

## CHAPTER ONE

# 1883 - 1933

### **Formation and Early History.**

On Saturday, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1883, there was held at Alexandra Park, Manchester, a Great Meet of Cyclists. Patronised by the Mayor of Manchester and many members of the City Council, it was one of the social events of the year, and attracted 50,000 spectators. The West Manchester Bicycle Club, eldest of those present, headed a procession of nearly six hundred cyclists-including several lady tricyclists - which, after a ceremonial ride past a platform from which His Worship acknowledged the salutes of the captains, made a double circuit of the park and continued its progress through cheering crowds to the City, where the proceedings concluded with a dinner and appropriate speeches.

Most of the thirty clubs present were in uniform – the “neat dark claret” of the Rusholme Bicycle Club is specially mentioned - and their movements were controlled by bugle calls. The whole pageantry of that fine summer afternoon must have been very impressive.

This Meet was not the first of its kind, nor even the first in Manchester, but it is important because there is little doubt that it acted as an inspiration to the handful of men who, one month later, formed the Club whose jubilee is now being celebrated.

The actual birthplace of the Club was the Albert Inn, Radnor Street, Hulme. Here lived Harry and Jack Feay, and in Boston Street, not far away, lived Jack Sherlock. Harry possessed a 56-inch Rudge bicycle - it had not yet become necessary to call them “ordinaries” - and Jack had recently been presented with a “Harrison’s latest, 50-inch, with roller bearings.” Sherlock, not so tall as his two friends, rode a 44-inch Illston “Royal Mail,” and the enthusiasm of the three was boundless.

The inaugural meeting was duly held at the “Albert,” and on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1883, Manchester Athletic Bicycle Club came into existence.

Sherlock was elected Captain; Jack Feay, Sub-Captain; and J. Taylor, Bugler. Harry Feay was the first hon. secretary, and G. L. Darwent took office as hon. treasurer. Darwent and J. H. Robinson each persuaded his father to be a Vice-President, and a similar honour was accepted by Professor T. Renshaw, instructor at the Y.M.C.A. gymnasium, with which several members of the newly-formed Club were already identified.

With all the assurance of youth the officials asked Mr. W. H. Houldsworth, M.P. (later Sir William Houldsworth) to be President, and having obtained his consent, settled down to spend the winter in putting the Club on a true and solid foundation.

### **Uniform.**

It was decided that the uniform should be an olive-green suit (military), huntsman’s cap with badge, and hose (black); and each member was required by rule to carry a whistle and cord. The original badge, or “gridiron” as it was nicknamed, was a monogram in silver of the letters M.A.B.C., and was two inches across. “We want something visible from a distance,” said Harry Feay, when he made the design. The subscription was half-a crown; and the first committee evidently was determined to stand no nonsense about it, Rule 6 stating mercilessly “that any member who shall not have paid his subscription be expelled from the Club.”

### **The First Club-run.**

The 1884 season commenced with a run to Rostherne, and on the Friday following - Good Friday - the Club set out on its first all-day excursion. The destination was Liverpool, and it is recorded that Tom Bagshaw acted as guide, Frank Guildford, an authority on routes, being absent. Tom's sense of direction was at fault, however, and the party lost its way soon after leaving Warrington. Miles of setts were encountered in the St. Helens district, and Liverpool was not reached until three o'clock in the afternoon, after over nine hours' riding. After a much-needed meal the party started back the way they had come-they knew no other; but the agony of the return journey was lessened by somebody discovering that one could go from St. Helens to Manchester by train.

This year's Manchester "Meet" was held in Seymour Grove, and M.A.B.C. paraded, 13 strong, in full uniform. Later in the same year they made an equally brave show at Liverpool and Birkenhead; but interest in the "monster meet" movement fell away towards the end of the following year, and within a very short time uniforms were discarded and clubs were content to be recognized by their badges or distinctive headgear. For a few years after this the Club adopted the white cap as official headgear. At one time there was a rule which said "No white cap, no attendance mark," which must have been somewhat difficult to enforce. The white cap was very conspicuous indeed; so much so that at least one club prohibited its being worn in races on the ground that it gave an unfair advantage to a rider, his approach being much more easily observed by his helpers than that of his fellow competitors.

### **Early 24-hour Rides.**

Two years after its foundation the Club commenced to offer medals to members who rode 150 miles, or more, in a day; and the performance of this feat soon came to be regarded almost as a qualification of membership.

The 24-hours was always taken as between midnight and midnight, and the route usually consisted of a run to Whitchurch via Chester, with an extension to Ludlow or Wellington. Towards the end of 1886 there appeared in the Press a record of these rides, from which it can be seen that no less than 20 members-almost the whole Club-were entitled to wear the silver star which marked the proved long-distance rider. The more modest were content to cover 160 miles or so, but among the faster men competition was very keen. Until the summer of 1886 the best all-day ride for the district stood to the credit of Cariton McDermot Smith, of the Rusholme Bicycle Club, at a distance of 223 miles, Club record being held by W. Reilly who had covered 206 miles; but in August of that year Dave Foulkes, of M. A. B. C., eclipsed this with a ride of 241 miles which stood for three years until beaten, in its turn, by a fellow clubman, W. Howe.

Foulkes' ride was without doubt one of the outstanding sporting achievements of the period, and the fullest details are still available. His route, which commenced at Brooks's Bar, lay between Manchester and Lichfield, by way of Chester, Shrewsbury, and Wellington, and he reached the furthestmost point, 124 miles, after exactly 12 hours' riding. On his return he passed through Shrewsbury at 4-20, checked at Chester with three hours still to go, and reached the milestone at Dunham Park just as his time expired.

Foulkes was mounted on a "Premier" safety bicycle, with solid tyres; and, in striking contrast to present-day custom, his costume was a complete suit of white flannel.

### **Path Racing-Sale Botanical Gardens.**

Active as they were on the road, the members of M.A.B.C. were just as well, if not better known on the path.

Many villages and small towns had grass-tracks, and at Sale Botanical Gardens there was a gravel track measuring five laps to the mile, unbanked of course, round which much fame was won. This track lay round a pond, in which was a small tree covered island, and if half the reminiscences of the old-timers are to be believed it was not unusual for races to be won and lost at a point where the judges' vision was obscured by the foliage! Jack Feay was the Club's star on the path in these days, scoring wins at Eccles, Blackley, Rochdale, Barnsley and other tracks; varying his programme with an occasional trip to the Isle of Man. F. H. Koenen, originally a member of an Amsterdam club and known as "The Flying Dutchman," and later J. Lawrence, J. Reilly, H. H. Spencer, D. C. Davies, and C. A. Fletcher upheld the Club's reputation in no uncertain manner.

### **The First Road Race.**

Not until the fourth year of its existence did the Club promote a road race, and the first attempt in this direction was a very haphazard affair. The distance was "about ten miles," the starting-point being at the top of Dunham Hill and the finish at Lostock Gralam. Most of the riders negotiated the first half-mile with their legs over the handlebar-the "ordinary" method of free-wheeling. Harold Jones won, Jack Paulding was second, and G. W. Howarth third. Jim Reilly, the scratch man, was nowhere; as a consequence of which the handicappers began to feel that gentle breeze of criticism which has been the reward of their kind ever since. Evidently the event was a success, as several road races at varying distances were promoted during the following years.

### **M.A.B.C. become Manchester Wheelers' Club.**

By the end of 1889, although only six years old, Manchester Athletic Bicycle Club had an enviable record of achievements behind it. A regular sequence of club-runs and races had been carried out since its foundation, the annual "Sports," destined to rank among the foremost of its kind in Europe, had already been set on its way; and on the social side the Dinner and the Annual Ball were well established. It was not without some misgivings, therefore, that the "Athletics" found themselves compelled to consider whether a change in title would not be advisable. The similarity of their name with those of Manchester Bicycle Club and Manchester Athletic Club became more confusing as these two younger clubs grew in importance, and soon the question was not "Shall we change our name?" but "What shall we call ourselves?" It was at length decided to import a word from America, and at the Annual General Meeting of 1890 Manchester Athletic Bicycle Club became Manchester Wheelers' Club.

