

# The Speedway Researcher

Promoting Research into the History of Speedway and Dirt Track Racing

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Subscribers : 200

## Welcome to 2001 (The Real Start of the Millennium?)

A belated Happy New Year as we complete another volume of The Speedway Researcher. Thanks to Terry Stone and Eric Watson for very special collectors' item Christmas cards. We'll keep going on as long as you want us to. Keep the articles and items coming in, they are most welcome, and we will do our best to help. Maybe Volume 4 will see some coverage of cigarette cards and badges if someone can pen something for us. We need more post war items too so over to you. For our part we intend to start a series on speedway publications in Volume 4 and will probably make a start of providing information on local library newspaper holdings by abstracting information from the Newsplan series.

## 1931 A YEAR OF CONSOLIDATION

We continue with **Don Gray's** look at the speedway years and this time Don turns his attention to 1931.

The fourth season of speedway racing opened optimistically with the sport recognised and accepted by the media as a serious, professionally run entertainment. Much of the circus aura had faded and unnecessary costs and riders' appearance money was trimmed down to reasonable limits.

As regards machinery, Douglas were hoping to regain the lead established by Rudge, but a JAP engine was appearing as a major challenger to both the pioneer and its usurper. Indeed the JAP would establish itself and go on to monopolise the sport for many years.

A number of top men had decided to retire and the two great showmen, Sprouts Elder and Billy Lamont, chose to give Britain a miss and to concentrate on easy pickings on the Continent. Indeed, Elder was never again to be seen on the tracks of Britain, deciding to take up a career as a police highway patrolman in the USA. It was not until August that Lamont returned to England. Another big name absentee, Syd Jackson, took time out to learn to fly before returning to the tracks in June.

Many riders were returning from winter tours of countries in the southern hemisphere, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, and South America. Indeed a troupe of English riders had ridden in three Test Matches in New Zealand and had won each of them.

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It was announced that Wembley and West Ham were to be under the same management, whilst in the North a similar arrangement existed between Belle Vue and Sheffield. (Not one universally popular in the Steel Town as they saw Belle Vue robbing them of all their star men.) This was the year when Belle Vue incorporated the famous ace of clubs in their team colours and did the same for Sheffield with the ace of spades.

The Northern and Southern League competitions once again formed the staple diet together with the newspaper sponsored knock out cup matches such as the Daily Mail National Trophy, The Sunday Chronicle Northern Cup and the Evening News London Cup.

The successful series of Test matches between England and Australia were once again held, together with the established Star Championship for Southern League riders. There was also the introduction of what was billed as the World Championship (See Vol 3 No3) which involved star men from both the Northern and Southern Leagues.

## The Southern League

Of the 1930 league members, Hall Green and Coventry elected to operate on open licences in 1931, although Hall Green entered a team for the purpose of competing in the National Trophy Knock Out competition. The national economic depression affected the gates at most centres and was instrumental in the closure of Harringay and Leicester Stadium at the end of May. Hall Green agreed to take the place of Harringay but they also ceased operations before a match was played.

Due to a failure of many Northern Tracks to open in 1931, Belle Vue had become a mecca for homeless Northern riders. The club was, therefore, in a position to provide a fairly strong second team to operate in the Southern League by taking over from Harringay.

As regards Leicester, the stadium became unavailable for speedway mid May and the team moved up the road to the Leicester Super track for a couple of matches until Coventry agreed to rejoin the Southern League and fulfil Leicester's fixtures.

Another casualty was Nottingham who were obliged to resign from the Southern League in June. Their points were expunged from the league table and all the remaining teams were credited with four points. At the time of closure the Notts lads had ridden 20 matches of which they won 8, drew 1 and lost 11 for a total of 17 league points, results which constituted an appreciable improvement on their miserable showing in the previous season. Some teams benefited from the closures and were strengthened by addition of the best of the displaced riders. The most important transfers were Vic Huxley joining Wimbledon from Harringay, Wally Key to Crystal Palace from Nottingham and Cyril "Squib" Burton to Lea Bridge from Leicester.

The Coventry team was assembled from ex-Hall Green and Leicester

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riders under the captaincy of Syd Jackson.

West Ham made the running for the first half of the season but, weakened by an injury to their captain, Tiger Stevenson, in mid season, they lost their sparkle. This allowed Wembley and Stamford Bridge to dominate the league in the autumn, these two finishing up champions and runners up respectively. Coventry finished up with the wooden spoon.

Exeter and Plymouth kept the interest alive in the West Country, each opening for a short open licence season in mid summer.

### **The Northern League**

Of the thirteen teams in the ill fated 1930 league only six entered for the 1931 competition while Wombwell elected to run on an open licence and Edinburgh managed a couple of events under the banner of the Glasgow promotion. The depressing number of track closures in the North was offset by the opening of a new centre at York, albeit operating on an open licence. Both Wombwell and York closed early. It is possible that a few more venues also flickered briefly like Hull White City and the Motherwell track.

As mentioned earlier, Belle Vue accumulated a squad of good class riders and were thus in a good position to form a second team, known as Manchester, to operate in the Southern League from June onwards to fulfil the fixtures of the defunct Harringay track. Frank Charles was transferred to Leeds from Belle Vue, who had acquired him from White City, to stiffen the new team.

As in the previous year the full league programme was never completed. This was principally due to the closure of Glasgow in mid season and Leicester Super in late August. Drew McQueen moved down to Leeds as a replacement for the loss of Frank Charles, while Andy Nichol and Norrie Isbister went to Belle Vue. Norrie then moved on to Preston. The remaining Glasgow riders retired from the scene but did return to the fray in 1932 for a brief revival at Glasgow Nelson and Motherwell.

Belle Vue topped the league at the end of the day with Leeds as runners up.

On 26th September Leeds held a Sunday evening meeting claiming they could not make money on any other day of the week. Professional Sunday racing was strictly against ACU regulations at the time. Despite prior warnings the management and some of the riders went ahead with the meeting, the riders using assumed names and wearing masks. All were reported to the ACU and were threatened with action from the Sunday Observance League. The track closed and did not re-open for speedway until late in the 1938 season. In August a two leg challenge match was held between the North and the South. The South won at Leeds by 51 to 45 but in the return at Wembley the North reversed the result, winning by 27 to 25.

In order to confirm the unofficial top team in the country, home and

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away matches were held between the respective league champions, Belle Vue and Wembley. Belle Vue beat Wembley 27 - 26 in London but Wembley won the return match at Belle Vue by 30 - 22.

### **The Northern Cup**

The six Northern League teams, together with teams from Wombwell and York competed in The Sunday Chronicle Knock Out Cup competition. This was won eventually by Belle Vue who beat Leeds in both legs in the final.

### **The National Trophy**

This knock out cup competition was sponsored by the Daily Mail for teams of eight a side and the matches were raced over sixteen heats. Both Northern and Southern League teams took part. The initial rounds were staged on a regional basis. The top four Northern teams then went into the hat with the top four in the South. The eventual winners were Wembley with their old rivals Stamford Bridge the beaten finalists.

### **The London Cup**

The Evening News London Challenge Cup knock out competition which was open to all seven sides in the Capital resulted in a win for Crystal Palace who beat the 1930 winners, Wembley, in the final.

### **Test Matches**

The highly successful 1930 series of Test Matches between England and Australia ensured the inclusion of a further series as an annual event for the foreseeable future. The venues for 1931 were Crystal Palace, Leicester Super, Wembley, Belle Vue and Stamford Bridge.

The English team selectors were T.W. Loughborough (Secretary of the ACU), W.C. Bersey (International Speedways Ltd.), W.Burrows (Leicester Super), Fred Mockford (Crystal Palace)), and E.O. Spence (Belle Vue). The Australian selectors were Sir Newton Moore, John S. Hoskins and Norman Pritchard (editor of Speedway News).

