

## AUTUMN 2015 RUN REPORT: AGAINST ALL THE ODDS

I blame Tom Waterer; it was all his idea. Why not have a run based near Warwick, he suggested, with a morning loop around the Cotswolds and an afternoon route to the North, reprising some of the territory not visited since Rollo Denbigh's memorable Dunchurch run in 1991?

Having convinced me that I should put my local knowledge to good effect by taking charge of the afternoon loop, he then hit on the idea of including Norman Hyde in the organising team, with responsibility for accommodation and catering. Who better to ensure the finest wines and cuisine would be provided?

Unable to fault Tom's plan, Norman and I joined him for a series of 'recces' and everything soon fell into place with the run based at the excellent Glebe Hotel in Barford, just south of Warwick. In March 2014 "The Sunday Times" listed the village as one of the Top 10 places to live in The Midlands, which could only bode well, even if we would be there just for the weekend.

Barford was the birthplace of Joseph Arch (10 November 1826 – 12 February 1919), the politician who played a key role in unionising agricultural workers and in championing their welfare. He started work at the age of nine as a crow-scarer, working 12 hours a day. Afterwards he became a plough-boy, progressing to mastery of all-round skills, which enabled him to move around the Midlands and South Wales, earning a reasonable wage. At the same time he observed the terrible conditions in which the majority of agricultural labourers lived.[PIC]

At one time he also became a Primitive Methodist preacher in Barford but was discriminated against by the village parson and his wife, with whom his family had always been at odds. Since the Glebe Hotel was originally the village rectory, built in the 1820s, one suspects Arch would have been far less welcome there than our party.

As members and guests arrived on the Friday, we soon had a complicated mixture of riders, diners and 'part-timers'; an organiser's nightmare! Tom Waterer joined us for the evening dinner but had to attend a family wedding on the Saturday so was unable to join the actual run. Is this a first for an organiser? Mike Jackson and Peter Britton were welcome additions to the throng but also unable to join the Saturday run. Peter was particularly grateful to his daughter for chauffeuring him to and from the hotel, but gave her strict instructions not to collect him too early as it would interrupt his revelries!

All told, we had 20 bikes lined up outside the hotel, plus Peter Sheen, Dennis Bates, Alan Blake and Maurice Knight, who would follow the route by car. I had issued them with details of the various stops, including postcodes, so they could elect to follow the run or take short cuts where more appropriate. It was a shame that many of our run regulars had other commitments on that particular weekend but whatever we lacked in number, we more than made up for in attitude. There was a great atmosphere all weekend. Mind you, I'm not sure how much of this was due to the beer. True to form, Norman had arranged a supply from an award winning local micro-brewery, Slaughterhouse Brewery of Warwick. The proprietor, Steve Ridgway, was Norman's guest for the weekend, and brought his 1990 Yamaha SRX500 on the run.

The usual formalities on the Friday evening included a 'double act' from Norman and me, assuring members of a seamless handover between the morning and afternoon routes at the lunch stop.

Norman was to lead the morning run while I would be Tail End Charlie; both of us resplendent in reflective yellow bibs for easy identification. Our roles would be reversed in the afternoon; what could possibly go wrong?

#### SATURDAY MORNING: THE COTSWOLDS LOOP

Saturday dawned dry and mild but with a persistent mist. We took a hearty breakfast in the bright and airy Conservatory before assembling with tanks full and throttle hands twitching, ready for a prompt start at 9am. My son, Phil, joined us for the run on his 'pocket rocket' FZR400, under strict instructions not to misbehave, and having memorised the rules for the drop-off system of marshalling. I need not have worried; the only comments that came back to me about his riding were complimentary.

Norman led the run away on his Hinckley Bonneville, equipped with a variety of Hyde enhancements to the standard specification. Other machines and riders that caught my eye were Nick Hopkins, on a 1955 Norton 600cc single instead of his usual Commando, Graham Archer (Alan Halford's guest) on a 1958 BSA A10, Rick Parish, who had been extolling the virtues of his huge Triumph Trophy 1200 in the bar on Friday evening, and Graham Goodman, whose trademark mustard yellow BMW 1150GS seems to sprout more accessories on every run!

Keith Blair's 1995 BMW K75 with its huge fairing looked very blue and was as reliable as ever; Tony Dawson, finding the FJ1200 increasingly heavy to handle, was on his newly acquired TDM850 and Alan Halford's Suzuki GSX650F made a familiar sight. It was very noticeable how many people had brought touring/adventure bikes, perhaps reflecting the ageing membership profile. Even the most ardent 'press-on' merchants are becoming affected; Andy Smith, once a regular R1 pilot, was mounted on a 1200 Super Tenere and Steve Callahan on a KTM Adventure 990cc; what is the world coming to?

