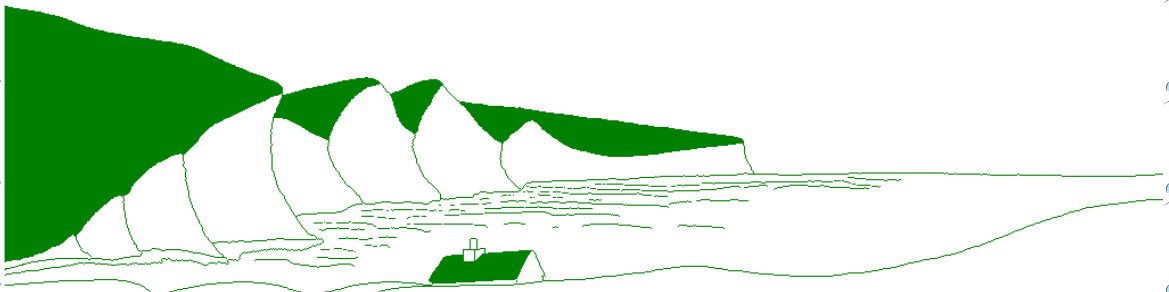


The



Coaster



the magazine of the

EAST SUSSEX DISTRICT ASSOCIATION
CYCLISTS' TOURING CLUB

No. 40 - Christmas 2002



working for cycling

***East Sussex District Association
Cyclists' Touring Club***

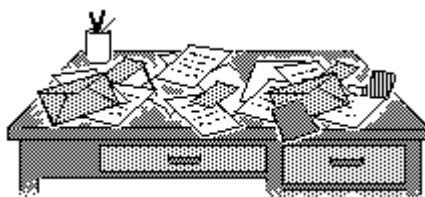
President - Esther Carpenter

*Secretary & Editor: David Rix, 27 Fullwood Avenue,
Newhaven, E. Sussex. BN9 9SP
E-mail: cycling@eastsussexctc.org.uk*



" THE COASTER "

Issue No. 42, Christmas 2003



From the Editor's Desk.

Welcome to this Christmas issue of "The Coaster". I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed putting it together.

Some really good articles this time, including part 2 of Peter Crowsley's reminiscences and a report on the Midweek trip to southern France. Nice to see some new contributors.

I've tried this time to give it a bit more of a Christmassy feel, by filling with some articles on Christmas in Victorian times, illustrated with contemporary pictures.

Articles for future issues are always welcome, on almost any subject - the deadline for the summer issue is mid-May - hopefully to be out for the President's Ride in June.

I hope you all have a good Christmas and New Year and this should give you something to occupy and amuse you as you rest contentedly and let your Christmas dinner go down.

Happy cycling.

David.

East Sussex D.A. Website: <http://www.eastsussexctc.org.uk>

©2003 East Sussex CTC

THE CYCLISTS' TOURING CLUB

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen

The Cyclists' Touring Club (originally known as the Bicycle Touring Club, the present title being adopted in 1883) was founded at Harrogate in Yorkshire on August 5th 1878 by Stanley Cotterell. It is Britain's national cyclists' association, devoted to the encouragement of cycling for recreation and as a means of transport, and to the protection of cyclists' interests.

The C.T.C. was the first Touring Club to be formed in the world. Membership details may be obtained from:-

C.T.C. National Headquarters,
Cotterell House, 69 Meadrow,
Godalming, Surrey, GU7 3HS

Tel: 0870 873 0060
e-mail: cycling@ctc.org.uk
website: www.ctc.org.uk

or from the local District Association (D.A.) Secretary or one of the Section Secretaries whose addresses are listed below.

EAST SUSSEX DISTRICT ASSOCIATION

(website: <http://eastsussexctc.5er.com>)

D.A. Secretary: David Rix, 27 Fullwood Avenue, Newhaven, BN9 9SP

E-mail: cycling@esda.worldonline.co.uk

Sections

Eastbourne & Hailsham: Marion Ball:

5 Horam Park Close, Horam, TN21 0HW

Hastings & Rother: Peter Jenner:

8 Hazelwood Gardens, St. Leonards on Sea, TN37 7HL

Mid-week Section: Esther Carpenter:

10 Maplehurst Road, Baldslow, St. Leonards on Sea, TN37 7NA

Seaford & Newhaven: Ann Rix:

3 Sutton Drove, Seaford, BN25 3EU

" THE COASTER " is published by the East Sussex District Association of the C.T.C. The opinions and comments expressed herein are the opinions and comments of the individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the East Sussex D.A. or its Sections. Contributions on any matters relating, even vaguely, to cycling (or on any subject of interest) are always welcome and should be sent to the Editor at the address given at the front.