England won the close fought series by four matches to one. Australia won the second test at Leicester Super by one point, but this match was a bit of a shambles due principally to the large number of false starts and a series of accidents to Wal Phillips and Squib Burton which sidelined these two English stalwarts for the remainder of the season. In the fifth test at Stamford Bridge Jack Parker captured the British Mile Record with a speed of 46.87 m.p.h. breaking the record held by Arthur Jervis which had been set at Leicester Super.

### **World Individual Championship**

Won by Jack Parker. See Vol 3 No.3

### **The Star Championship**

The individual contest was once again limited to riders of the Southern Association. The final was held at Wembley on 18th September and was contested by two competitors from each of the tracks including riders

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representing the defunct Nottingham team. Ray Tauser, Wimbledon's American rider was the surprise winner from Vic Huxley and Tommy Croombs.

### **The London Riders' Championship**

This event was held at Crystal Palace on 22nd August and was won by Joe Francis from team mate Ron Johnson. They, in common with the rest of the Palace team, were mounted on the super tuned Wallis JAP machines which were introduced to the club in mid season and which brought about a marked improvement in the team's late season performances.

### **Foreign Teams**

A team of German riders, Alfred Rumrich, Herbert Drews, Gerhart Ahrns, Hans Muller and Max Wunder visited Wembley and West Ham in late May but were beaten at both venues in four - a - side matches by the home teams. In September four Spanish riders, Angel Arche, Jose Marin, and the Poto Brothers repeated the formula at Wembley and West Ham and they too were beaten by their hosts.

### **General**

This year was notable for the number of serious accidents to riders. John Garmson, a New Zealander was tragically killed in his first meeting in this country on the nearly circular track at the Olympic Stadium, Nottingham. In August Jimmy "Indian" Allen. a popular Northerner was also killed in an accident at Belle Vue during the Manchester v Wembley league match. Bruce McCallum, the Australian attached to Leicester Super died after a short illness, He had ridden at West Ham in 1929 and at Belle Vue in 1930 when he had made a Test Match appearance.

As already stated Wal Phillips and Squib Burton were sidelined for the second half of the season as was Dick Case who had rapidly progressed to being recognised as one of the top Australian riders. His loss to Wimbledon was partly offset by the return of Lamont to the UK in August.

H.R. "Ginger" Lees of Preston was an early casualty as were George Bishop and William "Stiffy" Aston of Lea Bridge. The Lea Bridge team also lost their vice captain, George Heard, who broke his leg in May and retired for good. Aussie Dick Wise was extremely unfortunate. He signed for the weak Harringay team but broke his leg in the very first meeting and was out of action for five months.

Joe Abbott of Preston started the year in great form but lost a lot of ground later in the year to injury and illness. Frank Charles of Leeds, and later, Belle Vue also ran out of steam in the latter part of the season. he lost heart to such an extent that he decided to give the sport a miss for the next three seasons.

In July George Greenwood and Harry Whitfield of Wembley were adjudged to have "arranged" a race and were each suspended for a week.

On a brighter note the machines were becoming faster and more reliable. Arthur Jervis at Leicester Super was the first rider to win a race at an average speed in excess of 50 m.p.h. on a traditional British Speedway. Wal Phillips also achieved this feat later in the season. It was reported that Art Pechar, the American, regularly won races at over 50 m.p.h. in 1928 at the Greenford Trotting Track in West London, but high speeds were to be expected there as the track length measured 880 yards per lap.

Jervis was also the holder of the European quarter mile record for most of the season until Jack Parker became the new holder during the fifth Test Match at Stamford Bridge in September.

The move towards closer amalgamation of the two leagues was strengthened this year by the involvement of all teams in the National Trophy competition and at least three challenge matches towards the end of the season. i.e. Belle Vue v Wimbledon, Sheffield v West Ham and Coventry v Leicester Super. As for the top rider of 1931, Vic Huxley was again consistently good despite losing the World Championship contest to Jack Parker who developed a purple patch towards the end of the season. Eric Langton at Belle Vue was also a close contender for the best rider title while Colin Watson and Frank Arthur were not far behind.

**Don Gray**

## **NEWSPAPER INFORMATION**

### **IRISH NEWSPAPERS**

**Dublin** : Tracks : **Chapelizod, Santry, Shelbourne**, and pre war **Harrold's Cross**.  
Newspapers : (478) The Dublin Evening Mail 1928 - July 1962; (479) Evening Herald 1928 - date; (480) Evening Press Sept 1954 - date; (481) Irish Cyclist and Motor Cyclist Dec 1928 - Aug 1931; (482) Irish Daily Independent 1928 - date; (483) Irish Motor Trader 1928 - date; (484) The Irish Press Sept 1931 - date; (485) The Irish Motor News Aug 1931 - Dec 1983; (486) Sport 1928 - Aug 1931; (487) Sunday Independent 1928 - date; (488) Sunday Press Sept 1949 - date; (489) Sunday review Nov 1959 - Nov 1963. Included motoring press in view of items carried by the Auto and a Scottish equivalent - worth a look.

### **LONDON NEWSPAPERS**

The following are not area publications and are UK wide editions of newspapers.  
(489) All Sports Illustrated Weekly 1928 - May 1930; (490) All Sports Pictorial June 1946 Sept 1949; (491) Autocar 1928 - date; (490) Automotor Journal 1928 - Aug 1931 (\* Southern Edition Only Very Good Coverage); (491) The Auto Aug 1931 - Sept 1931(continues previous magazine); (492) Boys Realm 1928 - Feb 1929; (493) The British Australian and New Zealander 1928 - Dec 1944; (494) The British Australian July 1946 - Nov 1948; (495) The Australian and New Zealand Weekly Dec 1948 - Mar 1950; (496) Motor Sport 1928 - date; (497) Car Topics 1928 - Aug