From Barford, the route took riders West towards Alcester, using a short stretch of the B4089 which was once a favourite road for Meriden test riders. Another Triumph link, less well known, is that for many years John Bloor kept a 'second home' at Aston Cantlow for use mid-week when business commitments precluded a return to base. From Great Alne, we rode South across the Vale of Evesham. During this section, I noticed we had 'picked up' another rider. Not recognising the bike, I assumed he was just a local out for a ride, and when he pulled over I thought nothing of passing him. It was only later I discovered that it was Steve from Slaughterhouse Brewery and that I had unwittingly committed a cardinal sin as Tail End Charlie by overtaking him!

The original route crossed the river at Bidford-on-Avon but just weeks before the Autumn Run some idiot decided to put a very large agricultural vehicle through the parapet of the ancient bridge, closing it for repairs for many months. As there are relatively few crossing points over the Avon in this area, the revised route took us through Welford-on-Avon, which usually gives an exceptional view of the river which is particularly wide and slow moving at this point. Sadly, the thick morning mist meant most of the riders were more concerned about looking where they were going; later, at the coffee stop Norman would be heard complaining that he had struggled with a steamed up visor and assuring everybody that his relaxed pace was being dictated by visibility, not any physical infirmity or loss of enthusiasm for a good 'scratch'.

The re-route also took us through Long Marston, famous in recent years for its nearby airfield; the home of drag racing in the Midlands, and the Bulldog Bash. In earlier times, the village itself provided refuge for Charles II in September 1651, when he stayed at the house of a kinsman of Jane Lane called Tomes, on his way from Bentley Hall to Abbots Leigh during his escape following the defeat of the army at the Battle of Worcester. He was travelling incognito as a servant to Jane Lane, sister-in-law of George Norton, the owner of the house at Abbot's Leigh to which they were bound. In keeping with his outward guise as a servant, the cook of the house put him to work in the kitchen winding up the jack used to roast meat in the fireplace. Charles was very clumsy at this, but explained his clumsiness by saying that as the son of poor people, he so rarely ate meat that he did not know how to use a roasting jack. Given the state of the economy at the time, his story was accepted and he was not identified.

We reached the most southerly point of the route at Broadway where an enthusiastic dash up Fish Hill followed. Whether familiar with its bends or not, they always seem to tighten up just a bit more than expected! We rode past the site of Dan and Ben's excellent Spring 2014 run at Farncombe Conference Centre on our left with the distinctive Folly Tower to our right.

Broadway Tower was the brainchild of the great 18th Century landscape designer, Capability Brown. His vision was carried out for George William 6th Earl of Coventry with the help of renowned architect James Wyatt and completed in 1798. The location for the Tower was wisely chosen, a dramatic outlook on a pre-medieval trading route and Beacon Hill. Wyatt designed his "Saxon Tower" as an eccentric amalgamation of architectural components ranging from turrets, battlements and gargoyles to balconies.

Fifteen feet below a field on the Broadway Tower estate lies a relic of the Cold War. The former monitoring bunker was once part of a wider network of similar structures all over the United Kingdom built to study and report the effects of nuclear explosions and the resulting radioactive fallout. Manned by men and women of the Royal Observer Corps; they would be expected to spend 3 weeks below ground during a Nuclear Exchange. The Broadway Tower bunker was closed in 1991 when the Royal Observer Corps stood down but it has now been fully restored to how it would have been in the 1980's at the height of the Cold War.

The morning mist was disappearing as we reached the coffee stop at the Three Ways House in Mickleton, previously the base for Norman's 1987 run, the last one before the introduction of the 'drop-off' or despatch rider system. The sun was most welcome and stayed with us for the remainder of the run. We had covered 40 miles from the start at Barford, with another 40 to the lunch stop.

Mickleton was the scene of Brunel's infamous 'Battle of Mickleton Tunnel (1851), considered the last pitched battle to be fought between private armies in England. The 'battle' was between rival railway contractors and demonstrated both the fierce, belligerent loyalty of the navvies and their taste for fighting. Today's Cotswolds Line was built as part of the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway and under the general direction of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Although Brunel was an energetic and obsessive supervisor, he could not oversee all aspects of construction. Certain parts of the line were subcontracted and this is how the building of the Campden Tunnel came to be undertaken by Mr Marchant.