A CRAZY RIDER

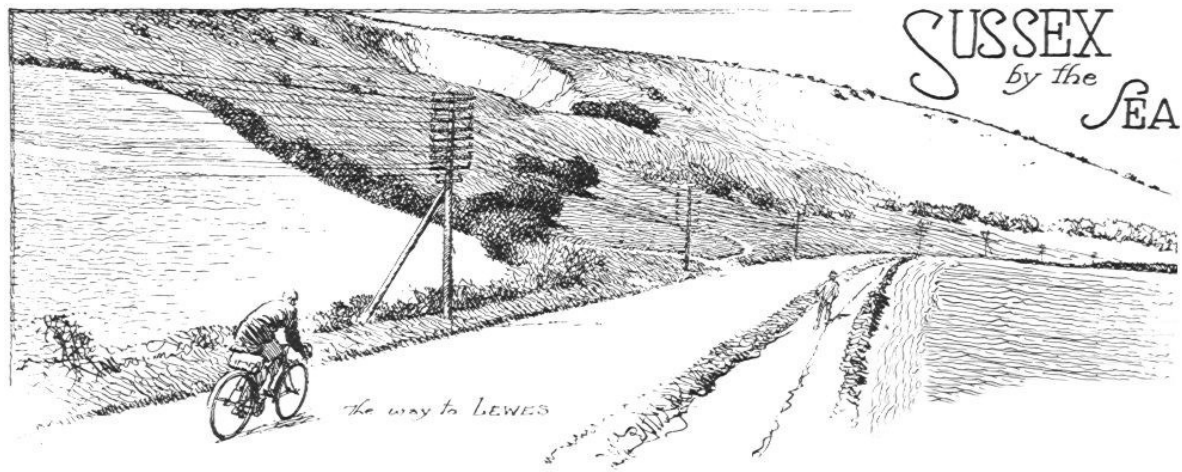
A report on a day in England by French CTC member Bernard Reinie

Do you know that today Newhaven is a town in the Parisian suburbs ?

Argenteuil, 12 km from Paris, a Wednesday in June. Five o'clock in the morning! The world belongs to the one who awakes very early. I have noticed that now there is a ferry between Dieppe and Newhaven, the timetable is interesting and Dieppe is not far from my home: only two hours by car!

Five o'clock, I just wash my eyes, the bike is in the car, and I jump to the adventure. Two hours of driving, I'll be in Dieppe at 7 h, and the ferry is at 8 h, perfect. Two hours later... I'm 30 km from Dieppe... in a morning fog, and I'm driving at 40km/h, and the clock turns, turns? My God! Half past seven and I just park the car in Dieppe harbour. Quick, quick, I lock the car and I pedal like mad to...to buy my ticket, and the employee speaks and speaks on his phone; "Please, it's ten to eight!! and I would like to continue my trip. A few minutes to eight, I'm on the boat, "ouf!" Made it, I'm now in England, my trip is beginning. But no, I'm very surprised, because the ferry is Italian, and here, everybody speaks Italian.

Four hours later, we arrive in Newhaven, that is to say 12 h ; no, no, it's 11h, I gain one hour, and I start off on my trip of 65 km, remember, Bernard, now keep to your left. I go straight to Lewes via Rodmell, and after that I turn right on the little roads. Hamsey,



Barcombe and its Pub - PUB! it's the time to stop for lunch with an English beer, a traditional beer, if you Please, and then I continue, Buckham Hill, Piltown, and now Fletching ; merde! I have lost my way, oh là là, and my ferry is at 17h!

I must ask my way ; this lady in her garden is a good idea : " Oh excuse me Madam, I would like to find my way to Fletching ?"

_ "oh yes, take the first on the right and then go straight on, it's the road to Fletching"

_ "Oh Thank you Madam"

_ "But where are you coming from?"

Does she recognise my horrible French accent ?

_ "This morning, at five o'clock, I was not far from Paris!" ... oh I must stop this speech, she is very astonished, she can't imagine I'm coming from Paris, at this time, in her garden, in

the middle of the afternoon! ... “and now I’m going back to Newhaven.”

“But it isn’t the shortest way “

Yes I know, but I can’t explain that for my trip I must discover Fletching, there is some French accent in this word, and I would like to discover this town with such a name.