1939; (498) The Daily Chronicle 1928 - May 1930; (499) Daily Express 1928 - date;  
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 (500) Daily Herald 1928 - Sept 1964; (501) The Daily Mail 1928 -date; (502) Daily Mail (Northern/Manchester Edition) 1928 - date; (503) Daily Mirror 1928 - date;  
 (504) Daily News and Westminster Gazette 1928 - May 1930; (505) News Chronicle June 1930 - Nov 1955; (506) News Chronicle and Daily Dispatch Nov 1955 - Oct 1960; (507) News Chronicle and Daily Dispatch (Manchester Edition) Nov 1955 - Oct 1960; (508) Daily Sketch 1928 - June 1946; (509) Daily Sketch and Daily Graphic June 1946 & Jan 1953 - Sept 1956; (510) Daily Graphic and Daily Sketch July 1946 - Jan 1953; (511) Daily Sketch Sept 1964 - May 1971; (512) Daily Sport 1928 - May 1939; (514) The Daily Telegraph 1928 - Sept 1937; (515) The Daily telegraph and Morning Post Oct 1937 - Oct 1962; (516) Daily Worker Jan 1930 - Jan 1941 1962 - April 1966; (517) Morning Star April 1966 - date; (518) Illustrated Sport Feb 1928 - March 1929; (519) Evening herald Mar 1930 - June 1963; (520) Evening Mirror 1928 - Dec 1954; (521) The Evening News 1928 - Oct 1960; (522) The Evening News and Star Oct 1960 - Date; (523) The Greyhound Daily Mirror June - July 1929; (524) The Guardian 1928 - 1951; (525) Ice Hockey and Speedway Gazette 14.10.1946 - 17.2.1947; (526) Speedway and Ice Hockey Gazette 10.3.1947 - 21.4.1947; (527) Speedway Gazette 26.4.1947 - 18.10.1947; (528) Darts and Sports Review 25.10.1947 - 10.1.1948; (529) Speedway Gazette 17.1.1950; (530) Speedway gazette and Echo 21.10.1950 - 30.6.1951; (531) Speedway Gazette 7.7.1951 - Dec 1955; (532) Illustrated Mirror 1928 - Dec 1954; (533) Illustrated Speedway 1.4.1955- 30.9.1966 & 7.4.1967 - 29.9.1967; (534) Sunday Graphic and Sunday Herald 1928 - April 1929; (535) Sunday Graphic April 1929 - Dec 1960; (536) The Sunday News 1928 - March 1930; (537) Sunday news March 1930 - Aug 1931; (538) London Calling 1928 - Feb 1929; (539) Modern Motoring May 1931 - Sept 1939; (540) Monthly Speedway Star May 1952 - Sept 1954; (541) The Morning Post 1928 - Sept 1937; (542) The Motor Cycle 1928 - date; (543) Motor Cycle Sport 1 copy only 1928' (544) Motor Cycling 1928 - Aug 1967; (545) The Motor Cyclist Review 1928 - Dec 1930; (546) Motorcycle Sport Feb - Sept 1962 & Nov 1962 - date; (547) The National May 1933 - Feb 1939; (548) The Sunday Times 1928 - date; (549) The New Sports Pictorial June 1946 - Sept 1949; (550) The New Zealand News 1928 - Date; (551) The News of The World 1928 - Oct 1960; (552) The News of The World & Empire News Oct 1960 - Date; (553) The Observer 1928 - date; (554) Pearson's Weekly 1928 - Sept 1938; (555) The People 1928 - date; (556) Reynold's Illustrated News 1928 - Feb 1963; (557) Reynold's News March 1936 - Aug 1944; (558) Reynold's News & Sunday Citizen Aug 1946 - Sept 1962; (559) Sunday Citizen Sept 1962 - Jan 1967; (560) Scottish daily Mail Dec 1962 - Nov 1968; (561) Speedway 11 April 1938 - 25 June 1938; (562) Speedway 13th March 1948; (563) Speedway & Sports Gazette 13 April 1933 - 30 August 1934; (564) Speedway Echo 23 March 1948 - 14th October 1950 & 25th April 1968 - 29th September 1968; (565) Speedway Express (Wembley Edition) 26th May 1932 - 15th September 1932; (566) Speedway Express (West Ham Edition) 31 May 1932 - 13 September 1932; (567) Speedway Express 17 May 1948 - 18 August 1948; (568) The Graphic Speedway Express 25 August 1948; (569)The Pictorial Speedway Express 8 Sept. 1948; (570) English Speedway Express 15 September 1948; (571) British Speedway Express 22 September 1948; (572) World Speedway Express 6 October 1948; ( 573) The

British Speedway and Football Express 13 October 1948; (574) The Universal Speedway Express & Football Express 20 October 1948; (575) Speedway Gazette 7 15 April 1946 - 12 August 1946; (576) National Speedway gazette 19 August 1946 - 16 September 1946; (577) British Speedway Gazette 23 September 1946 - 7 October 1946; (578) Speedway News 19 May 1928 - 9 September 1939; (579) Speedway News & Ice News 10 April 1946 - 1 June 1950; (580) Speedway & Ice News 8 June 1950 - 1 June 1956; (581) Speedway News Winter Bulletin Jan 1936 - Mar 1939; (582) Speedway Pictorial 1 - 29 Sept 1950; (583) Speedway Pix 25 April 1969 - 26 September 1969; (584) Speedway Reporter 22 & 29 April 1950; (585) Speedway Star 29 March 1952 - 20 November 1954; (586) Speedway & Ice Star 27 November 1954 - 3 September 1955; (587) Speedway Star 10 September 1955 - 14 April 1956; (588) Speedway Star & News - date (now Speedway Star); (589) Speedway Supporter 13 March 1948; (590) Speedway World 3 September 1937 - 19 October 1938; (591) Speedway World & Ice Hockey Journal 7 January 1948 - 17 March 1948; (592) Speedway World 24 March 1948 - 15 September 1954; (593) Speedway & Stock Car World 22 September 1954 - 11 April 1957; (594) Speedway World 18 April 1957 - 1 June 1961; (595) Sports Pictures & Football Mirror 1928 - Feb 1930; (596) Greyhound Outlook and Sports Pictures March 1930 - Sept 1939; (597) The Sporting Chance May - June 1928; (598) Sporting Mirror Nov 1953 - Dec 1954; (599) Sporting Pictorial June 1946 - Nov 1949; (600) Sporting World Aug 1939 - April 1952; (601) The Star 1928 - Oct 1950; (602) Sun Sept 1964 - Date; (603) Sunday Express 1928 - Date; (604) Sunday Pictorial 1928 - Mach 1963; (605) Sunday Mirror & Sunday Pictorial April - June 1963; (606) Sunday Mirror July 1963 - date; (607) The Sunday Sportsman 1928 - June 1940; (608) The Times 1928 - date;

## TRACK INFORMATION

Yet another instalment of **John Jarvis's** superb record system.

**MANSFIELD WOODHOUSE** : Park Hall, Mansfield Woodhouse. Track Length : 880 yards 1928, 440 yards 1929. 1st Meeting : 19th May 1928.

Years of Operation : 1928 - 29 - Open. (U.)

**MARCH** : GER Sports Auto Club, March, Cambridgeshire. Track Length : 375 yards. 1st Meeting : Not Known. Years of Operation : 1945 - 47 - Amateur Open. (N.)

**MELTON MOWBRAY** : Old. Two miles from the town close to Wilf Jay's garage. Training venue organised by Wilf Plant used 1936 only. (N.)

**MELTON MOWBRAY** : Greyhound Stadium, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. Track Length : 280 yards. 1st Meeting : 7th August 1949.

Years of Operation : 1949 - Open. Site became an industrial estate. (N)

**MIDDLESBROUGH** : Cleveland Park, Stockton Road, Middlesbrough. Track Length : 335 yards. 1st Meeting : 23rd August 1928. Years of

Operation : 1928 - Open; 1929 - English Dirt Track League; 1930 - 32 - Open; 1936 - 38 - Open; 1939 National League Division Two - resigned;

1945 - Open; 1946 - Northern League; 1947 - 1948 - National League Division Two; 1953 - 55 - Open; 1961 - 64 - Provincial League; 1965 - Open;

1966 - Northern League; 1968 - 74 - British League Division two; 1975 - 76 - New National League; 1977 - 93 National League; 1994 -

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British League Division Two and British League Division Three (Nickname - Cleveland Bays); 1995 - 96 - Premier League. Stadium demolished for redevelopment. (U.)

MILDENHALL : Old. West Row Fen, Mildenhall, Suffolk. Track Length : 307 yards. 1st Meeting : 8th April 1973. Years of Operation : 1973 - Training; 1974 - Open & Training; 1975 - 76 - New National League; 1977 - 1989 - National League; 1990 - 91 - Training; 1992 - British League Division two - resigned; 1994 - British League Division Three; 1995 - Amateur League; 1996 - Conference League; 1997 - 98 - Amateur League; 1999 - 2000 Conference League . Track modified by addition of greyhound track.

MILDENHALL : Old. West Row, Mildenhall, Suffolk. Track Length ; 93 metres. 1st Meeting : 2nd August 1987. Years of Operation : 1987 - Training; 1988 - Open; 1991 - Training. (N.)