### **Sefton-and-Dingle Match.**

The same Year saw road-racing at the summit of its popularity in the Manchester and Liverpool districts. Among the many clubs which had been formed, the Sefton-and-Dingle Bicycle Club, founded in 1880, had become by now one of the most important clubs in the North, and had a team of racing men who were extremely anxious to prove themselves unbeatable-which, it should be added, they subsequently did. A situation began to develop after the Sefton-and-Dingle Dinner, when their hon. secretary, Mr. F. W. Herbert, referred with pride to his club's victories over the Barrow Bicycle Club and the Rusholme men; which victories, he said, gave his club some little claim to the title of Premier Club of Liverpool, if not of the North of England. To show that his enthusiasm was due to something more than the influence of a good dinner and sparkling wine, there was issued, through *Wheeling*, a "challenge to Lancashire"; and it is interesting to note from the terms set out that some of the problems which, later, were to cause much debate among cycling politicians had

already begun to arise. The Sefton-and-Dingle challenged any club in Lancashire to a 25-miles race on the road, ten men aside, under the following conditions:-

- (i) The race to be for honour (“Bravo,” adds the Editor of *Wheeling*).
- (ii) The men forming the team to be *bona-fide* active members of the club, and to have been enrolled as active members at least six months prior to June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1890.
- (iii) Each member of the team to have resided within 20 miles of the headquarters of the club for at least three months.

After a mass of correspondence in the press in which the two secretaries were supported by several “constant Readers” and “Lovers of Fair Play,” the last Saturday in June, 1890, was fixed for a race between Sefton-and-Dingle B.C. and Manchester Wheelers'. The race duly took place and the Wheelers were beaten on final placings by 28 points.

The feeling shown by the newspaper correspondents evidently did not extend to the riders themselves, as the two clubs together spent the evening after the race in convivialities which lasted until nearly midnight, when the Liverpool men took their departure from Warrington Station.

“The Wheelers were assembled on the opposite platform,” says the account, “and amid ringing cheers from both sides one of the most enjoyable and pleasant matches in which the Sefton-and-Dingle team has been engaged was terminated.”

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### **The “Menace” of Cycling on the Road.**

After the Sefton-and-Dingle match, the roadracing game became even more popular among clubmen, but unfortunately for its devotees, the cyclist had fallen seriously from grace since the days when civic dignitaries and Members of Parliament acknowledged his salute from bunting-covered platforms. Pompous J.P.'s now regarded him as a potential danger to every road user. He frightened horses, his speed inspired terror everywhere, and his inelegant appearance was looked upon as an outrage on good taste by people who doubtless considered themselves quite competent to give an opinion on such matters.

### **Abandonment of Road Racing.**

The National Cyclists' Union at last declared its policy against the continuance of road-racing; and Manchester Wheelers' as an adherent club decided to abandon this form of sport altogether-with the reservation that their long distance event, conveniently styled a *road-ride*, should still retain its place in their programme.

### **Road Record Associations.**

On the abandonment of road-racing many of the faster road-riders in the country found an outlet for their energy in record-breaking.

The Road Records Association had been formed in 1888; and in December, two years later, a meeting was held at the Crown Hotel, Manchester, at which a similar organisation was formed to hall-mark Northern performances. Manchester Wheelers' Club was well represented at the inauguration, Kingshotte, Howarth, Moss, Gastall, and Brooke being on the first committee.

### **Early Record Achievements.**

The first member to hold a record under the auspices of the Northern Road Records Association was J. Reilly, whose fastest-time ride of 2 hrs. 46 mins. in the return "50" match with the Sefton-and-Dingle B.C. beat the previous best by 53 seconds.

The years 1893 and 1894 saw Charles W. Schafer and George Lascelles at their best. Schafer was famous as a cyclist before he came to Manchester. He had won the Bath Road Club's open "50" handicap on an "ordinary," formed one of a quartet which beat the coach record from London to Brighton and back; and in 1890 had ridden a straight-away 50-miles on the North Road in 2 hrs. 38 mins. 3 secs.; a ride which was, at the time a World record for the distance.

In 1893, as a Manchester Wheeler, Schafer knocked over four minutes off the N. R.R.A. "50" record, and the following year put up a 50-miles time of 2.25.13 - a performance which was regarded as unassailable.

Lascelles was more of a long-distance rider, and in 1894 was the holder of five N.R.R.A. single bicycle records ranging from 100-miles to 24hours.

Attempts on the 50-miles tandem record were popular. R. Thomas, with Robertson of Manchester Bicycle Club, set up the original record in 1893; after which Gastall-Schafer, Lascelles-Gee, Lascelles-Woodruff, and Simpson-Gurley were successful. Schafer and Cunliffe put the 100-miles record "on the shelf" in 1899 with a ride of 4.49.2, which remained unbeaten when the ruling body declared paced records obsolete in 1930.

### **Club-runs and Tours.**

As is often the case the Club was best known by the prowess of its racing-men; but social events were never left in the background. Then, as now, the carrying-out of Club-runs was regarded as a primary object; and the "Kilton" at Hoo Green, the "Angel" and "George" at Knutsford, the "Cat" (actually the "Red Lion") at Holmes Chapel, and the "Wheatsheaf" at Altrincham, to name but a few hostelrys, were the scenes of many merry evenings. Perhaps the best known of them all, to the early Wheelers, was "The Old Pelican" at Timperley. The landlord of "The Bird" as this inn was familiarly called, was Bob Walton, and Mrs. Walton's hotpots were an irresistible attraction.

Touring was very popular. Most of the Wheelers developed the habit of exploring the country - it *was* exploring in those days - and at least two of them, Jack Sherlock and Frank Guildford became familiar with most of the counties of Britain. Frank Guildford, on many occasions, contributed lively accounts of his experiences to the *Journal* under the pen-name "Club Geog."

Club tours began to be arranged in 1886 when "the pretty Welsh village of Betws-y-Coed" was visited at Easter. For many years after this there were three Club tours annually, the usual programme being: Wales at Easter, the Lakes at Whitsuntide, and the Dukeries in August.

### **Manchester Cyclist Harriers.**

In the winter months the old water-bound macadam road usually became a sea of mud, and cycling was out of the question; but, not to be denied, a small group of Wheelmen, led by Howarth, formed Manchester Cyclist Harriers-a club which for nearly a decade held cross-country runs, both on foot and on bicycles, between the closing of one "season" and the opening of the next.

### **First All-night ride.**

The first All-night ride arranged by the Club - apart from the 24-hours rides - took place in June, 1894. The occasion was the meeting between Manchester Wheelers and Catford Cycling Club. Among the members taking part in this ride were J. C. ("Pa") Grime, G. W. Howarth, J. H. Baynes. A. W. Phillips, C. W. Schafer, Will Knott, and F. W. Hatton; E. Buckley being one of the six representatives of local clubs who had been invited to take part in the adventure.

Before the start of the ride supper was served at the Continental restaurant, in Peter Street; and at 10-40 p.m., to the amazement of the hundred - or more spectators, twenty-one cyclists set out through the night for Warwick. Fortified by tea at Bert Baker's (the Holmes Chapel "Red Lion") and by a snack at Stone, the party reached Lichfield for breakfast, finally arriving at the "Woolpack," at Warwick, to receive the greetings of the thirteen Catford "kittens" who had ridden from London.

The festivities during the week-end will never be forgotten by those who were present. At one time the official programme left the party in Leamington with three miles to walk before dinner, and being tired they chartered a tram from the local tram-stable. On the way one whose name will never be known, unhitched the horses, which strolled away out of sight; and it was only after very lengthy explanations and assurances that the animals had not *really* been stolen that the proprietor of the tram agreed to consider the incident closed.