16 h 00. in the afternoon, I’m in a Pub, in Newhaven, my trip is finished. I’m very happy in front of my orange juice with ice. The day was so dry, with fantastic sunshine. Who have said that it often rains in England?

17 h 30. I’m eating a delicious...Italian meal ... crossing the Channel, it’s a surrealist situation.

21 h00. I arrive in Dieppe, yes, but I must add one hour in this direction, it’s now 22h00. The day will be long. Two hours of driving...Midnight, I’m in my bed, I sleep, no, no, I dream! I ride, I continue to speak English! What a trip, what beer, what sun, what a day, what a challenge!

I hope in a short time, to go back to England with my bike, and ride with the CTC of Newhaven, remember, Newhaven, it’s the suburb of Paris.



* * * * *

ODD CYCLING CUTTINGS

Rack Track

A new Post Office in Wythenshawe, Manchester, has parking places for 48 bikes outside, but cyclists are so used to wheeling their machines into the old premises that they don’t use them.

From *Metro News*, 14/9/02

A Victorian Christmas

Victorians were passionate in their decoration of the home. Most of the house would be decorated and a holly cart was a common sight out in the streets just before Christmas, coming round specially for those people who could not collect their own from the countryside. The centrepiece of the home decorations, then as



now, though was the Christmas tree. Prince Albert is usually credited with the introduction of the Christmas Tree into England and it quickly became the centre piece of all seasonal decoration. The Christmas tree is captivatingly beautiful to children's eyes as it stands in its blazing brilliancy, gleaming with lights and laden with fruits.



For a few weeks before Christmas the streets of 19th century London began to assume a new aspect, for London was a musical city, with many groups of music makers playing on the busy streets.



It was the Victorians who collected, composed and published old and new carols.

On the first night of the Christmas holidays the voices of carol singers floated in on the night air, and if they were lucky, welcomed indoors for a glass of punch and a mince pie.



Carol singers were often portrayed struggling through the snow of the countryside with only the light of their lanterns to guide them.

The Victorians celebrated Christmas with characteristic enthusiasm and a deep veneration for custom and tradition. It was a time for families to be reunited and to enjoy themselves to the full, beside the Yule log's Christmas glow.

Christmas Eve in Victorian times was a day for arrivals. Those who were going to spend Christmas with friends or relatives travelled by train or coach. The coach would be crowded both inside and out, with passengers who were on their way to the homes of relations or friends to eat the Christmas Dinner. Others were returning home for the holidays, and promising themselves a world of enjoyment.





Arriving for Christmas

The Victorian card publishers were very fond of illustrating bygone times. Visitors and travellers arriving at Christmas shown in old costumes are the romantic and old-time associations which made the pictures on the cards so popular. Christmas was a time for looking back and savouring the traditions of Olde England.

Cards of the 1870s and 80s reflected this Victorian delight in any aspect of the old-fashioned Christmas.

Father Christmas or Santa Claus was the last and most welcome seasonal visitor to the Victorian household on Christmas Eve.

In the deep hours of the night, laden with gifts and presents, he visits every deserving child and silently fills their stockings, returns up the chimney and disappears into the night sky.

With his departure the whole family slept, no doubt with visions of the day to come.



Welcome old Father Christmas with all his festive cheer !

For most middle-class Victorians, the Christmas morning service in the old church was one of the focal points of the day and it was only after duty done that the presents and the midday meal could be enjoyed.



Hymns and carols on Christmas Day

Among the working classes religious observation was not so widespread. Tradesmen still carried on business - bakers kept their ovens burning in readiness to cook the local families' Christmas goose or turkey. And even the postmen delivered on Christmas Day !



There was a hub-bub through the big house as the time finally arrived to open the presents! How eagerly the young ones awaited the coming presents and what excitement and pleasure they had in opening them.



Inspired by the example of the Queen herself the nation became wholeheartedly devoted to the ideal of the family Christmas. Turkey, roast beef, plum pudding, mince pies and rich fruit cake were indispensable elements of the festive feast. No Christmas dinner was complete without the Christmas pudding. Plum puddings appeared on Christmas cards from the earliest times, usually adorned with the traditional sprig of holly.



Fair girl be warned
When Christmas comes
Reject that pudding
Stuffed with plums

With Christmas dinner over the Victorian father would bring out the crackers, this was a signal for the fun and games to begin. The Victorian family was never at a loss for things to do after dinner. There were songs to sing, recitations to endure and games to play.