MILTON KEYNES : Bleak Hall, Elfield Park, Milton Keynes. Track Length : 250 yards. 1st Training Session : 27th September 1981. Years of Operation : 1981 - Training; 1982 - 83 Open & Training; 1984 - 85 - Training; 1986 - 1988 - Open & Training; 1989 - 90 - National League; 1991 - British League Division Two; 1992 - British League - resigned. (N.)

MILTON KEYNES : Groveway Greyhound Stadium, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK6 4AA. Track Length : 281 metres. 1st Meeting : 28th March 1978. Years of Operation : 1978 - 88 - National League; 1993 - Open (mixed events). Nickname : Knights. (N.)

MOTHERWELL : The Stadium, Milton Street, Motherwell, Lanarkshire. Track Length : 430 yards , 360 yards 1972. 1st Meeting : 14th July 1950. Years of Operation : 1950 - Open; 1951 - 54 - National League Division Two; 1957 - Training; 1958 - Open; 1972 - Open. Stadium demolished and 1972 track on centre green of trotting / long track. Long track events staged on trotting track (length 680 yards) 1972 1st Meeting: 2nd January 1972. Used in 1971 for training. (U.)

MOTHERWELL : Paragon Speedway, Airbles Road, Motherwell. Track Length : 0.3 Mile. 1st Meeting : 27th September 1930. Years of Operation : 1930 - Open; 1932 - Open. May have operated 1931 but no information. Greyhound stadium built on site by July 1932. May have been used for training in 1947. (N.)

NEATH : Abbey Stadium, Neath. Wales. Track Length : 376 yards. 1st Meeting : 28th April 1962. Year of Operation : 1962 - Provincial League- Neath raced some fixtures at St.Austell. Site redeveloped. Proposals to operate in 1953 never materialised.

NELSON : Seed Hill Stadium, Carr Road, Nelson, Lancashire. Track

Length : 300 yards. 1st Meeting : 3rd August 1967. Years of Operation : 1967 - Open; 1968 - 69 - British League Division Two; 1970 - British League Division Two - transferred to Bradford. Demolished 1980. (U.)

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NEW BRIGHTON : New Brighton Tower Grounds, New Brighton, Merseyside. Track Length : 511.66 yards. 1st Meeting : Not Known. Years of Operation : 1933 - 35 - Open Amateur. Vague venue needs some work to sort out full history.(U.)

NEW CROSS : New Cross Stadium, Hornsey Street, London, SE14. Track Length : 262 yards. 1st Meeting : 16th April 1934. Years of Operation : 1934 - National League Divisions One & Two; 1935 - 37 - National League; 1938 - 39 - National League Division One; 1945 - Open; 1946 National League; 1947 - 52 - National League Division One; 1953 - National League Division One - closed; 1959 - Open; 1960 - 61 - National League; 1963 - Provincial League - resigned.

NEWCASTLE : Brough Park Stadium, Byker, Newcastle Upon Tyne. Track Length : 359 yards 1939, 361 yards 1969. 1st Meeting : 17th May 1929. Years of Operation : 1929 - English Dirt Track League; 1930 - Open; 1938 - 39 - National League Division Two; 1945 - Open; 1946 - Northern League; 1947 - 51 - National League Division Two; 1961 - 64 - Provincial League; 1965 - 67 - British League; 1968 - 70 - British League Division One; 1975 - 76 - New National League; 1977 - 83 National League; 1984 - British League; 1986 - 87 - National League; 1989 - 90 National League; 1991 - 94 - British League Division Two; 1997 - 2000 - Premier League. In 1980 and 1981 was a base for Berwick. (U.)

NEWCASTLE : Gosforth Stadium, Great North Road, Newcastle. Track Length : 440 yards. 1st Meeting : 1st June 1929. Years of Operation : 1929 - Open; 1930 - Northern League; 1931 - Open. Stadium site shared with rugby club is now the site of a supermarket. (U.)

NEWPORT : Queensway Meadows, Newport, Wales. Track Length : 285 metres. 1st Meeting : 4th May 1997. Years of Operation : 1997 - 2000 Premier League and Conference League. Purpose built speedway in an industrial estate. (N.)

NEWPORT : Somerton Park, Newport, Wales. Track Length : 380 yards, 376 in 1969. 1st Meeting : 17th April 1964. Years of Operation : 1928 - Grass Track. 1964 - Provincial League; 1965 - 67 British League; 1968 - 74 - British League Division One; 1975 - 76 - British League; 1977 National League. Stadium demolished, site redeveloped for housing. (U.)

NEWTON HEATH : Deane Lane, Newton Heath, Manchester. Track Length : 320 yards. 1st Meeting : Not Known. Years of Operation : 1950 - Training; 1951 - Training & Open; 1952 - Training; 1953 - Training & Open; 1954 - 55 - Training.

NEWTONGRANGE : Victoria Park, Newtongrange, Midlothian, Scotland. Track Length : 430 yards. 1st Meeting : ? Years of Operation : 1928? - Training (Location for local rider testing bike ?); 1950 - 51 - Open &

Training; 1952 - Training; 1970 - Open; 1973 - Open. Site demolished and is now a housing site. (U.)

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**NORTHAMPTON** : The Stadium, South Bridge, Northampton. Track Length : 336 yards. 1st Meeting : 23rd September 1929. Years of Operation : 1929 - 30 - Open. Obscure short lived venue closed due to complaints about noise.

**NORWICH** : The Firs Stadium, Aylsham Road, Norwich. Track Length : 425 yards. 1st Meeting : 17th August 1930. Years of Operation : 1930 - Grass Speedway; 1931 - 36 - Open; 1937 - 39 - National League Division Two; 1945 - Open; 1946 - Northern League; 1947 - 51 - National League Division Two; 1952 - 56 National League Division One; 1957 - 64 - National League; 1965 - Training. Site redeveloped for housing.

**NORWICH** : Firs Stadium Car Park. Track Length : 300 yards. Year of Operation : 1956. (N.)

**NORWICH** : Hevingham Raceway, Nr Norwich. Track Length : 350 yards. 1st Meeting : 5th December 1976. Year of Operation : 1976 - Open. One meeting wonder where little now remains.

**NOTTINGHAM** : White City Stadium, Trent Lane, Nottingham. Track Length : 440 yards 1929, 412 yards 1938. 1st Meeting : 28th July 1928. Years of Operation : 1928 - Grass Track; 1929 - Open; 1930 - Southern League; 1931 - Southern League - resigned; 1933 - National League; 1934 - Open; 1936 - 37 Provincial League; 1938 - National League Division Two - resigned.

### CAN YOU HELP?

To save space we have not included addresses of a researcher has been mentioned in previously. However, due to a reasonable concern expressed by **Colin Parker** of Coventry, we will include address information from now on. Please keep us up to date with your address. Please let us know if we can use your telephone number in any request for help.

**Charles McKay**, 6 Haslemere Close, Bradford is seeking details of the scorers for World Ice Speedway Finals 1966 - 1970.

**Geoff Allman**, 6 Sherringham Drive, Essington, Wolverhampton, WV11 2EB is seeking details of the career of Doug Wells who rode for Hackney pre war and Birmingham and Yarmouth post war.

**Mike Craven**, Appleby, 10 Station Lane, Mickle Trafford, Chester, CH2 4EH is seeking date or year of death of Dick Geary, Percy Brine and George Newton. All rode for Fleetwood, the track Mike is researching.

**James Gooderham**, 3 Riverview Road, Harkstead, Ipswich IP9 1BL is seeking details of Rayleigh 4 Team Tournament 1.8.1953; Norwich v Ipswich 18.8.1956; Ipswich v Newpool 4.8.1964; Anglia TV Trophy 19.6.1965.