The Catford run became an annual event, and until 1897 between thirty and forty took part on each occasion. Bad weather and the clashing of other events reduced the attendance considerably in subsequent years, and in 1908 the function was allowed to lapse.

For some years the Club held an inter-club social event with the Warrington CC., and many of the present-day members took part in the series of smoking concerts and billiard-matches which ended when the Warrington Club disbanded in 1914.

### **Hill Climbing Contests.**

Towards the end of 1896 there was a move on the part of the road enthusiasts to institute a hill-climbing contest. It was pointed out that a hill-climb was not a race, in the strict sense of the word-it was a time-trial, and therefore allowable. There was at certain amount of opposition to the project, but some of the chief officials of the Club saw in it an opportunity for a little additional advertisement of the Race Meet, and it was decided to go on with it.

The hill selected for the first climb was Chorley Hill, Alderley. much better known as "The Wizard." The rise is a little short of 280ft. in three quarters-of-a-mile, and a description of the course at the time stated that the first-quarter-of-a-mile or more had good macadam surface but was steep, then came a slighter gradient, and alternate macadam and sets, the last fifty-yards or so being paved and steep. In the earlier climbs restrictions as to gear and crank-length were imposed, but later these were withdrawn, and towards the end of the series an occasional three-speed hub was seen, though the reason for a variable gear in such an event will always remain a mystery.

Never content with half-measures, the committee went to an immense amount of trouble to ensure the success of the first hill-climb. A large number of officials were appointed (among whom were T. W. Grace and T. A. Edge, who acted as timekeepers) and invitations were extended to no less than fifty-six clubs. It may be surprising, therefore, to find that only eighteen entries were received; but it should be remembered that at this time the mere ascent of "The Wizard" was considered a performance, apart from racing up it, and the field was thus limited.

Over the five climbs held at Alderley, J. L. Barratt, Buxton C. C. in 1900 set up the record for the fastest ascent, beating "Cuth" Glazebrook's 1897 time by a few seconds; but conditions varied so much year by year that comparison of times is hardly fair. In 1898 the road was in a very bad state of repair, while in the following year the heat was so intense that several of the competitors were overcome before reaching the top of the hill. The event attracted large crowds annually, but, chiefly owing to the good offices of Superintendent Downs of the Macclesfield Police, all trouble due to obstruction was avoided.

In 1902 it was proposed to extend invitations to riders of motor-bicycles and motor-tricycles. "The Wizard" was now thought unsuitable, and a two-miles stretch of the "Snake" hill, near Glossop, was adopted. This change was adhered to, even though the motoring idea was abandoned almost as soon as it had been seriously considered. Judging by the number of entries, the event at first gained little by the change, but during the four years 1907-1910 interest increased, the peak being reached in 1908 when there were forty-six names in the programme.

Wind was the deciding factor in the "Snake" climbs. Under favourable conditions in 1909 G.W. Wilkin, Sheffield C.C., made a record ascent in 10 min. 15 secs., no less than 2 minutes faster than the 1905 winner who had to face a gale.

Twelve climbs, in all, were held; there being no contest in 1903 (the year of the Blackpool Walk when the officials candidly said they were too busy), and in 1906. Twice the event was won by a Manchester Wheeler. T. E. Hesketh took first place in 1904, and in 1907 E. Tomlinson scored a decisive win over P. M. Moyle, the Catford hill-climb winner of that year. In 1910 the length of the course was reduced from two miles to a mile, and in the following year the event was discontinued in favour of the Invitation 50-miles Road Time Trial.

### **The Club House.**

January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1898, is an outstanding date in the history of the Club.

From that day the Manchester Wheelers' have had a home of their own.

As early as 1890 the question of club premises had been discussed, and in the Christmas number of the *Journal*, 1893, there appeared an article by D. C. Davies, entitled "A Wheelers' Dream of the Future" in which the establishment of a Club House is taken as granted.

Before 1898 the Club had its official headquarters at the Grand Hotel, Aytoun Street. The more important social functions were held there; but the real headquarters were: first at the Boston Hotel, Boston Street, and afterwards at the Raglan Hotel, Embden Street, Hulme, in which hotels a room was reserved on Monday evenings. By 1895, however, secretarial work in connection with the Race Meet had increased to such proportions that it became necessary to rent an office during the busy months; and the Club House, instead of being merely "A Wheelers' Dream" began to be considered as a practical proposition.

In October, 1896, a sub-committee was appointed to look for suitable premises, and so quickly did they work (possibly they had anticipated their appointment) that a Report was submitted to the very next committee meeting, following which a Special General Meeting was called for December 4<sup>th</sup>, to consider the formation of a limited company to carry out the scheme.

The negotiations and legal formalities took twelve months to complete, during which time the Club had the benefit of valuable assistance from one of its Vice-Presidents, Mr. T. W. Grace, a solicitor by profession and a prominent figure in athletic circles. The company was floated with the title "Manchester Wheelers' Club House, Limited," with a nominal capital of £1,000 divided into 2,000 10s. shares. Rules were adopted making it compulsory

upon every member of the Club to take up at least one share; and the Club, as a body, took 400-a holding which was later increased to 800.

[In passing, it might be mentioned that much later in its career the Club floated another company, Manchester Wheelers Sports, Limited. The reasons for this were purely financial, and have no concern with this History].

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Non-members were admitted to membership of the Club House, but the Articles were so framed as to ensure that the Club should at all times have a controlling interest.

G. W. Howarth, J. H. Robinson, J. L. Leach, and R. G. D. Burr were the first Directors of the Club House Company. In later years the whole of the committee were Directors, *ex-officio*; a state of affairs which continued until after the War.

The premises decided upon were at No. 4, Albert Square, Manchester; and comprised a large billiard-room, two, afterwards three, smaller rooms, a bar, and kitchen accommodation. During the eighteen years the Club lived there, "No. 4" became one of the recognized centres of the cycling world, and there were very few leading riders or officials, British or Continental, who did not, at some time receive a welcome within its precincts.

One of the first functions at the Club House took place after the 1908 Race Meet, when a meal described as "a cold collation" was served for members and guests. In such a manner did the Race Meet Dinner first appear on the Club's social programme.

When the Club entered its first home in 1898, there arose what is often referred to as "the Club House Problem"; which, summarised, is the finding of an answer to the question "shall membership of Manchester Wheelers' Club entail compulsory membership of Manchester Wheelers' Club House?"

The original policy, as expressed by the Club's rules, made membership of the Club House compulsory; and, except in the case of country members, was rigidly adhered to for over twenty years.

### **War Time Activities.**

During the first few months of the Great War the Club continued its usual activities. Those were the early days when "Business as usual" was a slogan; and opinion prevailed that hostilities could not continue for longer than a very few months. Even at the 1915 A.G.M. there was talk of arranging a full sporting programme, and it was not until May of that year that hopes of running the Race Meet were finally abandoned.

Manchester Wheelers have every reason to be proud of the part they played, as a Club, during the next four years. No less than twenty members served with the Colours-most of them on foreign service. Those at home were no less active. From time to time motor-trips for wounded soldiers were arranged, a fund was opened for sending out parcels of food and clothing, and the Club was closely associated with the N.C.U. Prisoners of War Fund and with the French War Charities Organisation.

Of those who served with the Forces all but two returned; and on November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1919, a Dinner was held at the Grand Hotel, Manchester, to welcome them home. At this function the unanimous wish was expressed that some memorial should be set up to the two members who gave their lives for their country; and it was later decided that this should take the form of two prizes, to be awarded annually-the path prize to the member scoring the highest aggregate number of points in open events, and the road prize to the member returning the fastest average time over three 50-mile time-trials.

### **“Armytage” and “Reeks” Memorials.**

A few years later the two silver shields were hung in the Club House, on which are engraved the names of the successive winners of the Memorial Prizes.