Brunel was unhappy with progress on the tunnel and had stopped paying Marchant. The debt from Brunel reached £34,000, Marchant stopped paying his men and construction ground to a halt. This was intolerable for both Brunel and Peto and Betts, the firm responsible for building the rest of the line. Reports vary, but it seems likely that about 2,000 navvies assembled under Brunel's command. His idea was to overawe Marchant by an overwhelming show of strength, and to persuade him to hand over the works. At three o'clock on Monday morning the navvies began to close in on the tunnel and the Battle of Mickleton began. Although enlivened by injuries big (a head almost severed from the body) and small (a little finger bitten off), this account does not do justice to the scale of the Battle. A fuller, historical account is given in Terry Coleman's book 'The Railway Navvies'. The epic opening of the battle includes a cast of thousands, including navvies dredged from across the west country, cutlass wielding policemen, pistol waving contractors and reinforcements from the army.

Suitably fortified by a combination of caffeine and calories (home-made biscuits!), we took a little known but highly entertaining (i.e. very twisty) cross-country route from Mickleton across to the Fosse Way at Halford. Instead of sweeping up the Fosse on the modern bridge which spans a tributary of the Stour, we thought it would be amusing to take the old bridge which still stands alongside, largely hidden from view. First mentioned in 1278, in 1633 it was called 'a great bridge and very useful to passengers passing from Warwick to Shipston'; it was broken down by the Royalists in 1644, and apparently again later by the Parliamentarians 'for the safety of the county'.

Picking up the pace, we turned off the Fosse Way onto the A422 Stratford-Banbury road for an ascent on another famous hill, Sun Rising, the scene of much 'pedal assistance' on vintage motorcycles during the annual Banbury Run. Reports of motorists coming to grief descending Sun Rising Hill date back to 1907; as recently as the 1980s, during the Honda-Rover years, a group of visiting Japanese senior staff also were caught out by its deceptive bends, according to a tale I was told in the bar on an earlier Club Run (by Ray Battersby if I recall).

After Sun Rising, we trickled through Edge Hill with its distinctive pub, The Castle, built in the 1740s and overlooking the scene of the first major battle of the English Civil War, 100 years earlier, on the fields below. A few miles of scratching took us to the village of Temple Herdewyke and past the Kineton MoD facility, visited many years ago on a Club run and the largest ammunition dump in Western Europe. Once you've had an ammunition expert explain the aftermath of a depleted uranium shell piercing an armour plated tank turret, you don't really want to go back for more. So we left it off the itinerary this time.

Much happier thoughts occupied us as we climbed the Burton Dassett hills near Fenny Compton, topped by the distinctive round tower, the Beacon, a late medieval look-out tower which is just visible from some parts of the M40. Look for it next time you're dashing between London and The Midlands (or perhaps not, if you're driving).

The sweeping bends of the A423 took us North to Southam (if that isn't a contradiction) and as traffic was light for a Saturday morning, we were able to enjoy the road to the full. Southam is famous for minting its own currency (Southam tokens) because the locals found the regular English currency too high in value for everyday use. I used to drink in the pub, The Olde Mint, on Coventry Street, many years ago, but didn't realise its significance at the time.

The flowing A425 took us from Southam towards Daventry, peeling off into more challenging lanes and field roads (fully metalled of course!) to reach our lunch stop at the Rose Inn, Willoughby, just five minutes behind schedule at 12:05. Records of Willoughby village pre-date the Norman Conquest, and five small tenanted estates there are listed in the Domesday Book.

On arrival at the pub our group spread out; some indoors, some in the sunshine; all with big smiles and enjoying the kind of animated conversation that follows a great ride with friends. It was nice to catch up with everybody after my first ever stint as Tail End Charlie. It had been very enjoyable, ambling along 'hoovering up' all the riders marking the junctions. The relatively small turnout meant that pretty well all the riders 'did' a junction or two so I was continually riding with different people.

The Rose had impressed us during the recce; the landlord had agreed to our budget for soup and sandwiches plus drinks all round and promised to include locally reared beef in wholemeal sandwiches and home-made soup. Then he went on holiday without fully briefing the staff.

My first inkling that all was not well came with the sight of a tray of sandwiches; white bread, some containing grated cheese, some with tuna and other 'low budget' fillings, about enough for six of us. Another, similar, tray arrived and at this point I asked who was in charge. The poor old chef had been left holding the fort and while his mushroom soup was indeed home-made, and delicious, I made it clear that we had been badly let down regarding the standard promised. Unable to offer a cost reduction in the proprietor's absence, he provided copious quantities of freshly cooked chips as a supplement and more sandwiches; I don't think anybody was left hungry. In fact towards the end of the meal I was walking round with half-full trays of the remaining chips, trying to tempt members into having seconds!