**Darren Riley**, 9 Guernsey Farm Drive, Woking, Surrey, GU21 4BE is 11

seeking details of Barrow v Sunderland 20.8.1974 and the whereabouts of George Graham an ex-promoter.

**John Pearson**, 123A Woodhouse Lane, Brighouse, West Yorkshire, HD6 3TP is seeking details of car speedway / midget cars. Can we suggest you contact John Hyam (see Vintage Speedway Magazine) as he is working on a similar exercise. (Car speedway was featured at Marine Gardens, Edinburgh 1938 it featured at Stepps Stadium, near Glasgow and Glasgow Ashfield in 1953. It was staged at Motherwell in 1954. It is possible it was staged at Glasgow White City about 1937 - 1938.)

**Mike Terran**, 5280 North West 7th Street, Apartment 401, Miami, Florida, 33126, USA seeks confirmation of the following Southern League scores : 1929 - 31/7 Lea Bridge v Wembley (30 - 39); 7/8 v Crystal Palace (31 - 32); 10/8 Crystal Palace v Lea Bridge (34 - 29). 1930 - 5/6 Leicester Stadium v West Ham (30 - 22); 4/7 Hall Green v Lea Bridge (33 - 21); 23/7 Lea Bridge v Hall Green (29 - 21); 30/8 High Beech v Southampton (27 - 25). 1931 - 10/10 Crystal Palace v High Beech (31 - 15). Confirmation of National League scores 1935 - 13/4 Harringay v New Cross (44 - 27); 29/ 6 v New Cross (42 - 29); 5/6 New Cross v Harringay (38 - 33); 28/8 v Harringay (30 - 41); 1937 - 28/4 New Cross v Wimbledon (48 - 35); 3/5 Wimbledon v New Cross (40 - 42). Mike would appreciate a source of your information and, if possible, a match report.

**Eric Abbott**, 5 Ryedale Avenue, Knottingley WF11 0LN 01977 675404 is looking for any details for Plymouth 1935 and 1937.

**Eric Watson**, 43 Hammonds Green, Totton, Southampton, SO40 3SU wants information on team colours (TC), logos on race jackets (L), and team names (N) : Nottingham Southern League 1930 - 31 Provincial League 1936 - 37 National League Division Two 1938 TC,L,N; Sheffield Northern League 1929 - 31 National league 1932 - 33 National League Division Two 1938 - 39 TC,L,N. Stamford Bridge Southern League 1929 - 31, National League 1932, TC,L, N. Plymouth National League 1932-34, Provincial League 1935, TC,L,N. Hanley Northern League 1929, National League Div 2 1939, TC,L,N. Walthamstow National League 1934, TC,L,N. Wembley 2 National League Div 2 1934, TC,L,N. Harringay 2 National League Div 2 1934, TC,L, N. Warrington Northern League 1930, TC,L,N. West Ham 2 National League Div 2 1934, TC,L,N. White City(London) Southern League 1929 Red, White, Yellow, L, N. White City Manchester Northern League 1929-30, TC,L,N. West Ham Southern League 1929- 31, National League 1932-35, National

League Division 1 1936- 39,TC,L,N. Wimbledon 2 National League Division 2 1934, TC,L,N. Wombwell Northern League 1930 TC,L,N.

**The Editors** wonder if anyone can throw some light on a venue called Harlington 1932 - 1934 - Amateur Open and Hendon - 1937 - Training which are suggested as omissions by **Mike Terran**. **14**

### Recollections

The early wireless stations were emerging at the same time as dirt track racing and it is not surprising radio should be interested in the new sport. However, the following penned by the late **Norrie Isbister** appears to have been broadcast over three years after the first phase of dirt track racing died out in Scotland in 1932. Norrie was also involved in a radio broadcast in 1950 when "Round and Round They Go," a programme featuring Ken Le Breton and others was given an airing on Radio Scotland. A script of the 1935 broadcast makes interesting reading. "I" stands for Isbister, one of the Scottish dirt-track "stars" of three years ago. Good evening, everybody. I hope some of you remember me when I was racing on the Scottish dirt-tracks - sorry they call them speedways now. I haven't raced on a dirt track since 1932, when the last dirt track closed in Glasgow. The Edinburgh speedway closed down just before that, and we haven't had any dirt-track racing in Scotland since, though it is still a popular sport in England and Australia.

I won't forget, though, the thrills I had when I was dirt-track racing. It was certainly an exciting sport, and I met some of the finest men you could meet anywhere. If any of you are dirt track fans, you'll recollect the names of Sprouts Elder, Billy Galloway, Frank Varey, Buzz Hibberd, Drew McQueen and the rest of the bunch.

Talking of Sprouts Elder, I remember one time when I had met him three times in one evening. Sprouts Elder, for those of you who don't know, is a giant American, and could he ride the dirt-track! Yes, there was always lots of fun going round when you raced Sprouts. Well, anyway, this was a night in 1929, and I had just got delivery of a new bike that day. Now, when you got a new bike, you had to change the gear ratio right away to suit the track you were riding on, but I had no time for that so had to ride in second gear.

The first event, as usual, was the handicap race. I had got through the heats to the final of this race and had to meet Sprouts, so I got the lead right away. I held that lead, too, for three laps, but that was nothing unusual, for one of Sprouts' favourite games was to stick on your tail right till the last lap then let it go. He never made the pace himself. Anyway, I broadside round the second last bend, just three-quarters of a lap to go. There was a nasty bump in the track just at that bend. I was still lying over at an angle when I smacked this bump good and proper. Off came my rear chain and that finished me.

Sprouts won, of course, and came up to me in the pits later and said "That was galdarn hard luck. I'd never have caught you." Well, there was nothing more to be done about that. I got the bike ready for the scratch race then, when the scratch race came along I got **15**

through to the final and there was Sprouts Elder waiting for me again. This time I was second to Sprouts. My arms were getting pretty tired with the new bike. You see, you were used to a certain riding position, so that when you got a new bike it was pretty sore on your arms at first. But we were asked to have a match race, so I agreed to meet Sprouts for a third time. We got away after a few false starts. As usual Sprouts let me take the lead. I glanced round after a bit and saw I was a good bit ahead. I took full advantage of this and I was still leading at the end of three laps. Seeing I was the Glasgow boy, the crowd were roaring themselves hoarse by this time. As I came round the last bend I thought, "I've got to keep it up now." So I went flat out down the straight, instead of doing my usual broadside and sliding to the outside of the track, I kept close to the white line and thought, "If Sprouts is going to get past me, he's going round the outside." I finished the race and looked round, but there was no Sprouts to be seen. I carried on round the track and then came on Sprouts at the east bend. He was standing beside his bike looking sort of lost. He told me afterwards that when he was coming round he had felt he was cutting things too fine. But just then he hit the same bump as I did, somersaulted over the handlebars and landed on his head. That finished the race for him.

Well, you would think that was enough for one night, but I was asked to make an attempt on the lap record after that. My arms were very sore by this time, but I thought I might as well have a bang at it. I was going round in good style when I felt my left arm weaken and my hand dropped off the handlebar. I just couldn't hold it any longer. So I finished the course holding on with one hand. No, I didn't beat the record. I was two-tenths of a second outside it.

The dirt track got the name of being dangerous, but I was only once in hospital myself. I was in a collision and got concussion. I wasn't very bad because I was in hospital on the Wednesday and was riding again on the Saturday. Oh yes, I enjoyed the dirt track, and I was sorry to see it close down. I've still got some of my fan mail. Dirt track riders used to get fan mail just like the film stars. If you did a good deal of racing, you got at least six letters a day.

Some people ask me if I would go back to the dirt track racing now, if it started again in Scotland - and, mind you, I see no reason why it shouldn't be, because there's a public for it. Well, if I was asked. I'd be tempted! Good night everybody.

