture. His story was adapted by Vera Allinson and dialogue was supplied by Lionel Hale and Monica Ewer.

### **The Story**

The story the movie told was of an Australian Speedway rider who ousted an Englishman from his position of track champion. The deposed rider pretended friendship with the Australian and introduced him to a girl who was apparently charming and simple with whom the Aussie was to fall in love with.

He was later to find out that the romance was all part of the Englishman's plot against him. The theme of the story concerned how the girl turned "loves evidence" and then eventually was reconciled with the Australian after he had risked everything on a stunt ride over the top of the Wall of Death.

The Wall of Death stunt was said to be at the time to provide one of the most thrilling exhibitions of trick riding ever seen. In performing the stunt seven motorcycles were wrecked before a perfect camera shot was obtained. In the end the cameraman got his spectacular shot by taking up his stance on the identical spot where three machines had already crashed. In all no fewer than twenty eight speed track motorcycles were completely wrecked during the making of the movie but no serious injuries were sustained.

### **The Actors**

Craig McLaglen (as the Australian – Big Bill Summers), John Loder (as his Rival - Mitch) and Ida Lupino (as the Girl - Jane) played the leading parts in the film. The support acting roles came from Marie Ault 9Ma), Moore Marriott (Shorty), George Merritt and Sam Wilkinson.

## The Speedway Riders

The real life Speedway riders involved in the movie included;

Ginger Lees – who played himself

Frank Arthur

Jack Parker

Eric Langton

Frank Varey

Vic Huxley

Bluey Wilkinson

Billy Lamont

Ron Johnson

Jack Ormston

Tom Farndon

Colin Watson

Tiger Stevenson

George Greenwood

Wal Phillips

Also involved were “Cyclone Danny” the Wall of Death expert and Johnnie Hoskins who played the team manager. The preliminary crowd shots were taken at stadiums all over the country.

## References

*Midland Daily Telegraph Newspaper 1933*

*Internet Movie Database - <http://www.imdb.com>*

**Deadline for items for next edition is 30th July 2013**

**Web Master: Matt Jackson**

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