The occasion of the unveiling of the Memorial Shields was one of the most impressive in the Club's history. J. E. Feay-the Jack Feay of the inaugural meeting in 1883-paid the final tribute in the presence of a large and representative gathering of cyclists. In performing the ceremony, he said:

“To-night it is my duty, a sad one in many respects, to unveil Memorial Shields dedicated to the memory of Fred. Armytage and Albert Reeks. I am sure I am voicing the sincere feeling of everyone assembled here, and of those who are unavoidably absent, when I say that we are proud to have known these two men, to have played the game with them, and to know that in playing the greatest game any man can be called upon to play, they laid down their lives for the country we love so well.”

### **Club Badges.**

The Club Badge and the path-racing colours were among the first items to be considered in the general reconstruction which followed the Armistice.

In its earliest years the Club's colours were navy-blue and cardinal, the famous myrtle-and gold being first adopted in 1895. After the War, partly owing to the great difficulty of procuring fast dyes, a plain black-and-white costume, with monogram, was decided upon. As first worn, the jersey was white with a broad lateral black stripe, but later the arrangement was altered and the broad stripe is now vertical.

The Badge has undergone a variety of changes from time to time. The first Manchester Wheelers' Badge was a silver monogram, worn in the cap, parallel in design with the original M.A.B.C. “gridiron” but smaller. This was superseded in 1900 by a button-badge in myrtle-and-gold enamel, on which appeared the Arms of Manchester and the words “Manchester Wheelers”; but it was found that this was not generally worn, the active member preferring the standard-time badge, in bronze or silver, which he usually became entitled to wear after his first season's racing.

The present badge system, introduced in 1919 by A. W. Phillips, incorporates the merit classification with the monogram design; degree being indicated, first by an outer ring of enamel coloured progressively green, blue and red; then by a ring of inlaid gold; and ultimately by the solid gold badge which is the distinguishing mark of a road-record holder or an English path-champion.

### **Novice Road Time Trials.**

In addition to the adoption of the Junior Membership scheme, it was decided further to encourage youthful road riders by promoting an open 50-miles time trial for novices. Expectations for this event were not realised in the first year, there being only 15 starters, and for four years the event was suspended. In 1924, however, it was revived with considerable success; and over a period extending until 1928 the Open (Novices) “50” introduced many young riders to the competitive side of cycling.

After the War, however, there was a general opinion that the financial obligations of full membership acted as a deterrent to prospective members among the younger generation of cyclists, and F.T. Guildford introduced a Junior Membership scheme which provided for optional Club House membership in the case of every Club member under twenty-one years of age. This involved an important change in principle, and was looked upon with disfavour by some of the older members; but the opposition was not very strong, and Guildford's scheme was adopted by a large majority.

*[Towards the end of 1932 the question of Junior Membership was again raised, and as a result the maximum age-limit for optional membership of the Club House is now 25 years].*

The removal of the Club House to its present premises was effected in 1915.

### **Road Time Trials Inaugurated.**

Efforts towards a revival of competitive road-riding as part of the Club's programme met with considerable opposition at first, but the roadmen were persistent, and at the 1900 A.G.M. the committee had instructions to arrange a 50-miles road-ride to be run on time-trial lines. Progress at first was hindered by the leading officials of the Club being so fully occupied with path-racing affairs as to have little sympathy with what was, after all, a new and untried form of sport. Twice the event was postponed; and it was not until the end of September that the first Manchester Wheelers' unpaced road time-trial took place.

Headquarters for this event were at the "Saracen's Head," Warburton; and the course, starting and finishing near Grappenhall, included the Holmes Chapel-West Heath-Brickhouses triangle. The riders started, not at regular intervals, but "at the discretion of the Judge and Timekeeper," and called their names, not their numbers, to the checkers.

A proposal to run two road time-trials annually, defeated in 1901, was adopted the following year on a chairman's casting vote; but the roadmen's case was not helped by an incident which occurred in the second 1902 event, when C. A. Fletcher was pulled off his machine by the police in Holmes Chapel. In 1903 opposition was still fairly strong, and a proposal to hold a "100" in addition to the two "50's" was rejected; but by 1904 the road policy of the Club became stabilised, and from then until 1911 four "50's" were included in the programme each year. Several further attempts were made to introduce a "100," and one event at this distance actually was held-on August Bank Holiday, 1910 - but this met with indifferent success and the experiment was not repeated.

### **Outstanding Road Rides.**

The earlier 50-mile trials showed T. E. Hesketh at the top of his form. In seven events he was beaten only twice for fastest-time honours. Later, J. P. Taylor-"Jimmy" to everybody-scored seven fastest-times during a period of seven years, and in 1906 was the first rider to beat "evens," in Cheshire; while C. E. Smith's four fastest-times include a 2.24.45 in the 1908 championship, this being the best time returned in a Club event before the War.

Perhaps the outstanding feature of this series of road events, however, was the consistently excellent riding of F. C. Lowcock. Between 1905 and 1913 Lowcock won no fewer than fourteen fastest-time prizes, in addition to which he was five times "fastest Wheeler" in the Midland Matches referred to elsewhere.

A "25" was substituted for one of the "50's" in 1912, and has retained its place ever since. It was in the "25" of 1913 that R. Consterdine repeated Jimmy Taylor's feat of scoring a fastest-time in his first race; and in 1914 C. W. Anderson was the first member to win four fastest-time prizes in succession in Club road events.

### **The Blackpool Walk.**

With the exception of a few items in the Race Meet programmes there was only one occasion when the Club was interested in anything but cycling. This was in 1903, when the Club successfully promoted a Walk-known afterwards as the Great Walk-between teams

representing Lancashire and The Rest of England, over a course between Manchester and Blackpool.

The event developed out of the enthusiasm aroused when many members responded to a request to assist at a Manchester-Southport Walk. The original plan was to ask the London Stock Exchange-promoters of the London Brighton Walk - to select a "South" team to take part in a North v. South contest over a Manchester - Chester course, but this fell through; and finally F.W. Hatton, G.W. Howarth, and A.W. Phillips went over to Blackpool with a view to interesting the Mayor and other officials in a project which would have a definite advertising value, both for the town and the Club. The interview was successful, and Howarth and Hatton, as hon. secretaries, set about organising the Match with characteristic thoroughness. Messrs. D. B. Muratti and Sons presented valuable prizes, and the Mayor of Blackpool invited the competitors and officials to Dinner after the event.

Fifty competitors started from Albert Street Police Station at 6-30 a.m. on Saturday, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1903. Their number included many famous walkers, A. Ormrod, J. E. Rankin, and H.C. Gow leading the Lancashire men while J. Butler and W. Sturgess, amateur champions, were among the better-known of the Rest of England team. Butler scored an outstanding individual success, walking the 51¼ miles in 8 hrs. 19 mins. 50 secs., and the Rest of England team won by 205 points to 261.

Both before and after the race the anomaly of a cycling club promoting a Walk was freely discussed in athletic circles, but criticism was silenced when it was pointed out that the sanction of the Northern Counties Athletic Association had been asked and obtained before any arrangements had been confirmed.

### **M.C. and A.C. Matches.**

The idea of an inter-club time-trial between the Midland Cycling and Athletic Club and Manchester Wheelers' originated when the two clubs met at Shrewsbury during the week-end before the Anfield "100" of 1901. Shortly afterwards, F. W. Brierley, the Wheelers' captain of that year, went fully into the possibilities of such an event with W. B. Goodwin, the Midlander, and in the September, after the usual formalities and committee-work, the first road match between the clubs took place. Headquarters were at Whitchurch, and the course lay out-and-time between Prees Heath and Crudgington. H. W. Burman and A. Powell of the M.C. and A.C. each beat "evens"-it was five years before anyone did this again in a Midland match-and the Wheelers, partly owing to the retirement of A. E. Maycock and C. A. Fletcher, were well beaten.