## Coventry's First Speedway : Lythall's Lane (Part One)

Part one of **Colin Parker's** article tells us of the pioneer Coventry track. Dirt track racing at the Foleshill Greyhound racing Stadium, Lythall's Lane was first seen on July 21st 1928. **16**

Like many contemporary speedway tracks it was constructed on the inside of a greyhound track in a newly opened arena. The Foleshill Stadium opened for greyhound racing on Easter Saturday, 7th April 1928.

The birth of the stadium was not without its problems as there had been a great deal of local opposition to betting which was, after all, the main impetus for greyhound racing. A number of religious groups campaigned against the proposed track in the early months of the year.

The local Council was sympathetic to the objectors but could do little to stop the Lythall's Lane venture. They had refused to allow the Butts Cricket Club use the Council owned ground for greyhound racing.

Objectors even tried to raise Government objection to greyhound racing, but, the this never materialised. A Government study into betting associated with greyhound racing did not see any problems and no veto was forthcoming.

The Foleshill Stadium was designed and constructed to a high standard. The site occupied an area considerably greater than that of Coventry City's Highfield Road football ground and was equipped with three large grandstands, refreshment rooms, kennels and ancillary buildings all smartly finished in red tiles. The track was illuminated by arc lights and floodlit greyhound racing was staged every Monday, Thursday and Saturday evening. Originally it was planned to build the speedway track on the lower part of the spectator banking outside the dog track but the major problem was how to accommodate the covered gangway into which the hare disappeared at the conclusion of its circuit. The only possible solution was to build the track inside the dog track rather than outside it.

Within two months the new speedway track had been built and surfaced in black cinders. The circuit measured one fifth of a mile.

The promoting company was Midland Speedways Ltd. (Manchester) which also operated Leicester Stadium. The manager and clerk of the course was Jack Marshall who had been a road racer and winner of the 1907 and 1908 Isle of Man TT races.

Coventry's first speedway meeting was opened at 2.45pm on Saturday 21st July by C.P. Dodson the winner of the 1928 Senior TT. Apart from a strong breeze the weather was good and three thousand of a crowd gathered eager to see what this thrilling new sport of motor cycle dirt track racing, or "dracing" as some were calling it, was all about. In the event a slightly confused crowd saw mainly local novice riders with little or no previous dirt track experience attempt, mostly unsuccessfully, to broadside a wide variety of machines round tight bends on a soft and deeply rutted track.

Many came to grief, but in these early days crashes were part of the attraction. (perhaps they still are.) Everyone was excited by the "thrills and spills."

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However, New Zealand ace Spencer "Smoky" Stratton and Australian Irvine Jones did their best to drive their machines in sideways fashion around the bends. They met in a series of £100 challenge races, an enormous amount of money in 1928. A brand new Triumph motor cycle could be bought for under £40.

The magazine The Motor Cycle reported that Stratton "on one of his exhibition rides, hit one of the many bad bumps and came the most terrific purler without personal injury, but effectively bending his machine." Gus Kuhn and Manchester's (Norman ?) Dawson were the best of the English riders and others who competed were Arthur Jervis, Johnny Leete, Les Baldock and Cyril Lord. Stratton and Jones used the dirt track Douglas machine and Leete used a new dirt track Coventry Victor machine. Most of the English lads were still using stripped down roadsters. Kuhn used a 348cc Calthorpe and other makes mentioned included AJS, Montgomery, Scott, Rex Acme and Humber. The last named was used by Squib Burton.

Arthur Jervis and his brother Hubert owned the Gosford Garage in East Street, Coventry, an agency for AJS. Arthur was a well known grass track racer and stunt rider. Performing at local motorcycle gymkhanas Arthur would, for example, ride his AJS round the field standing on the tank. Johnny Leete was a brilliant and inventive engineer who prepared Arthur Jervis' engines. Johnny's other claim to fame is that he was solely responsible for redesigning the Coventry built Rudge dirt track bike which ousted the Douglas in 1930.

The first meeting at Lythall's Lane was not very well organised. The Midland Daily Telegraph reported "Riders changed colours in a most muddling fashion with seldom any explanation given over the loudspeakers" and the purchase of a meeting programme proved to be of little help in following the proceedings. This was not entirely surprising when one considers that up to fifty competitors took part in around thirty races and both men and machines varied enormously in experience, reliability and suitability. Early newspaper adverts had cheerfully invited "racing men" and "you speed merchants" to turn up on Saturdays when special bonuses would be paid to "any rider who can give spectacular exhibitions!"

The day before the first meeting, the M.D.T. announced the amalgamation of the four dirt - track racing companies - The British Dirt Track Racing Association Ltd., based in Manchester with tracks at White City, Manchester; Bolton; Blackpool and Bristol; Dirt Track Speedways Ltd., with tracks at West Ham, Glasgow and a interest in Edinburgh; Midland Speedways Ltd., and Northern Speedways which controlled Middlesbrough and Salford. The

BDTRA would run in direct competition with A.J. Hunting's International Speedways Ltd.

“Speed, Broadside Thrills!”

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Foleshill's second meeting, under BDTRA control on Saturday, 28th July, again included challenge races between Jervis of Coventry, Dawson of Manchester and Spencer Stratton. There were inter-city races between Jervis and Baldock of Coventry and Dawson and Firth (Frith ?) of Manchester; as well as Junior (novice) and Senior (experts) races, each including machines of differing capacities from 350cc to 500cc. There was also the incredible Dot Cowley. Seventeen years old Miss Cowley competed against A.W. Jervis in a challenge sidecar race and won by default after Jervis' machine developed engine trouble.

Two thousand people came to see this second meeting which took over three hours to complete. Most races were over five laps (one mile), the riders being pushed directly into the race. The loose surface provided little grip to enable the rear wheel to “fire up” the engine so a good start depended very much on the weight and strength of the pushers. The man lucky enough to get his motor started first not only gained a valuable lead but could also take the favoured inside line. The MDT wondered whether there would be any objection to riders lining up with their engines running, but at this time many of the experts' bikes were not fitted with clutches and those that had clutches would have probably burned them out very quickly.

Nevertheless clutch starts would not be too far away in the future.

The second meeting was much better organised than the first but the track was still far from ideal for true broadsideing. The corners were tight and continued to cut up badly despite the efforts of a small army of rakers. Consequently it was almost as quick, at least for novices, to tour round the bends in road-race style, rather than to attempt to slide round the corners. The experts, however, Stratton and Sherlock, gave “thrilling exhibitions” of broadsideing on their Douglas Special and Jervis was learning fast.

Average winning times for five laps were around 2 minutes 20 seconds. Why had this slightly crazy sport of sliding racing motor cycles around a small loose-surface oval taken off so spectacularly in Australia and was now doing exactly the same in Britain ? Unlike road racing, spectators can see the entire race and are so close to the action that they can almost study the expression on a rider's face as he gets into a vicious wobble or overslides and comes down. At floodlit meetings “machines gleaming under the lights, set off with a roar, engines screaming, shooting like meteors into the bend! Flames would spout from the exhausts and sparks fly from their steel shod left boots as they race neck and neck, skidding, bumping and swerving as their machines raised clouds of dust. To see them racing round the bends with their handlebars almost touching the ground is one of the most

thrilling sights that any form motor racing has yet provided. In fact they lean over so far that sometimes they actually graze their knees on the track.” “The Motor Cycle” regarding this dirt-track business to

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have “the spectacular value probably higher than that of any rival show in the world!” Spectacular praise, but Lythall's Lane was not quite attaining these heights, partly because racing took place in the daylight only. TBC

**We Won't Sling You A Deafie !!!**

Glasgow lingo means that we will not turn a deaf ear to what you have to say. **Fred Paul** from Plymouth suggests that we add the name of Peter Lansdale to the list of veteran riders. Fred recounts Peter's career from Southampton in 1947 to Exeter in 1963. Once he retired Peter went on to be Exeter team manager and after that became co-promoter with Wally Maudsley. Fred is sure that Peter was well into his fifties before he packed in riding. (Great stories about Peter were: 1. his tale of winning a race by half a wheel which in his accent sounded like “Arfur Weel” and his listener reportedly asking him - Who did Arthur Weal ride for ?; 2. his riding in a race when the track lights failed and his coming to a halt clear of the safety fence guided by the lights from glowing cigarette ends in the crowd.)