#### SATURDAY AFTERNOON: ROMAN ROADS, TEST TRACKS AND A DEAD KING

With roles reversed, I was now leading the run while Norman covered the rear. If the morning had been characterised by history from the Civil War and the Industrial Revolution, the afternoon was to be a trip through Roman, Plantagenet and Cold War eras; plus another selection of twisty roads, of course.

Climbing out of Willoughby to Kilsby, then Crick, we took back roads past Stanford Hall, home to the VMCC Founders Day and countless other classic vehicle events, before the petrol stop at North Kilworth, on the Lutterworth/Market Harborough road. I tried a new approach to the petrol stop; instead of halting the entire run, one rider marked 'in' and another marked 'out' so instead of bunching up the run, riders carried on at their own pace. It worked very well except that I ran out of people to 'drop off' a few miles later and had to wait for the field to catch up!

A few miles north of the petrol stop we passed Bruntingthorpe proving ground, for many years home to the last flying Vulcan, XH558, and soon to be home to Royal Enfield's UK technical centre. It's certainly handy for test track facilities (and potential recruits from Hinckley!). During the dash down from Bruntingthorpe to Lutterworth the only bike I could see in my mirrors was our Phil's FZR. It was a surreal experience; riding briskly with my son on a road we have travelled many times, it could have been a typical sunny Saturday afternoon outing, except it wasn't; we were in the middle of a Club Run with a cross section of industry VIPs just a few minutes behind, relying on somebody to give directions at the next junction. Best get a grip then.

Picking our way through small villages as we 'squeezed' between Leicester and Lutterworth we emerged briefly onto a narrow, featureless straight; apparently just an anonymous country lane. It was in fact the course of the original Roman Fosse Way, but with a more recent tarmac dressing than our occupying friends would have recognised.

Soon after the Fosse Way, not long before the afternoon tea stop, with the riders becoming spread out, I had to wait at a junction for the next bike to arrive. It was Keith Blair, who followed me to the next turning where I indicated for him to stop in the usual way, to guide following riders. Imagine my surprise when he carried straight on, apparently ignoring my increasingly desperate gestures, followed by Maurice Knight and his fellow travellers in the car. Fortunately I knew Keith had gone up a dead end and would soon return. However, when he did return (followed by Maurice and co) he rode straight past me, in the intended direction, and I couldn't chase after him without leaving the junction and prejudicing the rest of the run. The next rider along was Nick Hopkins who responded to my gestures by stopping and order was restored; I set off after Keith but to no avail – he had disappeared into the Leicestershire countryside.

The afternoon tea stop was at Mallory Park race circuit. Though the circuit management was at Assen for the weekend, we had special permission to unlock the circuit gates and make our way to the grid for a photo opportunity (as long as we kept the noise down). I informed the old ladies at the circuit café that we had arrived so they could start organising the tea and cakes, then we made our way down to the start line. How hard could it be to take a picture of the riders and their machines? At any given moment there seemed to be as many people behind the photographer, taking their own pictures, as there were 'in frame'.

As a noise precaution, and mindful of the circuit's difficult relationship with certain neighbours in recent times, we were restricted to just one lap. This didn't seem to register with Roy Pinto, who managed two or three laps in total on his Hinckley Triumph Tiger. Needless to say, the Sergeant-at-Arms was notified and due punishment was meted out later!

Returning to the café, the old dears began taking our orders for tea and cakes. They clearly had not grasped our intention that they should prepare everything while we were on the circuit. Never mind; the run was still on schedule so we sat around in the sunshine, taking bets on where Keith Blair, Maurice Knight and friends would next be seen.

In the event, they all arrived at Mallory Park in time for cakes; Keith's excuse for overtaking the Run Leader was: 'I just thought it was some guy on a T-reg Bandit.' Perhaps I should have been riding my more familiar green Trident?

The route across country from Mallory took us past the point where Richard 111 was believed to have fallen during the battle of Bosworth, and from where his recent ceremonial funeral procession began. We reached our most northerly point at Twycross, where we joined the B4116 to Sheepy Magna (a good Roman name, typical of this area). This road formed part of the test route for the early Hinckley Triumph prototypes and was where a certain Mr Nick Jeffery identified a head shaking issue with the unfaired Trident model, back in 1989. Nick was the first person outside the Triumph factory to ride the prototypes so his opinion was considered impartial and taken very seriously. I can still recall the impact of his words: 'it's not frightening but at the same speed over the same stretch

of road my Kawasaki GT550 doesn't do it'. Those words hit hard and we quickly set to finding a solution.

