

From Chas. Damyon

L E T T E R S

Found Bill Underhill's letter re. the pre-war 12s very interesting but a little incorrect. I would therefore like to put the record straight.

In 1938, also I believe in 1937 (not quite sure about the latter) the 12 hour was stopped in favour of a 200 mile time trial. In the 1938 event it was by Johnny Fuller in competition record time, he caught and passed me whilst I was riding alongside Charlie Tapp of the Woolwich, encouraging him to keep going as he was having a bad time, for he had to finish (which he did) for the Woolwich to win the KCA B.A.R. team award. I got the individual Championship, still have the replica of the B.A.R. given to every winner.

Bill states that the 1939 event was not held because the Min. of Defence had clamped down on all movement, sorry Bill, you're wrong, cos' it was held on August 20th, 1939, two weeks before war was declared on September 3rd, and I won it. Bill handed me a drink on the A28 coming up the hill from the railway bridge into Ashford. In that event I had the pleasure of catching and dropping Johnny Fuller. It was Johnny's clubmate, Ted Lawrence of the Southborough, who was second in that event. Ted had run out time and finished between the railway bridge outside Headcorn and the now airfield crossroads. He was sitting on the grass verge when I passed him with a few minutes to go, and gave me a shout of encouragement as I went by followed by my runners out on a tandem. In those days there was no finishing circuit. We used to come back to Headcorn, make detours from there, Frittenden, etc, and when a rider had about fifteen minutes to go, the runners out - usually tandem pairs for the faster riders - would synchronize their wathes with Flick Cash the timekeeper, follow their appointed rider and then call upon him to stop when his 12 hours up, making a note of the number of the nearest telegraph post. I finished between the airfield crossroads and Curteis Corner in 1939, with a distance of 221 miles 1250 yards.

The next time I met Ted Lawrence was in Cairo in 1944. We were both on leave and in Cairo to see the first Grand Prix de Gerzeria organised by the Buckshee Wheelers on the roads closed by the police of Gerzeria Island, Cairo. Unfortunately Ted had lost an eye in the desert fighting.

More about '12s' from Bill Underhill - A DAY AT THE RACES

The 12, which hangs on like grim death although threatened with extinction survives, in Kent at least, by the 'gathering of the clans'. Those of former years, some with larger waist measurements, others with the fashionable Ash Blond Hair (used to be known as grey), several ladies with more than one chin, and the whole crowd made up of those who competed and organised many moons back under much different conditions, although in recent years there has been some very hard work put in by dedicated officials, one in particular, to secure the use of the Village Hall at Bethersden and to establish something that money cannot purchase, i.e. the goodwill of the Good People of Bethersden.

To the 12. Esther had handed out the various jobs and in my case I was able to sit and yarn with many of the 'Golden Oldies'. May Montgomery for one. Up from Devon, to where she and Dick had retired some 10 or 12 years back, only for Dick to pass on within a short while. May has not had the best of health in recent years but has never lost interest in the great game. No slouch in her active days (she rode Sutton Valence in many reliability trials) she recalled the era of the Kent R.C.'s prowess on road and track, and the names flowed out with delight. "Topper" Agg, Freddie Waller, Jerry Knott, his brother Larry, Hughie Prior, Geoff Jones, the Low brothers and many more, lastly that remarkable man, Jim Siburn. Still going strong in his mid seventies, and faster than ever with the Hillingdon CC. Jim always impressed me by virtue of his dedicated team spirit. On one notable occasion when promised motor transport had failed to materialise, riding from Lewisham to Headcorn for the sake of his club team. In spite of his late start they brought home the spoils and kept the club in the running for the KCA B.A.R. Team, as well as the individual championship, which needless to say, he won. All this fifty years ago. May keeps up to date with the cycling press and is looking forward to the winter social functions. It is May's considered opinion the the Kent R.C. could still be functioning if they had broken away from the hidebound idea of 'men only' (not the only club to suffer).