On the same topic the Editors recall that Doug Templeton was presented with his 65th birthday cake by Barry Briggs at the Powderhall Golden Greats meeting in 1995. Edinburgh pioneer Papa Forsyth was 48 when he took up dirt track racing at Marine Gardens in 1928.

**Terry Campbell** of Leek in Staffordshire tells us that Weymouth's Radipole Lane venue did not become a supermarket site as planning permission was turned down. The site was swapped to the local football club and is now the site of a squared off football pitch. Thanks to everyone else who pointed this out - we always stand to be corrected.

**Deborah Cherry** would like us to pass on her thanks to a mystery person from Wales who sent her copies of information about Fay Tylour and Eva Asquith racing at Cardiff White City in 1929. Deborah apologies for being unable to decipher the person's signature.

**Glynn Shailes** questions Bill Lamb's recollections re the Tamworth race jacket as he states that between 1947 until 1949 the Tamworth colours were Blue and White with a Red leaping greyhound. and their nickname was “The Hounds.” Glynn recalls seeing Tamworth riders at Poole in 1948 and at Oxford and Swindon in 1949 sporting these colours. The Poole Handbook for 1949 carries a picture of Tamworth wearing the Hounds race jacket. Glynn suggests that Bill is a year out and that the race jacket Bill saw was the 1950 version as it was that year that Birmingham's Les Marshall took over Tamworth. Glynn has confirmed this with a one time Tamworth fan he knows who owns a leaping hound race jacket.

**Glynn** confirms that Peter “Gundy” Harris mentioned by Keith Farman did indeed ride for Wolverhampton and later went on to ride for Yarmouth and briefly for Coventry before returning home to Australia. Glynn considers the Peter Harris who rode for Newport and Long Eaton in the 1960s was not Gundy Harris. (Gundy rode in Scotland 1950. Jim H)

**Eric Watson** supports the views of Glynn Shailes. For the record Peter Orpwood raced in the World Championship rounds at Old Meadowbank in 1949 and 1950. Orpwood was a Sheffield rider in 1950.

**Bob Rowe**, suggests Christer Lofqvist is the correct spelling not Lofquist. **C.V. Chubb** of Plaistow, London wonders if anyone remembers proposals by Villa and Benneli, Italian manufacturers, to make speedway engines. Mr Chubb notes the mention of a Huskvarna machine which brings to mind his seeing Bengt Jansson using the Hedland engine at Cradley in 1968 and tells us that Nils Hedland was a Huskvarna engineer. (Can I clarify the reference to the Huskvarna, which was inserted into Chris Byles article by me, was a mention of a JAP copy seen at one of the British Motorcycle Federation displays at Peterborough. I think this bike was owned by the late Richard Forshaw. Jim Henry.) Mr Chubb mentions the English Cole engine built by Howard Cole Senior and mentions the PPT motor built by tuner Phil Pratt. Can anyone give us a few bits of information on the Cole and PPT motors? He also mentions Larry Ross using a New Zealand built motor in Aussie and Kiwi country. Again, can you shed any light on this motor? Finally Mr Chubb considers the Red House, Hannington venue should be listed under Northampton, not Kettering - anyone else any views on this?

**Alan Goodman** poses one for you race jacket buffs. Alan thinks the No. 18 race jacket recently auctioned at Wembley was not a World Final race jacket but one meant to be used at a Continental Final staged at Wembley when a Czech rider pulled out and Ron Mountford took his place. Can anyone comment on this one from the 1960s.

Re **Vic Butcher**'s recent Southampton article England v Australia - Roger May's score was 4 not 5. Re league match Southampton v Stamford Bridge 17/7/1929 Vic has discovered Saints did use both reserves in Heat 8. Jimmy Hayes and Ernie Rickman were both injured in Heat 6 and replaced in Heat 8 by Cecil Bounds and Clarrie Eldridge. (We will have comments on the article penned by Eric Watson in the next Researcher.)

**Jeremy Jackson** from St.Austell (Trelawny Country Now!) considers Adrian Kessell to be the most senior citizen in speedway who still turns out with “The Men In Black!” Adrian still turns out on grass and has a go at the odd hill climb as well at the age of 75 years young.

**Alan Jones**, who hopes to draw his work on the history of speedway in Leicester into a book before too much longer has a new phone number - 01509 561521 and Email alanjones24@hotmail.com.

## Cumbrian Dirt Track Activity

**Adrian Pavey** gives us an insight into the pre-war activity in Cumbria which in these days was Cumberland, Westmorland and a detached part of Lancashire. The beaches of the Solway Firth in the north and the Furness Peninsula in the south were popular venues for beach racing in the early 1920s. Approximately 15 miles north of Workington is the coastal hamlet of Skinburness. Local residents can recall informal beach races being held there in 1927. Similar events took place around Barrow as early as 1924, three years prior to the well documented sand race meetings at Droylsden, Manchester and Camberley Heath in Surrey and well before the first cinder meeting at High Beech in 1928. These beach races witnessed the formative years of some of the pioneer riders from Cumbria notably Frank Charles from Barrow. Further north in Aspatria, Roland (Rol) Stobbart bought his first bike in 1928 when aged 18. He acquired a two year old Cotton machine and he took to the fields to practice the new sport of dirt track racing he had read about in the contemporary publications like “Motor Cycle.” He also competed at Skinburness.

Frank Charles appears to have made his debut on the beaches in 1924 and also raced on grass at various Lancashire venues before taking to the cinders at Blackpool in 1928. He actually passed the chequered flag first in his first race but was sensationally excluded for dangerous riding because he looked over his shoulder during a race. (This was an excludable offence in speedway until relatively recently.)

Five months after High Beech, speedway style racing came to Carlisle. On 21st July the city hosted its first stadium grass track event at the Harraby Greyhound Stadium. The meeting was, like those staged at Barrow and Hull White City, designed to gauge interest in proposals to lay a permanent cinder track and stage dirt track racing. The local newspapers ran adverts for “Australian Style Motorcycle Racing” and a contemporary photograph of Harraby looks as though a track existed inside the greyhound circuit but there are no details of any meetings being staged there.

Frank Charles progressed from Blackpool and became a regular at many of the northern venues notably Sheffield, Leeds and the Manchester tracks. He was a member of a number of the 1929 league teams as they either closed or pulled out of the competition. In all he rode for Manchester White City, Belle Vue, Burnley, Preston and Leeds. Barrow was the first town in Cumbria to definitely stage dirt track racing. However, as mentioned above, the promotion used the evening of Thursday 12th June 1930 to “test the water.” The crowds turned out in

numbers to watch Rol Stobbart aboard his Rudge race to victory. A week later the crowds came back to watch action on the 415 yards cinder track and the first true speedway meeting took place at Holker Street.

Forty miles up the coast in Whitehaven, plans were being made for another "Thrilling Motor Cycle Race Meeting." Under the auspices of the Whitehaven and District Motor Club, local motor cycle enthusiast, Harry Meageen (winner of the 1928 Isle of Man TT), had organised a grass track meeting on the town's Colliery Recreation Ground. The event was staged on Saturday 5th July 1930 as the grand finale of the Whitehaven Carnival and all the proceeds went to the local hospital.