The following year the now historic Shawbury triangle was suggested as a better course for the event, and there was some consternation when it was found that considerable discrepancies existed between the true measurements and those hitherto accepted by the N.R.R.A. Much time and energy were expended by individuals and subcommittees in collecting a set of accurate figures, and it was at length agreed that a double circuit of the triangle, Shawbury-Shawbirch-Hodnet, measured 46 miles 4 furlongs 148 yards. The adjustment to 50 miles was then made by taking in a stretch of road from Shawbury in the direction of Shrewsbury-ever afterwards known as the "panhandle."

It would seem that officials and riders alike had something to learn about unpaced riding on the road, for in 1902 many of the latter ran off the course through the lack of marshals; and there were several spills due to bad cornering. It is somewhat remarkable that, in spite of everything, both teams managed to finish at full strength. As might be expected the matter was freely discussed after the match, and to such purpose that at the following year's event the two clubs, in conjunction, marshalled the course so well that nothing short of

a deliberate attempt to desert it could have succeeded. In this year it was decided to ride nine aside-six to count, instead of six aside-all to count.

The question of spare machines arose in 1904. One of the riders had trouble of some kind, and upon asking for a certain spare machine was told, quite reasonably, that this particular bicycle had been provided by another rider for his own use, and was therefore not available. Surprising as it may seem today, the incident was noticed officially, and the whole matter assumed such an importance that, in 1905, arrangements were made which included the provision of spare machines for everyone. There was a spare machine in every mile! Unfortunately, these same arrangements did not provide for the removal of cows from the course; and one of these ungainly animals, presenting its rear-quarters to Tom Peck, caused that famous End-to-End record-breaker to fall heavily, thereby helping to increase the Midlanders' total, adversely, by at least two points.

At the beginning of the 1906 season the score was three wins to two in favour of the Wheelers; and the Midlanders began to take the forthcoming match very seriously indeed. Their whole team was put into intensive training under a specially appointed coach, and when the meeting took place the result of this was only too evident. Dave Noon "clocked" 2.24.37 (the current N.R.R.A. record stood at 2.30), and Tom Peck 2.27, each beating his previous best by six minutes. C. Moss finished in a few seconds under 2.27; and Powell, regarded as a safe 2.40-man, beat "evens." Against this display of form the Wheelers were well in the background, though F. C. Lowcock rode the fastest "50" of his career and J. Taylor put up a time which had only once previously been beaten.

Needless to say there followed a persistent demand by a section of the Wheelers' team for special training facilities; but the committee remained unmoved, deciding that the funds of the Club were not intended to be used in this direction. At the same time some encouragement was given to the racing men to train more seriously than before, and on the inclusion in the 1907 team of C. E. Smith, who had recently joined the Club with some reputation as a speedman, it was expected that a mere defeat and not a total eclipse would be the Wheelers' position when the clubs met again.

Early in September, 1907, the seventh match duly took place, and to the surprise of everybody the Wheelers won! Nor was it altogether a lucky victory for, though Moss and Peck punctured, Smith and Currie met with similar mishaps. The result was in doubt until the very end, and the finish at Shawbury provided thrills reminiscent of a like occasion at Grappenhall, sixteen years before. An eye-witness' account says:-

"Joe Cornwall, of the M.C. & A.C., and Phillips of ours, kept us posted with results to date, and while the former leaped high in the air as he megaphoned the timetable to an anxious crowd, Phillips was content to suck his cigarette and kick loose stones about the road.

"A wave of a white handkerchief signalled Noon, who dashed up merrily in fine time for the day. Then came Lowcock who had passed Moss; after him, naturally, came Taylor who finished as strongly as anybody; then Peck, the victim of tyre trouble. Matters looked bad enough, in all conscience but when Powell and Cusack followed in succession the hopes of Birmingham rose high.

"Currie rolled up next, then Tomlinson. and the veteran Waddington. A different complexion was put on the event at this point, and a rapid count showed us in a favourable light. The excitement was intense, made more so by the fact that we were mere onlookers and helpless. At one point we had dead-heated, and when it came to the stage that made the next arrival either win or lose, some of the crowd had attacks of St. Vitus' Dance. Whilst we were wondering what remedy would cure this

disease Arthur Guildford raced past the Kew 'A' chronometer, and the Wheelers had won!"

The success of the Midland Matches reached its pinnacle with the 1907 event. The series continued, but interest diminished during the following years. It had been customary for the rival clubs to dine together after the afternoon's exertions, and in the earlier period the convivial evening had quite as important a part in the programme as the race itself; but there was a misunderstanding as to the catering arrangements in 1907 and thereafter a steady decline set in, which the few remaining enthusiasts were unable to stem. The last Match race took place in 1912. This was followed by an inter-club handicap in 1913, after which the outbreak of the War automatically applied the closure.

### **Record Rides.**

Unpaced riding was first recognized by the Northern Road Records Association in 1899; and in that year Schafer and Cunliffe reduced the time for the 50-miles tandem-bicycle record and set up new figures for the 100-miles record in the same class.

In 1903, T. E. Hesketh and J. H. Banks, in succession, held the 50-miles single-bicycle record., and Hesketh, in partnership with G. Guricy, beat the tandem-bicycle record for the same distance. During the period 1907-1909, C. E. Smith held the single-bicycle record at 50 and 100-miles; and F. C. Lowcock and J. Taylor attacked tandem-bicycle records so successfully that their rides at 50-miles, 100-miles, and 12hours' remained as current records until after the War.

Since the War two record rides have been accomplished by members. F. H. Harrison and J. J. Barker added six miles to the 12-hours-tandem distance in 1921, and A. R. Wager and J. Cresswell broke the 50-miles tandem-bicycle record in 1927.

### **The Road Championship.**

The Club's road-racing programme was resumed on the same lines as before the War. From 1919 to the present time the "25" and three (occasionally four) "50's" have been held annually; the race for the Road Championship being incorporated with the last "50" in each season.

In 1919 a silver cup was presented by G. B. Fidler, then resident in South America, to be held by the road champion each year until won outright.

The same year saw the entry into the club of F. C. Lowcock, junior, son of the F. C. Lowcock of earlier days. Few riders have had such a meteoric career as that of the younger Lowcock. He remained a member only three years, but in that time he scored ten "fastest-times" in succession, including the three victories necessary to win the Fidler Cup outright. At the time of his first race he was a junior member and a complete novice. Three years later he was ranked by the North Road Club as one of the fastest twelve road-riders in England.

In recent years Harold Crye repeated Lowcock's feat of winning the championship three times in succession; another record being set up by A. J. Bradbury, who was fastest in the "25" for the four successive years 1922-1925.

### **The Open "Fifty."**

The Open Invitation 50-miles Road Handicap was instituted in 1911, to take the place of the Hill Climb.

The card for the first of what was to become a long series of rides showed F. H. Grubb and C. Moss together on scratch, with J. A. Grimshaw, H. G. Cook, W. H. Genders, E. A. Merlin, D. R. Noon, and E. Buckley on short marks; and the event will always be remembered on account of the deluge of rain which fell during the whole afternoon.

Competitors and officials alike were drenched. A photograph of F. T. Bidlake, humorously entitled "The Bath of Psyche," appeared later, showing the worthy North Road Club president holding the watch at the finish with water literally streaming off him. Dave Noon, who had previously covered the same course in 2 hrs. 24 mins., needed 2 hrs. 32 mins. to win the fastest-time award, and only fifteen others finished.

The Open "50" of 1912, which, incidentally, was the only one for which Bidlake did not frame the handicap, was run under almost ideal conditions; but only 26 riders accepted invitations, and in 1913 promotion of the event was suspended.

The year following the Armistice was a period of financial uncertainty for the Club, and a revival of the Open "50" was not considered for some time; but after the successful Race Meet of 1919 it was felt that the expense of promoting an invitation road-ride could reasonably be incurred, and from 1920 the Open "50" has been an annual event.

In 1922, in order that the race might have a greater appeal to scratch riders, the value of the fastest-time award was increased to ten guineas. This policy aroused some criticism, however, and after two years the original prize values were readopted.