A game of Snapdragon in progress

A popular game was "Snapdragon". A shallow bowl filled with spirit and currants was put on a table and the spirit set alight. The players had to try and snatch the currants out of the flames and put them into their mouths.

After the games it was time for the individual members of the family to entertain the company



Christmas Day would draw all too soon to a close. The visitors made their way home and the family to bed - midnight has passed and Boxing Day has dawned.



The Victorians threw themselves into charitable works with enthusiasm, giving Christmas boxes - presents of food and money to all the deserving poor of the parish, usually on the day after Christmas. These charitable acts reassured the well-to-do that the "decent poor" were provided for, at least at Christmas.

Snow clearers and crossing sweepers (shown left) would be examples of the deserving poor .

Victorian children looked forward to the Christmas party season with great delight.

A thrilling ride in horse and trap took them through the sparkling white snow to a friend's house for games and dancing.



With the last dance of the last ball of the season, the Victorian Christmas has come and gone - and a most marvellous Christmas it has been !

All illustrations are from contemporary Victorian sources.

WHAT IF?

If you are squeamish about bottoms and bowels then move on to the next article. If on the other hand you accept that we've all got them, then the following observations could be of interest to you.

What if the bicycle had evolved in parallel with, and over the same time span, as the human race? As it is, in roughly 150 years the humble cycle has reached a level of efficiency which could never have been dreamed of by Kirkpatrick Macmillan.

Would mankind have evolved differently under these conditions? Mankind has one major design weakness. The spent fuel (S/F) outlet is located right in the middle of the area designed for sitting. Not only that, it is out of sight and not visibly maintainable, unlike the cat! An elaborate and expensive system of drains is needed to take away the S/F products and a network of loos is required to accept them.

What if mankind had evolved with the sit upon separated from the S/F outlet? He would then have none of the problems experienced by the cyclist. The S/F outlet could then be located readily in an easily accessible position that could be visibly and hygienically maintained. Better still, have it fitted with a lightweight easily emptiable Porterloo which could be replaced on a regular basis. Imagine, no more frustrating hunts for a loo only to find that it has been rendered unusable by mindless vandals.

Maybe by the time all the petrol has run out evolution will have reached this point. It adds a whole new meaning to camping "wild".

The downside would be that the Friday night hooligans would have to find something else to vandalise and loo manufacturers would have to diversify or go to the wall. Imagine rolling up at a restricted New Forest campsite on a bike loaded with camping gear. Warden, "Sorry sir but there are no toilets on this site."

_"That's O.K. I have my own personal toilet"

I flash the bag stuck on my tummy and repeat,

_"I have my own personal toilet, see"

Warden, "Ah, but what about passing water sir"

_"You allow horses, cows, donkeys, and dogs on your site, what's more it's good for the grass".

Warden, getting exasperated, " But sir, you're not a dog."

_"All right, your foresters working in the woods don't go to a public loo when they want to go, what's the difference."

Warden picks up the phone, "Edinburgh? I've got a cycling nut here who doesn't use a loo and wants to use this site." What do you mean, " what the hell am I talking about?"



If you think this is all very fanciful I can assure you that “we have the technology” and the modification is available today!

If you have a dodgy spent fuel pipe, your friendly local surgeon can help.

As he said to me, “You have two options, I can operate, get rid of the dodgy bit of pipe and you’ll probably be O.K. or leave it and you probably won’t.” Pretty persuasive stuff.

Job done and the system working. The fact is that now I can’t imagine being without my colostomy bag.

By the way, do you know why surgeons are called Mister, not Doctor? It seems that in the early days of medicine a doctor who needed to make an amputation called in the most experienced man he knew at cutting flesh, the local butcher.

If you are diagnosed as needing an operation don’t be down. Think positive, keep fit and go for it. It takes several months for the old S/F site to heal over and the new S/F outlet to establish itself. On the upside no more sore bottoms, on the downside no control over when the new S/F outlet will operate, usually burbles when it will cause the most embarrassment, like the vicars tea party.

Hopefully your plumbing will see you out without modification. If not, fitting can be a bit of a pain and keep you off your bike for a few months but, if your man says, “You’ve got two choices,” go for it.

Mr Key.



A Victorian Christmas - the first cards

The World's first Christmas card was designed by J C Horsley in 1843 from an idea supplied by Henry Cole. One thousand copies were lithographed and sold at Felix Summerly's Home Treasury Office in Old Bond Street, England for one shilling each.