The meeting was very well organised and run under ACU rules. The programme featured a host of local motorcyclist racers from all over seeking to secure some of the excellent prize money. Racing was organised into three separate classes and the winner of each event won £5. Not bad when you consider that the local miners would struggle to earn that in a week.

The local newspaper described it as "Whitehaven Speedway..... the most exciting event in this area for years." A crowd of between 4 - 5,000, some paying as much as 2 shillings (10p) for a grandstand seat, witnessed high speed thrills and plenty of spills.

The 430 yards circuit was very narrow causing untold problems for the less experienced competitors. Mr Wilson of Carlisle and B. Crabtree of Kendal collided spectacularly on the last bend of the last lap of heat two. Both riders ended up in the local West Cumberland Hospital with facial injuries. They were joined by Frank Allison of Brough who crashed into sand bags and broke a collar bone. In addition to human injury a bike caught fire during a race and its rider had to jump clear.

It was Roland Stobbart who stole the show. In the final of the "Unlimited" event his dirt-track Rudge was proving difficult to start and he was left at the start line. He had to push it to fire it up then chased after the others giving the finest exhibition of speedway and "skidding" the crowd could wish for as he picked off the opposition one by one. He recorded the fastest lap in his chase. Meeting results: 350cc G. Skirrow, R.Stobbart, H.Skirrow.

Unlimited cc R.Stobbart, H.Skirrow, W.Clague, Harry Elbeck.

Side Valve/Two Stroke G.Vingoe, "Nibs" Boyd, T.Ferguson.

There was also an eight lap race between local rivals D.C.Benson (Whitehaven) and Vingoe (Workington). Vingoe on a 500cc Scott shot from the start and maintained a lead for five laps but he was overhauled by Benson on a 500cc Douglas. It seemed Benson had the race in his pocket but he fell on the final bend and Vingoe roared past to win and pocket the £5 prize.

To be continued.

## Publications

**Howard Jones** published his latest volume on defunct tracks in December. This time Howard looks at Rochdale, a venue with an interesting past. Copies from Speed Away Promotions, 26 Cheviot Avenue, Lytham St. Annes, Lancashire, FY9 4TE. Cost £2.00. Howard has started a new publication, Speedway Programme Monthly, on 1st February. It cost £2.50 per copy or a subscription is £30 a year. Howard is also working on a book on Ellesmere Port Speedway. Cheques should be made payable to H. Jones.

**Friends of Edinburgh Speedway** published two more Tales From Scottish Shale - one on Reidar Eide and the other on Big Meetings in Scotland. These cost £1.00 plus £0.30 p & p each. Also available is the Edinburgh Speedway Handbook 2000 priced £6.00 plus £1.00 p & p. Cheques / P.O. should be made payable to Friends of Edinburgh Speedway and the publications are available from Ian Moultray, 24 Moredun Park Gardens, Edinburgh.

**Jeff Holmes** is publishing another four part volume of The Ashfield Angle this winter. This is available from Jeff at 24 Castle Road, Glasgow, G77 6DQ cost £10 for four editions inclusive of p & p. Also available is the Tigers Yearbook 2000 for £6.00 inclusive of p & p. Cheques should be made payable to Jeff Holmes.

By way of interest we understand that **Norman Jacobs'** book on Speedway in East Anglia has been a phenomenal success, far outselling the publishers' expectations. We understand that the run to date has been about 4,000 copies. Work is ongoing on companion volumes for London and Scotland.

## Can We Do It Again ?

**Alan Bates** Flat G, 14 Radnor Park Avenue, Folkestone 01303 253924 is now one match short of completing his Walthamstow research needing Dublin Eagles v Walthamstow 23.5.1951 heat details. They may be in an Irish newspaper in Colindale or perhaps in a programme somewhere. Can you help and repeat our success with Keith Farman's last missing Yarmouth item ? Alan intends to research Walthamstow's short 1934 season and would welcome any information.

**Deadline for items for next edition is : 1st May 2001.**

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## 1946 Northern Trophy

First Round				Second Round				Final			
Newcastle	48	Glasgow	48	Glasgow	54	Norwich	42	Sheffield	50	Norwich	45
Glasgow	50	Newcastle	46	Norwich	59	Glasgow	36	Norwich	61	Sheffield	35
Aggregate	Glasgow 98 - 94			Aggregate	Norwich 101 - 90			<b>Winners</b>	<b>Norwich 106 - 85</b>		
Sheffield	60	Birmingham	35								
Birmingham	46	Sheffield	50								
Aggregate	Sheffield 110 - 81										
Middlesbrough	48	Norwich	47								
Norwich	62	Middlesbrough	32								
Aggregate	Norwich 109 - 80										

## 1946 Northern League

## League Table

Home	Away	Birmingham	Glasgow	Middlesbrough	Newcastle	Norwich	Sheffield	Team	R	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Birmingham		xxxxxx	46 - 37	42 - 42	45 - 38	43 - 41	48 - 35	Middlesbrough	20	12	4	4	946.5	722.5	28
		xxxxxx	39 - 45	33 - 51	44 - 39	28 - 55	46 - 38	Sheffield	20	11	1	8	828.5	851.5	23
Glasgow		40 - 42	xxxxxx	34 - 50	40 - 44	44 - 38	58 - 26	Norwich	20	10	1	9	880	793	21
		58 - 26	xxxxxx	37 - 47	52 - 32	40 - 44	37 - 47	Birmingham	20	9	1	10	740	925	19
Middlesbrough		55 - 28	54 - 30	xxxxxx	40 - 44	49 - 34	49 - 34	Newcastle	20	8	1	11	803	806	17
		65 - 18	52 - 30	xxxxxx	57 - 26	42 - 42	52 - 32	Glasgow	20	6	0	14	811	865	12
Newcastle		40 - 41	44 - 40	42 - 42	xxxxxx	48 - 36	48 - 34								
		52 - 31	46 - 38	33 - 49	xxxxxx	51 - 33	41 - 43								
Norwich		58 - 26	41 - 43	50 - 32	51 - 33	xxxxxx	42 - 40								
		52 - 32	51 - 32	44 - 40	51 - 32	xxxxxx	40 - 44								
Sheffield		39 - 44	45 - 39	43.5 - 39.5	50 - 34	45 - 39	xxxxxx								
		45 - 39	48 - 36	42 - 42	49 - 35	45 - 38	xxxxxx								

## 1946 ACU Cup

## ACU Cup Table

Home	Away	Birmingham	Glasgow	Middlesbrough	Newcastle	Norwich	Sheffield	Team	R	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Birmingham		xxxxxx	62 - 34	56 - 40	57 - 38	48 - 48	49 - 47	Norwich	10	6	2	2	491	428	14
Glasgow		47 - 36	xxxxxx	42 - 54	51 - 45	37 - 46	51 - 32	Middlesbrough	10	7	0	3	493	453	14
Middlesbrough		61 - 35	54 - 41	xxxxxx	54 - 42	55 - 41	51 - 45	Sheffield	10	6	0	4	499	453	12
Newcastle		66 - 29	47 - 36	46 - 50	xxxxxx	42 - 42*	43 - 50	Birmingham	10	4	1	5	455	491	9
Norwich		51 - 45	64 - 32	55 - 28	48 - 46	xxxxxx	51 - 45	Glasgow	10	3	0	7	412	505	6
Sheffield		58 - 38	55 - 41	51 - 45	57 - 39	52 - 43	xxxxxx	Newcastle	10	2	1	7	454	474	5