The only occasion when the course was other than the Shropshire triangle was in 1923, when the condition of the road surface around Hodnet made an alteration necessary and the road from Battlefield to Prees Heath was used. It was in this year that "Andy" Wilson won the scratch prize in 2 hrs. 21 mins. - a ride which beat the existing record for the event by nearly three minutes. On two occasions Club members reached the prize list - F.C. Lowcock, junior, was fastest in 1921, and in 1924 A. R. Bomford won the handicap. J. Bentley being third.

Record for the event is at present held by C. Holland, with a ride of 2.12.31 in 1932.

### **East Liverpool Wheelers' Matches.**

At the 1924 Annual General Meeting a motion was passed in favour of a revival of inter-club team racing. The proposers had in mind an annual match with the Anfield B.C., but negotiations in this direction fell through and East Liverpool Wheelers were approached.

There followed a series of seven Match races, of which Manchester Wheelers won two and East Liverpool Wheelers five.

All the contests took place on neutral ground over what is known as the Cholmondeley course, in West Cheshire. Each team consisted of nine men-six to count, and the result was determined on aggregate times, n Matches, on points. circumstances arose which clubs riding at full strength large part in some of the d when Manchester Wheel after four of their riders h trouble.

The E.L.W. matches so much by the contests sequels at Warrington late two clubs met at tea, presented to the winners during the "celebrations" which followed. The principal award for the event was a silver cup, presented by Mr. Hyman Gilbert, of Liverpool.

### **The Open "Twelve."**

The race from which developed the Open Invitation Twelve-hours Road Ride, began in 1914 as a Club event introduced to meet the wishes of those who sought to qualify for standard medals. Before 1912, 12-hour rides were carried out by small groups of men riding in company and pacing each other, but in that year the conditions were altered and subsequently only strictly unpaced rides were recognized.

A 12-hours race was not, at first, introduced in the post-War fixtures, but enthusiasm for long distance riding still persisted, and there were privately organised 12-hour rides in 1922 and 1923; in which latter year J. J. Barker became the first member to cover over 200

miles in the half day. In 1924 the race again became official as a Club event, and five years later the Open "Twelve" began its career.

The Open "Twelve," though only four years old, already ranks as one of the most important races in the country.

### **Evening Path Meetings.**

In order to encourage a revival of path-racing the Club included in its 1919 programme two evening meetings at which novice events and open handicaps were decided. These were held at Salford Football Club's track at Weaste – and among the competitors were G. Owen and J. E. Sibbit, each of whom won a handicap prize.

From 1920 to the present time, following upon pre-war tradition, it has been customary to hold three evening meetings at Fallowfield each year, confined to Club members. The programme for these has undergone very little change during the years, except in regard to arrangement. It includes two (occasionally three) short-distance handicaps, a time-trial handicap, and a team-race of some kind, in addition to the two path championships for sprinters and "stayers" respectively.

### **Club Path Championships.**

The Club sprint championship was born in the 1 eighties, but at first was held only at irregular intervals. Jack Feay won it in 1885 and again in 1886, and there is a record of the event having been held in 1892. From 1895, however, the championship has been held annually (except during the War years). Originally the distance was one mile, the present-day distance of 1,000 yards being adopted in 1927 to bring the event into line with the revised N.C.U. distance. It was in connection with this championship that the "Seddon" Cup was presented in 1896. C. W. Schafer was the first to hold this trophy, after which E. R. Worthington scored two successive victories and won it outright.

The long-distance path-championship began its career, strangely enough, as a paced road-race, and at the first five championship races the winner was entitled also to hold for one year a 20-guinea challenge trophy, presented by R. W. Fletcher.

The "Fletcher" Cup saw many changes in its short life. Originally it was intended to be a perpetual trophy, but in its second year the conditions were altered so that it might be won outright. The first contest was at 25-miles, on the road, the following year 50-miles was the distance, and in 1892, in conformity with the Club's policy being opposed to road-racing, the race became a 25-miles path event—a race, incidentally, in which organised pacing was first seen on a Manchester track. The next year saw a temporary resumption of road-racing, and the championship was held over "a very quiet course in Cheshire." In 1894, however, road-racing was permanently abandoned, and for the second time the event was transferred to the path.

The fifth, and last, contest for the "Fletcher" Cup promised a thrilling fight between D. C. Davies and J. Reilly (each of whom held two shares in the trophy), and the other two riders, "Doug." Ball and C. A. Fletcher, but after a very few miles there were three retirements, and Reilly and his pacers finished alone.

After the last Fletcher-Cup race there followed a short series of paced championships, two at 100miles and one at 50-miles. The prize was the "Grime" Cup, which C. W. Schafer made his own property by three successive wins. From 1896 onward, pacing, other than by competitors themselves, was discontinued; and since then the long-distance path-championship has been ridden as a scratch race on modern lines. For eight years the title was held at 25-miles, the present championship distance of 10 miles being adopted in 1906.

Since 1921 the Club has fostered a remarkable succession of path riders.

Perhaps the best known to-day, is Jack Sibbit, winner of innumerable championships and trophies, who, for ten years in succession has been awarded the N.C.U. brassard, either for winning - a National Championship or to mark his selection to ride for England in international events. Between 1921 and 1926, George Owen was equally famous, his brilliant "Muratti" win of 1926 and his victory in the Grand Prix de Copenhagen being but two of his many successes. S. T. Cozens, now professional, won the Amateur Grand Prix de Paris three times in succession ' and on two occasions reached the final of the World's Championship; and in E. W. Higgins the Club has still another aspirant for international fame.

### **The Club "Journal."**

The year 1892 was one of great activity and progress. In March of that year appeared No. 1, Volume 1, of *Manchester Wheelers' Club Journal* - a four-page broadsheet edited by G. W. Howarth. In this issue, in addition to reports and announcements regarding a variety of social functions, such as inter-club billiards matches, Saturday and mid-week club-runs, and holiday tours, we read: "The fixtures for the present year include two 50-miles handicaps, one 50-miles consolation handicap, one 25-miles novice handicap, one 50-miles championship race for the challenge cup, a 5-miles path championship, a 12-hours race, 12-hours ride for standard medals, and, probably, a race meeting on a big scale."

## **THE RACE MEET**

### **Inauguration.**

What must be regarded as the first of the long series of Race Meets was held at Sale Gardens in 1884. On this occasion, as in 1885, the events were confined to members; but in 1886 the Club, in conjunction with the Y.M.C.A. Bicycle Club ran a small open meeting which owed at least some of its financial success to the arrival of a political picnic whose numbers swelled the "gate" considerably. It was at Sale in 1890, that the pneumatic, or "bolster" tyre was first officially recognized. The handicapper decided that it should carry a penalty of 40 yards if the day was wet, or 35 yards if fine. The state of the weather on that day is not recorded, but the handicapper had evidently under-estimated the possibilities of the new tyre, as one of the two competitors on "air bags"-H. A. Clarke, of Stonygate - won both handicaps from virtual scratch.

The "race meeting on a big scale" referred to in the first issue of the *Journal* duly materialised as a "Cycling and Athletic Tournament," held on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1892, at the newly-opened Fallowfield track. The events included the mile N.C.U. Centre championship (a race which remained in the programme each succeeding year until 1907), a half-mile handicap and a half-mile scratch race; J. H. Adams, T. W. Hilton, and J. E. Feay being the "stars." There were also foot events, but these were poorly supported. The gate" was 4,000; and the profit, amounting to £25, was handed over to the Warehousemen and Clerks' Orphan Schools at Cheadle Hulme.