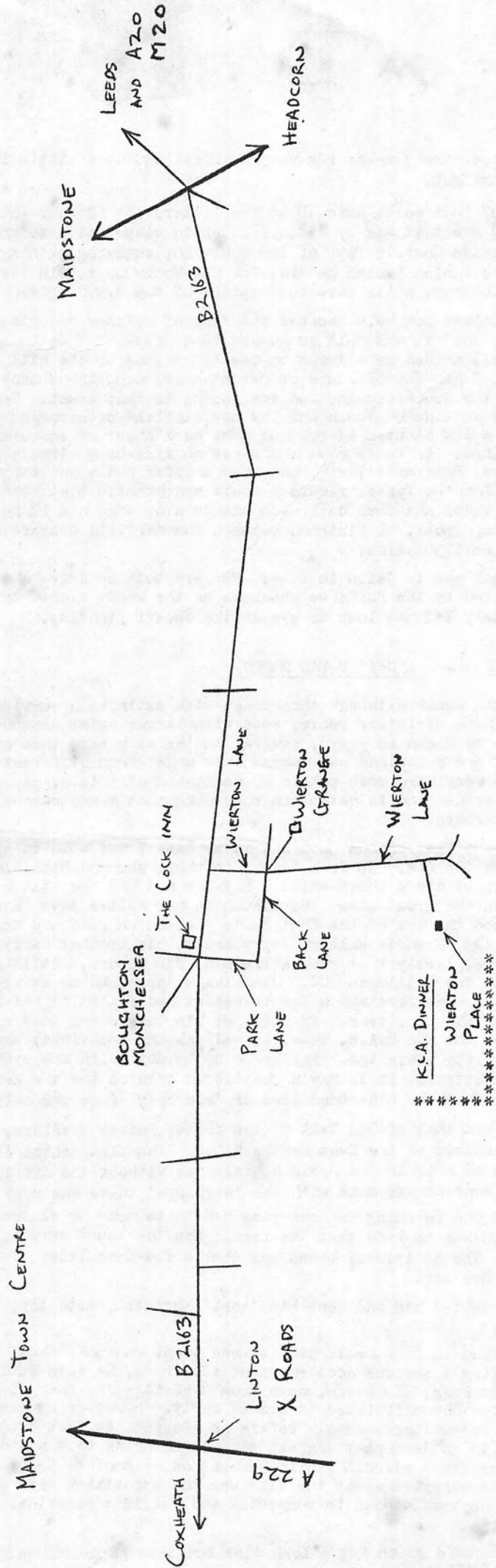
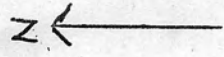
Another face not much altered was that of Don Tait of the former Medway Wheelers, who organised the first open 12 in Kent, under the auspices of the Kent Centre N.C.U. The idea behind it was to give the all conquering Wheelers trio the chance of a 12 in the B.B.A.R. calendar without the difficulty of travel. Petrol was on ration, and although contact was made with the 'High Ups' there was none available beyond the allowance. In consequence a lot of the fetching and carrying had to be done by clubmen on bikes. Don made a good job of the event and his reward was to know that the result was the counting one for the National Competition for the Wheelers trio. The additional bonus was that a few days later his wife, Kath, presented him with a son and definitely made his day.

Within a few years his firm promoted him and sent him 'west', Bristol, actually, and the area lost a good official in more than one job.

Nancy and Lou Pique had travelled in from Deal, nice to see them. Another hardy annual was Ron Dane of the Faversham CC. Still cycling after a serious accident some time back, he says he doesn't get down the hooks these days but sees more. Tom Bray, of course, down from Cambridge for the job which he has made his own. In the fifty or so twelves, Tom has officiated in around forty. Moreover he has brought the ability to obtain a finishing time for any competitor, usually before he has got his feet out of the straps. Doubtless the principle of the circuit finish does play a great part in bringing this state of affairs about. To keep the business in the family, the first circuit finish was put on by brother Geoff when he did a stint as TT Sec of the Association. What did surprise me at the time was the opposition from some quarters. Often the way when something different from the traditional is suggested and put into practice, then grudgingly approved of when successful.

Well, the "do you remembers?" could go on for a long time but some hardworking KCA official has got to decipher this and get in print, so I'll finish now.

APPROX. SCALE
3 ins = 1 mile



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