Cole's card is about the size of an ordinary postcard. Trellis work and garlands of ivy create a rustic frame for a kind of triptych. The oblong side-pieces depict the charitable acts of "clothing the naked" and "feeding the hungry", whilst the middle part shows a happy family gathering, drinking a toast to Christmas and the New Year, inviting us to join in.

Good works and good eating and drinking, the two elements of Victorian Christmas, make their appearance together - as it should be - on this first card.

Louis Prang is often called "the father of the American Christmas card". He originated the production of Christmas cards in the United States at his plant in Boston. Originally born in Breslau, Prang, came to America in 1850 and went into the printing business. At the Vienna Exposition in 1873, he distributed small business cards that had designs of flowers on a tinted or black background with a ribbon scroll for the name. It was the suggestion of an English lady that the ribbon or scroll on the cards be filled in with a Christmas greeting and be sold as a Christmas card.



These first Prang Christmas cards appeared in England in 1873 but were not sold in America until a year later.

Prang produced a large number of different Christmas cards, including one with Santa on a bike, but the competition from imported cards led Prang to give up the publication of Christmas cards in the 1890s.



Holiday Adventure at Finestre in the Pyrennees by John Regan



Peter Graham's step-son, Stephen, invited Peter to take some of his cycling friends on a holiday to his villa in Finestre during June. Ron Street took on the responsibility of the booking on the Bike Express and as a result Les Springett, John Seviour and John Regan boarded the Bike Express near Faversham. On arrival at Dover, Peter Graham, Marie Shepherd, Marian Jones, Pat Graham, Jan Porizecchi, Derek Pritty, Gordon Winrow and Marian Shephard loaded their cycles into the trailer and came aboard the luxury coach. A smooth crossing soon took us to Calais where we began our uneventful 1,200 miles journey south to Perpignan. We arrived on the Sunday morning and after we had all reassembled our cycles we set off at a steady pace for Finestre. Joyce Wickens and Val Marchant had flown over and were waiting for us, as pre-arranged, in Vinca.

Bill Earl had also flown and made the number up to 14.

During Stephen's absences in the UK the villa is looked after by a local man, Carlos. Carlos showed us around this large villa and we were so pleasantly surprised to discover that Carlos had made up enough beds for all of us. On average it was two to a room where most rooms had en-suite facilities. He had even arranged fourteen chairs around the beautiful oak dining room table for us. He had also bought in enough food to provide us with at least our initial meal and enough red and white wine to last us for the whole holiday. Stephen had arranged this wonderful reception for us. With a temperature just above or just below 30 degrees c. this was going to be a very successful adventure.

The following day was a Bank Holiday but Carlos took Pat, Marie and John R. in his car to the supermarket in Prades where we bought enough food to last us all for the whole holiday. So, apart from Pat and her team of lady volunteers who expertly managed an interesting and varied diet each day, that was the domestics taken care of. The co-operation from each and every member present helped the whole household to run smoothly and enjoyably right to the end of the holiday. All the ingredients for a perfect holiday were there: good company, excellent food and wine, wonderful weather and beautiful scenery.

On our first leisure day one group enjoyed a walk which began by climbing the grand stone staircase which led out from the back garden onto a path and so into the country. They then enjoyed a swim in the local lake near Vinca whilst the other party enjoyed a cycle run and then joined the swimmers for a refreshing dip. Tuesday was market day and the 'marketeers' went there to purchase more food and then they enjoyed a swim in the lake on the way back. Some of those who had enjoyed a cycle ride on the previous



day walked up part of the same beautiful valley which they had cycled on the day before and then they too joined the swimming party.

On the Wednesday the first group cycled via Prades so that John R. could have a new chain fitted to his 10 gear transmission. It transpired that it was all worn out and so he finished up with a new 21 gear transmission. That evening it was the turn of the men to cook the evening meal and even all the ladies agreed that they excelled themselves. A delicious four course French meal was served and enjoyed by all. Ron told a good joke in order to get a session of joke-telling under way and it worked successfully. On the Thursday we all had a long day out enjoying ourselves but Pat and her crew had planned ahead and a quick meal was soon on the table. Our timing was perfect because just a little way down the road from home there was a PYO cherry farm and on many evenings members would supplement our evening meal by bringing several kilos of lovely, large, juicy cherries back.

On the Friday Ron, John R., Marian and Jan planned a triangular walk up through some woods and then down again and through a village. They encountered two Dutch couples on their walk and received an invitation back to their camp-site which was on the walking route. The Dutch proprietor of this camping site had dammed the river to create a swimming pool for his campers. Marian and Jan borrowed swimming costumes from the Dutch ladies whereas John and Ron had to manage in their underpants!