### **Open Twelve Hours Path Race.**

The outstanding event of the 1895 season was the paced 12-hours' race, held at Fallowfield, on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. For this race *The Wheeler*, a popular cycling weekly at that time, presented to the Club a silver trophy, valued at 50-guineas. C. W. Schafer, who had the pick of the pacing, in the earlier hours of the race, retired at 100-miles, after breaking the current N.C.U. cinder-track record, leaving W. Rosser with the lead. The last two hours were full of

excitement, Rosser, with 240miles 199 yards, winning from J. Hunt by a little over half-a-mile. F. C. Lowcock, of the promoting club finished third, and Jack Waddington fourth. Among the pacers were A. W. Phillips, R. J. Foster, E. Buckley, W. R. Toft, H. B. Saunders, and T. A. Edge, the last-named acting as pacing marshal.

A fortnight after the "12" (1895) came the annual "Cycling Carnival," including a volunteer cyclists' shooting competition; but although the sport was good the meeting was not a financial success. The loss, added to that from the "12," was sufficient to absorb all the profits gained earlier, and the Club found itself with little more than a goodwill as a backing for further ventures.

Nevertheless it was decided to go on-to start all over again. A whip-round among the members raised a guarantee fund and the committee set about promoting a sports meeting which should outshine anything previously attempted.

This meeting, the thirteenth of the series, took place on the second Saturday in July, 1896, and was the first to bear the title "Manchester Wheelers' Race Meet."

### **The "Wheeler" Vase.**

Looking back over the many successes achieved by the Club in the promotion of sports meetings one is tempted to select the 1896 Race Meet as the most remarkable of them all. The programme was probably the most ambitious ever offered for a single afternoon's cycling, and was presented, moreover, in a manner so attractive as to retain the interest of a crowd of ten-thousand people for over six hours. The principal items were the N. C. U. (Manchester Centre) Mile Championship, a lap-scratch race. and a 25-miles paced race for the "Wheeler" vase. There was also a half-mile handicap for novices, which attracted 120 entries! A novelty item was "The Motor Cycle-The Latest Sensation," but although this delighted the crowd, it did not judging by press comments-show any promise of future developments.

The "Wheeler" Vase race was a wonderful spectacle. The 22 riders were paced by tandems, "trips," and "quads," and a thrilling duel took place between S. Rollason of Coventry and "Jeb" Gascoyne of Chesterfield. Gascoyne lapped his rival towards the end "amidst probably the greatest exhibition of enthusiasm ever seen at Fallowfield."

The "Diamond" Race Meet of 1897 saw the gates closed on the crowd for the first time at Fallowfield. This year the "Wheeler" Vase was put up for a 10-miles race for professionals. Gascoyne, now a "cash" rider, was beaten by H Brown, of Leigh, who, in the following year, made the trophy his own.

### **"Muratti" Races.**

The history of the "Muratti" race begins in 1899, when Messrs. D. B. Muratti and Sons offered the first "Muratti" Cup for an amateur invitation race.

The first "Muratti" trophy was in the form of a large silver bowl, and successive winners from 1899 to 1902 were T. Childs, Durham; "Tommy" Davies, Manchester; Roland Janson, London; and W. H. Webb, who joined the Club after his victory in 1902. When first instituted the trophy was to become the property of anyone who won it three times, but after four races the conditions were altered so that only two wins were necessary. This change gave additional interest to the 1903 event, as the entry included three previous winners (T. Davies had become a professional) and there was a crowd of 15,000 present when Webb won the trophy outright from Childs and Janson.

The second "Muratti" trophy was a gold vase, and the seven contests for possession of it were full of surprises.

Ernest Payne, of Worcester, was the first winner at the "coming-of-age" Race Meet in 1904, when T. Sherratt and J. S. Benyon split up the field so successfully that ten riders retired in the first three miles. In 1905 Payne was put out of the running by tyre trouble, but in the following year he scored his second win. So far the race had always been favoured with fine weather, but in 1907 the Club experienced its first wet Race Meet in 15 years. This year marked the appearance of Ben Jones, of Wigan, and Payne was again disappointed.

The 1908 "Muratti" was started in a storm, which soon became a deluge. The crowd was so tightly packed as to be almost immovable, but everyone in the enclosure, except those whose official duty compelled them to remain, dashed for cover. It is a lasting tribute to the goodwill which has always existed between the Club and the riders that the race took place at all. Before the half-way point had been reached only three riders remained on the track-Tom Sherratt, C. W. White, and Ben Jones who had changed machines and was half-a-lap behind. The last lap saw a terrific fight between the two leaders, Sherratt winning by inches. In 1910, yet another wet day, Jones acquired his second share in the trophy, beating Payne by the narrowest of margins.

It was in 1910 that the Club gave Manchester its first flying exhibition, but though George Barnes' advertised monoplane display must have drawn thousands to Fallowfield, the promised struggle between Payne and Jones in the 10-mile event certainly attracted thousands more who regarded the "Muratti" as the chief event in the programme. The crowd on this occasion numbered over 20,0001 hundreds of whom were swept into the ground when one of the barriers gave way.

The final race for the second "Muratti" trophy was taken very seriously by all the competitors, and nothing took place to break up the processions until the last lap. "At the bell," says the account, "Payne and Jones were at the front, neck-and-neck, and the crowd went mad with excitement when they saw Payne gradually drawing away from Jones, with V. L. Johnson in close pursuit. Payne's finish was a grand effort, and he reached the line a couple of lengths ahead of Johnson, Jones being third."

\* \* \* \*

Mr. Muratti had already offered to replace the trophy if won outright; and in 1911 the "Muratti" Gold Vase appeared.

Many times has an attempt been made by a rider to get away from the field with an early sprint. but the 1911 "Muratti" is one of the very few occasions when this was done successfully. R. L. Player dashed away in the first half-mile and gained a lead of 50 yards. C. A. Denny was the only one of the crowd who believed that Player could hold his advantage, and went after him; and the two, taking 1 lap and lap, increased the lead. V. L. Johnson made a belated effort to bring up the crowd but without success, and one by one riders dropped out until only two, in addition to the leaders, were left. Player and Denny lapped C.W. White once, and W.H. Kerr (who had changed machines) twice, and in the final sprint Player won by a wheel. Player was third in 1912, being beaten by V. L. Johnson and D. Hodgetts.

V.L. Johnson was regarded as a warm favourite for the triple win, but bad luck put him out of the running in the two years following. H.T. Johnson won in 1913, but was in America when the 1914 race took place; and it was D. Hodgetts who held the trophy during the four years of sporting inactivity brought about by the War.

### **Motor pacing.**

Motor-pacing was unknown until 1900, when the Club featured a motor-paced record ride in its Race Meet programme. The rider was J. Platt-Betts, who set up times for short distances paced by a tandem-bicycle with auxiliary power in the shape of a small motor-engine fitted on the back of the machine. Two years later Arthur A. Chase gave an exhibition of following motor-bicycles which needed no help from their riders in the matter of propulsion. Chase had two pacing - machines, and an account of his successful ten miles record attempt refers to the clever way in which he changed over when his pacemakers alternated. The motor-bicycles of that day were not equal to 10-mile non-stop efforts.

The following year Tom Linton was the attraction, paced by Cissac on a French motorbicycle fitted with wind-shields.

The famous Tommy Hall first appeared at the Race Meet in 1905, bringing with him the first "big" motor seen at Fallowfield. Paced by Franz Hoffmann, Hall attained a speed of over forty miles per hour, and covered 3 ½ laps in 1 min. 30 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs. This record, which came to be known as "Tommy Hall's Mile" was regarded as unbeatable; and in actual fact it stood for 27 years, until Harry Grant clipped off 1 <sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub> seconds in 1932.

Two lightweight motor-bicycles of the type then in vogue on the Continent, were introduced as pacing-machines in 1906, the "followers" being Jean Gougoltz and André Dussot; and in 1908 the Wheelers' crowd saw A. E. Wills who, a fortnight later became the first cyclist in the world to ride over sixty miles in an hour.

After 1908, amateur pace-followers came into the programme, and many in the crowd of to-day remember S. F. Bailey, H. T. Bartlett, and Leon Meredith, who gave thrilling exhibitions of speed and skill.

