

NORTHAMPTON CYCLING CLUBS OF THE 19TH CENTURY.



St James Cycling Club, pictured at Franklin's Gardens in 1898. Seated on the wooden chair in the centre is the Club President, Edward Lewis (boot and shoe manufacturer and Mayor of Northampton in 1903). *Note* that the bicycles have no brakes as these were racing machines. Cycle racing bicycles took place on the 'County Cricket ground' and on the Racecourse. The position of the bugler was an important and honoured office to hold within the club. During road runs a bugler usually rode either at the side or immediately behind the Captain (it was a strict rule that the latter led the outings and must not be overtaken). By means of bugle calls he relayed the Captain's instructions to the other members lower down the line.

Cycling clubs of varying degrees of exclusivity flourished during this period:



The Northamptonshire Bicycle Club counted James Manfield, E.J. Allchin and T.P.Dorman among its riding members, paying a subscription of 15s. and wearing – on penalty of relegation to the rear of the column – a uniform of dark green Norfolk serge shooting jacket and breeches, stockings and black polo cap. *Picture – N.B.C. at the bottom of the George Hotel yard circa 1883.*



MEMBERS OF THE OLD NORTHAMPTON BICYCLE CLUB.

Many well known Northamptonians are seen in the above picture of the *Old Northampton Cycling Club*, which was taken at the Jepson Gardens, Leamington on Whit-Monday, in the 1880's.

Reading from left to right.

Back row :

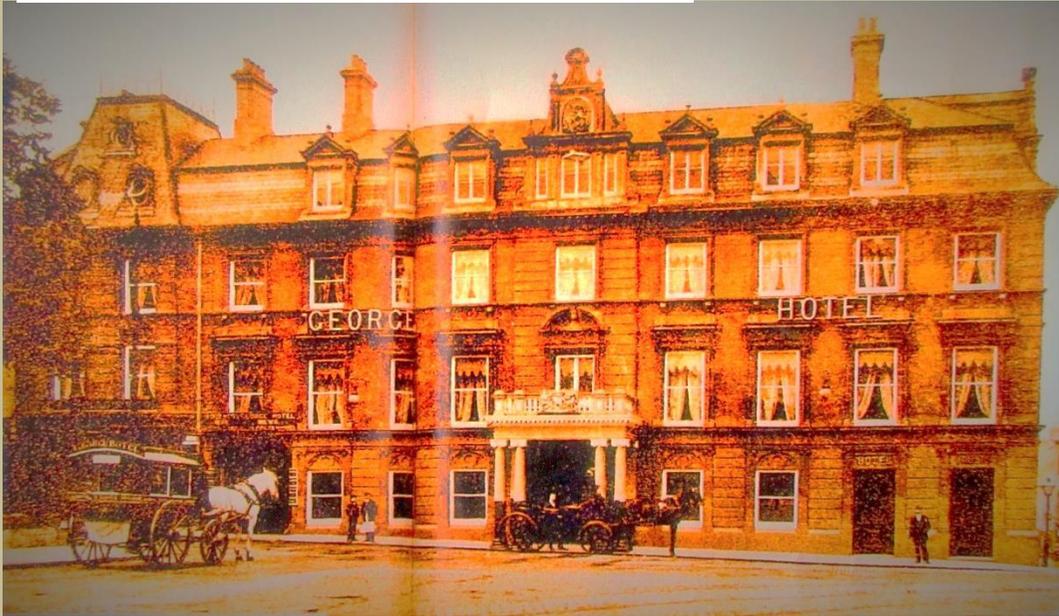
- Mr Harry Smith, Mr F. W. Hornby,
- Mr Alfred Tedbutt, Mr T.D.Church,
- Mr Sid Green, Mr James Green,
- Mr Frank Milne, Mr Jack Riddley,
- Mr W.J.Hull, Mr George Warren,
- Mr Jack Perry, Mr Warwick (?),
- Mr Harry Whiteman,
- Mr Frank Whiteman, and Mr Jack Daniels (on bicycle)

Front row –

- Mr Daniels, senior.
- Mrs Clifton (wife of the late Dr.Clifton),
- Mr.A.J.Jowett (Captain),
- and Mrs Jowett.

The Whit-Monday Run.

The George Hotel in Northampton was demolished in 1921



The run started at about eight o'clock in the morning from the George Hotel, and after assembling with other clubs at the Jepson Gardens, a move was made for a parade at Warwick, where a silver bugle given for the best muster was won by the Northampton Club.

All members who took part in the run rode the old 54 inch wheel bicycles, like those seen in the photograph, and one of their number, Mr W.J.Hull, now the borough accountant, was thrown from his machine through someone touching his back wheel just before reaching Southam, and sustained a damaged shoulder. This did not, however, prevent him completing the run.

The Northamptonshire Bicycle Club had club rooms at the bottom of the George Hotel yard at the time.

The Victoria Cycling Club for gentlemen amateur's, Joseph Grose among them, sported a navy Uniform with silver shield and charged a more modest 7s. 6d. Discipline in the clubs was very strict as the road rules shown below illustrate, taken from the Victoria. C.C Membership card for 1888 season.

ROAD RULES.

1.—The Captain and sub-Captain shall have command during all excursions, and, if either be absent, an orderly shall, if necessary, be appointed. The vacancy to be filled from Members present. When passing horses, or for the safety of the public, the Captain in command shall have the power to compel the Members to slacken speed or to dismount.

2.—In forming single file, the left-hand man will run to the front, the man on the right falling in his rear, always taking the left-hand side of the road if possible, with two machines length between.

3.—Riding upon the footpath will, on no account, be permitted, and when riding through towns or villages, the Club bells must always be ringing.

4.—The Bugle calls to be strictly obeyed.

NOTE.—The Committee earnestly request, for the welfare and honour of the Club, that every Member will study the Rules of the Road, with the County Bye-laws attached; so that, should any misunderstanding arise with the public, it will not be owing to the Members not knowing the laws, and how to act in cases of sudden emergency.

Revised Rules, January, 1887.

While members of the College Street Club, whose committee included the proprietor of the glass firm W.T.Church, paid only 1s and dispensed with the uniform or at the instigation of other working men who – like the Captain of the Rovers Club, temperate but inveterate poacher James Hawker – hoped to persuade them out of it.

With the exception of the Socialist Clarion Clubs, cycling clubs were still largely male affairs, and when on the road they demanded military-style obedience.

Safety was important, of course, and members of the Northamptonshire were advised to ‘use great care in descending unknown hills’s. However, the signals the bugler – lesser clubs used a whistle – were to be instantly observed, no matter the wealth or status of his fellows, the authority of the Captain reigned supreme.