Monday was market day again and our "marketeers" bought two more tins of paint and two new paint brushes. This enabled us to finish the rails and to include two solid steel gates, which really added the finishing touch. The "marketeers" also topped up the food supplies. Bill had expressed a wish to climb up the Col de Jau and Les, being a glutton for punishment, accompanied him to the top again.

On the Saturday Les, John S., and John R. cycled up to the Col du Jau (1536m). On our way back home we stopped in Prades for a coffee. We then set off for Finestre and did this part of the journey in less than 20 mins. On the Sunday the men rubbed down and then painted the railings, which surrounded the Courtyard in the House. We used up all the paint, which Carlos had left. However,



We ate all of our evening meals on the veranda and our party contained one or two birdwatchers. There were great sounds of enthusiasm as first one than another person spotted a Golden Oriole and further delight a few nights later when someone observed - "the Golden Oriole is back". The strikingly crested Hoopoe was also spotted as he probed the

ground for small insects. A small party of cyclists set off next morning at 7a.m. to catch "the yellow train". We needed to cycle to VilleFranche to catch this mountain train. We were pleasantly surprised to discover that our cycles could go on board free of charge. The surveying and construction of this railway line is of great credit to the many thousands who must have wielded pick-axes and shovels under dangerous conditions to achieve this unique railway. The train went up and up



at quite a steep angle, poised perilously over great drops and across lengthy viaducts, to climb to the highest station on the SNCF, which was some 1800 metres high. We cycled up to Font Romeau and enjoyed 'des grandes cafe au lait' with some beautiful French fresh fruit pastries. We then experienced our only rain in the form of a short thunderstorm. Derek and Val then demonstrated just how warm and dry one could be in a black sack and even appear to be dressed in 'haute couture'. We were pleasantly surprised when the cycle-shop proprietor from Prades stopped to talk to us. He had cycled all the way up from Prades. We then cycled down to Port Louis to await the next train home. Gordon and Marian repeated our experience on the following day and they also enjoyed it.

The following day John Seviour, like a true Huguenot cycled to within a few metres of the border with Spain. He reported back to the effect that there were no planned invasions and that the only Spaniards in this part of France were the friendly ones such as our own Carlos. Gordon led on a number of days and all those who accompanied him seemed to have found his trips most interesting. As often as not we all met up for a swim at a certain spot beside the lake, which we seemed to acquire as our very own.

And so enjoyable day after enjoyable day we all too soon reached the end of our holiday. On the last day we were all packed up and ready to leave at 8 a.m. - quite remarkable! With the sun shining and with a strong following wind we set off on our way home. We were free-wheeling almost at 15 m.p.h. along the N116 on the cycle path quite nonchalantly. Quite innocently we passed by a sign with a blue car on it and we noticed just how friendly the motorists and lorry drivers were as they tooted. Then we noticed 'le Gendarme' with their van blocking the hard shoulder and with its lights flashing. Firmly but politely they directed us off the motorway. The little blue car had converted the cycle path into a hard shoulder. We will know the next time. We had feared that we might be treated to a free night's bed and breakfast in the local goal. Bill had gone his own way independently as usual and we then bade farewell to Joyce and Val on their way to the airport. We enjoyed elevenses and then lunch and arrived in good time to catch the bike express back. As we waited beside the Toll-gates we were amused to talk to the French civil servants who were on strike. Vehicle drivers were being given the option as to whether to pay the tolls or not and perhaps to drop some coins into the strikers' tins. We then had a trouble free journey back through France and a smooth crossing. Many thanks to both Stephen and Peter for a most enjoyable holiday.

* * * * *

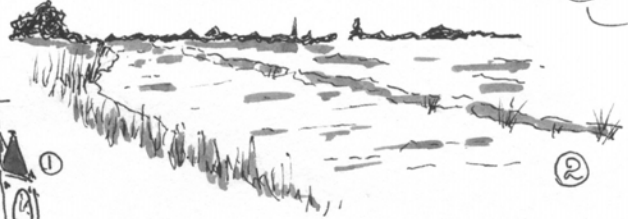
Downham Market. Fine, once important market town.

Date. 3.6.03.

Destination. The Wighenhall's.

A NORFOLK MEANDER.

- ① Clock Tower. Downham Market.
- ② River Great Ouse. Morton Bridge.
- ③ Wattington.