### **Flying.**

In 1910, when M. Bleriot's flight across the Straits of Dover was fresh in everybody's mind, the Club startled Manchester by advertising an aeroplane "ascent" as its Race Meet attraction. The expense was enormous, or so it seemed at the time, but the resulting "gate" justified it. There were twenty-thousand people inside the ground, and half as many outside, most of whom witnessed for the first time in their lives a heavier-than-air machine rise from the ground. It did not rise far. "It cleared the hoardings, *with plenty to spare*, and, continuing its flight over the heads of the people outside, came down quietly two fields distant," but everyone was satisfied and the feature was hailed as a huge success.

Two years later Claude Grahame-White brought a bi-plane to Fallowfield, and again there was a huge attendance. "Clad in a blue serge suit with a bunch of lobelia in his buttonhole, Mr. Grahame-White caused his machine to run along the centre of the ground, and then, taking an upward course. he went higher and higher, all the time waving his hand to the people below." This was described as "the polished display of the finished artist"; and at that period it certainly did represent the last word in aeronautics.

### **Post-War Meets**

When the Club set out to revive the Race Meet after the War, the task was found to be by no means easy. The complete suspension of bicycle racing for nearly five years made it extremely difficult to provide a programme of the high standard attained in the past; and in addition, grave doubts were entertained as to the possibility of including the "Muratti" race among the attractions. The N.C.U., quite properly, had adopted a policy of not allowing any trophy race to be run, where the holders were serving with the Forces, except with the consent of such holders; and all three surviving riders sharing the "Muratti" Gold Vase were still with the Army. (R. L. Player had been killed in action). After some delay, however, V.

L. Johnson and Denis Hodgetts were found, and in a most sportsmanlike way agreed to the race being run in their absence, the N.C.U. giving consent in the case of H. T. Johnson.

### **National Championships.**

With the "Muratti" race assured, the Club applied for two National Championships-the Five Miles and the Quarter-Mile, and was successful in having these allocated to the Race Meet. Speaking at the Race Meet Dinner afterwards, Mr. F. Percy Low, Chairman of the N.C.U. Championships Committee, said, in reference to the matter, that when the question of allocating championships came up "it was immediately recognized that if the Manchester Wheelers could not run a championship properly, then it was impossible for a championship to be so run." This was the first time the governing body had permitted National Championships to be run at a sports-meeting organised by any body but itself.

### **Famous Motor-paced Riders.**

With Leon Meredith in motor-paced record attempts, and a motor cycle obstacles race as a novelty event, the programme was as good as ever. Favoured with "Wheelers' weather" the Race Meet "came back" successfully; and once again the gates had to be closed on the crowd.

Luck temporarily deserted the Club in 1920, when, in addition to heavy rain on the second Saturday in July, the preparations for the Race Meet were hindered by a printers' strike.

The 1921 Race Meet will always be remembered for the appearance of Paul Guignard, whose distance of 63 miles for the World's motor-paced hour-record, ridden at Munich, was so incredible to the lay mind that assurances of its authenticity had appeared with amusing regularity for years in the Answers-to Correspondents columns of daily and sporting papers.

In later years the erection of the new motoring track at Montlhéry, near Paris, made much higher speeds possible, and Guignard's distance was beaten by Leon Vanderstuyft and Jean Brunier, each of whom in turn was engaged by the Club to give exhibitions of motor-paced riding at the Race Meet.

### **Recent "Muratti" Races.**

The third "Muratti" trophy survived until 1922, when Albert White, of Scunthorpe, won it for the third time. The final tussle was between White and H. T. Johnson who scored his second share in 1920. In that year White burst a tyre with less than half-a-mile to ride, but Johnson had a similar misfortune when White won in 1921; and it is satisfactory to note that both riders went through the final race without mishap.

The fourth "Muratti" trophy, like the first, was won outright after only five contests. Albert Theaker was the hero of the short series, finishing among the prize-winners on each occasion. The 1927 race, in which he scored his third success, was ridden in 23 mins. 3 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> secs., the fastest time in the history of the event.

It has always been the policy of the Club to invite Continental amateurs to the "Muratti" event whenever practicable, but only on one occasion-the first race for the fifth trophy-has the race been won by other than an Englishman. Victory, this year, went to W. Falck-Hansen, of the Dansk.

## **CHAMPION OF THE WORLD**

The first member to win a National Championship was J.S. Benyon. The Championship was the quarter mile N.C.U. Track Championship which Benyon won in 1904, and in the same year he also won the quarter mile British Empire Championship. The Journal of December, 1904 edited by Fred Leeming (what a great Wheeler he proved to be) recorded this achievement with considerable satisfaction.

## **J. S. BENYON**

### **English and British Empire Champion**

THE year 1904 has been a memorable one. From so many points and divisions have we been successful that it seems as though the fates had decided our majority year should be our greatest up to date. Consequently, it seems only part of that good fortune that our new member, J.S. Benyon, should add to his and our laurels by becoming an English and an Empire Champion. That he has fully deserved that honour no one who has only but casually watched his brief career could deny. We have had members who in their racing career have attained success, and many honours, but we have never had one who reached the highest goal of success on the path by winning a championship. To attempt here to give even a brief history of Benyon's career would be unnecessary. It is of such recent occurrence that even the most casual of observers and followers of sport must be well acquainted with it. We are proud of him and his many achievements. On the other hand he is proud of being a member of the Wheelers, and we might say in proof of this that on every occasion of his riding this season he has done so under the name of our Club. This is certainly not the only way; when he has been required, and his engagements have permitted, he has ridden for the Club in the team races, and on all occasions he has endeavoured to further the interests of the Club. His wonderful record of performances have been so remarkable that the Press have thought them sufficiently interesting to specially comment upon them in the daily papers.

It was therefore a very happy idea of the Committee, on behalf of the members, to record their appreciation of such by presenting him with an illuminated address at the Annual Dinner. That he appreciated the compliment goes without saying, and his reply proved him to have attainments in the oratory line no less than many of his abilities as a rider. It is unfortunate that his living so far away prevents him from joining in our Club path events, but next year he will endeavour to participate. He is an enthusiastic follower of association football, and with a view of keeping himself fit, plays the game with the Chester Club. His play is brilliant, and it is no secret he could shine in better company, but very often as the brilliance of play increases, so does the risk of accidents, and as he is a cyclist first, he has no desire to tempt fortune by taking a lot of football risks. He is young, much younger than perhaps he looks, but how old he is does not matter. Of his strength, his height, weight, etc., we are not going to trouble you here, it has appeared before. Of his future we are very much concerned; he has thrown in his lot with us, and the respect and admiration is mutual.

A year later, on Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1905 he won the Amateur Sprint Championship of the World at the Velodrome de Zurenborg in Antwerp, Belgium. "Cycling" noted that he rode a gear of 92" beating into second place H. D. Buck (who rode a gear of 96") with Frenchman E. Devongnies in third place.

Following this victory he turned professional and competed at Fallowfield at the 1906 Race Meet in a series of match races against the professional sprint champion of the world, E. Poulain of France.

### **Conclusion.**

The Club has now been in existence fifty years. Its object has always been to encourage and develop the sport and pastime of cycling; and whatever success may have been achieved is due first to the enthusiasm of the small band of pioneers whose judgement and courage carried the Club through the critical early years, and afterwards to the team-spirit which has always been such remarkable feature - particularly in connection with Race Meet organisation.

Throughout the Club's life many of its members have shown outstanding ability in committee and executive positions, but though their efforts have been appreciated, individual brilliance has never been made a fetish. The policy has always been democratic; and today, as in the past, even the newest member is encouraged to take part in the management.

There have been many changes since the foundation of the Club, and doubtless there are many more to come, but the Manchester Wheelers have always been ready and willing to adapt themselves to new conditions, and with a fifty-years record behind them have every hope that in due time they will achieve a brilliant centenary.