Crossing the A5 (or Watling Street as our Roman chums called it) we cut across North Warwickshire, scenically one of the best kept secrets in the Midlands, through woodland, over hill and dale, and south through Maxstoke to Meriden. The 'straight mile' from the centre of Meriden towards Hampton-in-Arden was another famous Triumph testers' route but nowadays the various driveways and entrances along its length mean using a little more caution.

The A452 through Balsall Common and the A4177 past Honiley enabled us to miss the serious conurbations of Coventry and Birmingham and brought us to within a few miles of the Glebe. All that remained was a short run through the minor roads between Claverdon and Barford and everyone was back safe and sound by 5:15, having covered 180 miles all told.

#### SATURDAY EVENING AND AFTER:

Such a prompt finish at the hotel meant there was plenty of time in the bar for catching up with the day's events and enjoying an aperitif or two before dinner. In cahoots with Rick Parish, we had agreed to give Norman a bit of extra leeway to push the boat out on a few extras; the wine and cheese selection were particularly notable examples. I don't normally drink much wine but even I was converted by the quality on offer. After a short address by our chairman, Graham Matcham, it was on to the serious business of the Sergeant-at-Arms.

Steve Callahan has now made the role of Sergeant-at-Arms very much his own and generated mirth all around the room with his selection of accusations and fines; some particularly well-deserved, all highly entertaining. He must have the balance about right because everybody felt equally victimised by the end of the evening and felt obliged to seek solace in the bar until closing time.

Sunday began with another hearty breakfast (where do we put it all?) before the customary members' meeting, which has been reported separately by Graham Goodman. As members said their goodbyes, Norman and I received a number of very welcome expressions of thanks; these are much appreciated and it seems that we got the balance of location, accommodation, terrain and timing about right. It was a real pleasure to be able to put something back into a club which has brought me so much pleasure over the years. I promise not to leave it 14 years between runs next time.

Martyn Roberts

#### RUNNERS AND RIDERS

Martyn Roberts	Suzuki Bandit 600
Tony Dawson	Yamaha TDM850
Graham Matcham	BMW 1200GS
Nick Hopkins	Norton 19S 600cc single, 1955 model
Alan Halford	Suzuki GSX650F

Graham Archer	BSA A10 Gold Flash 650cc 1958 model (Alan H's guest)
Steve Callahan	KTM Adventure 990cc
Nick Campolucci	Honda Crossdresser 1200
Keith Davies	Triumph Tiger XRX 800cc
Graham Goodman	BMW 1150GS
Tony Jakeman	BMW F800GT
Ian Kerr	Yamaha FJR1300 Police demonstrator
Bob McMillan	Honda Crossdresser 1200
Rick Parish	Triumph Trophy 1200
Roy Pinto	Triumph Tiger 1050
Andrew Smith	Yamaha Super Tenere 1200cc
Arthur MacDonald	Triumph Tiger 800cc
Keith Blair	BMW K75 750cc (1995 model)
Norman Hyde	Triumph Bonneville T100 (865cc)
Steve Ridgway	Yamaha SRX500 (1990) Slaughterhouse Brewery man
Phil Roberts	Yamaha FZR400 (1989) (Martyn's son)
Peter Sheen	**
Dennis Bates	**
Alan Blake	**
Maurice Knight	**

Peter Britton, Mike Jackson – Friday night only, not on the run





Graham Matcham, Andy Smith, Keith Davies, Bob McMillan and Keith Blair in the morning mist after breakfast on Saturday, prior to the 'off'



Dennis Bates obviously admiring the organisers' bikes while Andy Smith shares a joke with Maurice Knight at the lunch stop



Norman Hyde relaxing at the lunch stop; having led through the morning mist he had a much easier afternoon as Tail End Charlie



Norman Hyde and Martyn Roberts looking like Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee at Mallory Park



On the start line at Mallory Park during the afternoon tea stop. It was supposed to be an organised photo shoot but nearly as many people were behind the camera as in the picture. It was like herding cats!



Ian Kerr and Rick Parish conferring over cake at the tea stop



At the tea stop, Keith Blair explains to Nick Hopkins how he came to overtake the Run Leader while Arthur MacDonald shows off his body art and Alan Halford tries to look super cool in his 'biker' shades



Bob McMillan looks distinctly unhappy at the tea stop when the lady offers Andy an identical cake to his own but with extra cream



Graham Goodman's eyes narrowed as he squinted against the afternoon sun trying to make out if the GS on the other side of the car park was fitted with more accessories than his