⑤ St Mary Magdalene, Wighenhall.
 14th Century font.
 Clock commemorates Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.
 Mediaeval stained glass. (circa 1450)

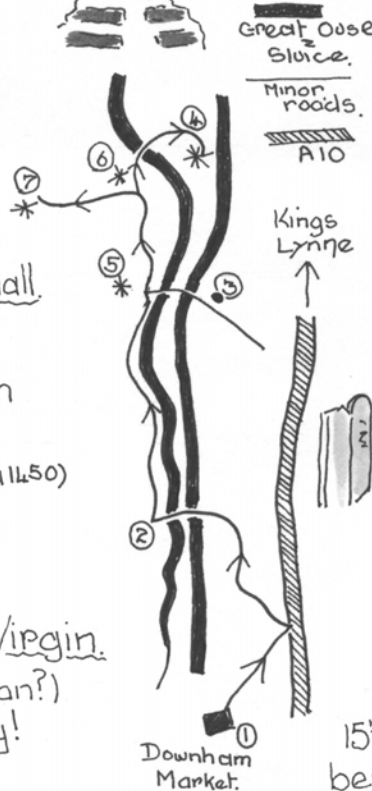


St Peter's Wighenhall. ④
 A romantic ruin on the very edge of the Great Ouse.



St German's Wighenhall. ⑥
 15th Century pews with carved bench ends, among the finest in England.
 Jacobean pulpit with hour glass and stand (1600)

⑦ Wighenhall St Mary the Virgin.
 Fierce dog (doberman?) prevented my entry!



Grid Reference. TF 59 14.



A Victorian Christmas - The Pantomime



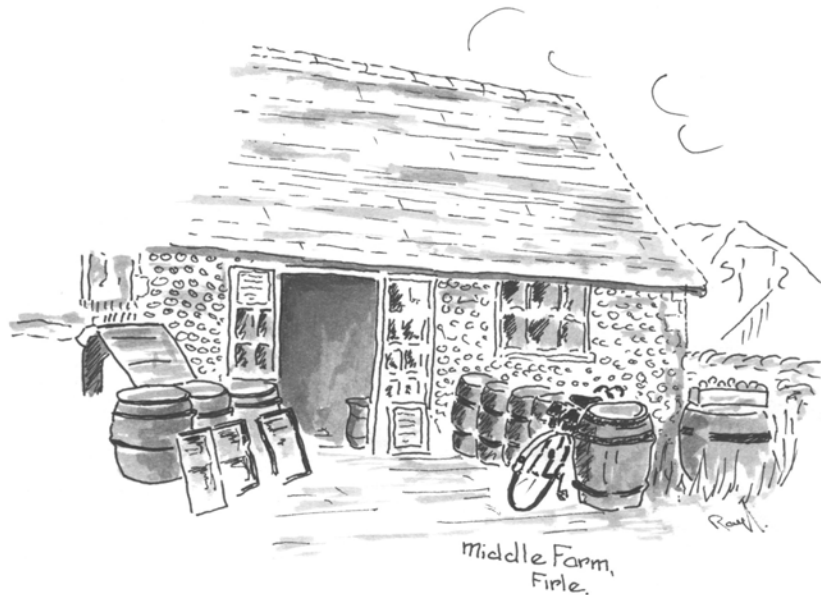
This evening the pits and galleries of all the theatres will be in their usual state of "Boxing Night" excitement and expectation.

For the pantomime was one of the great Victorian institutions and a peculiarly British affair. They attracted huge audiences of all generations and everything was designed to titillate and excite.



Fabulous celebrities would be wearing fanciful and splendid costumes and the whole performance commanded the applause of a full house.

Tradition demands that Harlequin with his bat, or Clown with the poker, shall turn everyday objects into something unexpected - the heights of fantasy are reached in the pantomime.



Every day Sussex by Roy James

PUJAS, RACING PIGS AND CUTTIFORD'S DOOR - PART 2

by Peter Crowsley

You may think - assuming that you read part 1 - that this will be a nostalgic ramble about touring in the 50's, when the weather was always perfect, there was 'No' traffic and B & B's were ten bob a night. But as none of that was true and in order to explain the strange title we will need to move forward a few decades to the late 90's and that Rite of Passage called retirement. It catches people in different ways. For many it comes as a shock of reduced income to a state pension and a "drawing in of ones horns" whatever that is. In my case my business acumen was such that a pension felt like a rise. Given the chance I would have opted for early retirement, about 17 would have been ideal. Unfortunately retirement was preceded by the death of my partner, and as Ellen and I had enjoyed nearly 20 years of holidays it marked a major change in several ways.

One was a return to Youth Hostelling. Geoff Boxall and I chose a fine autumn day in '97 to ride the ridge of the Malvern Hills, having stopped at the nearby hostel, and then wallow in a bit of nostalgia for the mid-Wales Easter rides we did with the Southborough Wheelers in the 60's and 70's by stopping at Brecon Hostel. It was when leaving the hostel that Geoff had a most peculiar accident resulting in a buckled frame. The only time I've been able to keep up with him descending hills.

Andover isn't a name that comes to mind for an ideal touring centre. If you read "What's on in Andover", it's quite understandable why, as its main attractions consist of pubs, bingo, karaoke evenings and car boot sales. However, one advert stood out announcing "Pig racing at peak times". This was at Cholderton Rare Breeds Farm, just off the A303. It has one of the largest collections of rabbits and fowls in the UK. But for me, whose life-changing moment was a ride on a pig at 4 years old, pig racing was the main attraction. The course is "sporting" and the sight of 6 teenaged pigs hurtling into a right-angled bend in a tight pack and at high speed, plus the sound of thundering trotters, would gladden the heart of any criterium racing enthusiast. The impression is that the pigs really like it. As my friend Jackie, who I was stopping with at the time, said "When my friends hear that you've stopped with me for a week AND taken me pig racing, they're bound to think that we're going steady."



Weather can be a major factor in holidays, so when my stay at Golant Youth Hostel, just outside Fowey, coincided with a beautiful Indian summer, it felt as though the Mediterranean had come to Cornwall for the autumn. This was touring at its very best and made up for the dismal weather 43 years previously.

Originally South Petherton (7 miles west of Yeovil) was a stopping - overnight place on our travels to the Isles of Scilly and points west, but since then I've returned many times on a working holiday arrangement - too complex to explain here. This corner of Somerset is ideal for cycle touring being "undiscovered", with the Levels of Glastonbury to the north,

the Dorset hills and coast to the south and peaceful lanes, but few cyclists. Most of the motorised lemmings rush up and down the A303 to and from the South-west and thankfully miss this area. I love the village names such as Ryme Intrinseca, Dowlish Wake and Cuttiford's Door. Regarding the latter (just north of Chard) the local doctor told me - yes he cycles too - that there is no door but a garden centre surrounded by cottages. Knowing how most villages started from a small dwelling, I wondered if this was a really ancient garden centre.

Regular visits to South Petherton have helped me get to know the locals and join in activities. Although I am not a Buddhist I go along to their meetings and attempt to join in singing Pujas, which are vaguely like a Christian Psalm but faster and sung in Tibetan. Something of a challenge as my Tibetan isn't very fluent in this incarnation, but at least it's something different.

Mention must be made of "The Docks", a pub was out in the country. Inside the walls are covered with photos of steam locos, docks and shipping (although the nearest must be 35 miles away), station name boards and general railway ephemera, giving the impression of some long disused branch line. All of it is fictitious and grew out of one of the local's fantasies that got out of control. Then there's Punky night at Hinton St. George and stories from local cyclist Ray Vanovich. I've a feeling that that's not a Somerset name.

You will gather from all this that my cycle touring is hardly the conventional stuff of cycle mags., but then cyclists are individualists - or the interesting ones are anyway. Sometime I'll fill you in with cycle touring between post-RAF and retirement.

* * * * *



A Topsy-Turvy Christmas on the pond !

By the time they get home their clothes will be as stiff as a board. Their wives will have to put them in front of the fire to thaw, before they can get out of them.

Set of four cards published by Hildesheimer & Faulkner



The afternoon grew murky and the air was thick with falling snow.

Two jolly gentlemen and their dog, hurrying through the dusky winter day, with a view to taking a turn on the frozen surface of the fish pond.

The greeting cards depict a few lively scenes illustrative of this popular recreation, which to those once expert in the balanced attitude and gliding movement is always delightful.



However, if there be any personal deficiency of aptitude for the exercise, want of skill, natural clumsiness or feebleness, or lack of courage, fortitude and self-possession, it is sure to betray itself on the ice and to excite the unflattering comments of idle spectators.



Few care for a possible tumble but the chance of a ducking in such cold water is a disagreeable possibility, and the general sympathy with healthy enjoyment is too often saddened by accounts of drowning !!

