



news letter No.22,

May, 2021

## VMCC Warwickshire Section Newsletter

Hello to you all, it looks as though that light is getting brighter as we exit the tunnel.

**Your section committee met a week or so ago and have pencilled in some dates for your diary. These are listed on our website. The first meet is this Sunday May16 at the Dog Lane Fishery, Napton.** It is just an informal get together (socially distanced still) preferably on a bike, or in a car, or a new-fangled electric scooter if you wish!

In between events you might like to visit one or more of the National Way points that I informed members of last week.



In this edition we have a couple of interesting articles written by members as well as some regular items. We always need more of them so please send in your piece, however short or long, grammatically bad or poorly spelt. We can sort them out.

### Chairman's Chat

By the time you read this newsletter, the committee would have met to discuss the coming year ahead. For once, the news is positive.....we have put together a calendar of pop up meetings, social gatherings and organised rides for everyone to enjoy. It will be nice to exercise our mighty machines on the road, meet up with old friends and hopefully, make new ones along the way. If you receive this newsletter and are not a VMCC member.... fear not, we are a friendly bunch, so introduce yourselves and click elbows. We must also be mindful that some people may still be nervous about meeting in groups, and also please remember to wear a face covering inside a cafe while ordering food.

We look forward to meeting up with you soon.

David Kendall

## A Velo. Nightmare as recounted by long time member Arthur Farrow

I must confess I am not a very long term Velo man but I am an experienced old bike bloke with particular experience riding and restoring of another glorious motorcycle beginning with V. I have always fancied a "Fruyton" ever since pressing my red nose against the window of Saunders shop in Leigh on Sea as a kid and wondering at the Blue framed delight in front of me. So, I took the plunge in 2017 buying at auction an honest "original and unrestored" near one owner bike in Blue and Silver of course that had been the auctioneers "headline" bike. I had not been well on the day of the auction courtesy the local Chinese take away so decided to bid on line and sight unseen.

The wise amongst you will have already spotted several classic errors, these were compounded by stupidly paying a World Record Price, but it was Ok because I felt sorry for myself with the Chinese business and anyway, I was going to get a right 'stonker'. Unfortunately, it seems I cannot spell because instead I got a 'stinker'. It started very well, handled like a pig on stilts, and had been recently "improved" by the vendor by using the most appalling blow over rattle can paintwork on the tank, mudguards and toolbox. The frame had the patina I had been hoping and expecting the whole machine to have, but overall, it was tragic. Classic errors now numbered about 10. It had, I think, been misrepresented, hands up anybody who has been pleased with an auction purchase? For me it's been 1 out of 6.

I did get to speak to the previous owner on the phone who had owned the machine over 50 years he was genuine and pleasant, but faults creep in during long ownership honestly not always spotted. Interestingly the chap referred to the big pile of bits with the bike which I did not have. So I called the auctioneer who stumbled at the question, clearly embarrassed and promised to personally deliver them which he did some weeks later.

The gear change was abominable with the foot brake and gear lever bonking themselves, the exhaust and all parts in-between, this was partially cured by new parts and the excellent internal rose joint gearbox linkage the club sold at that time and finally cured by a trick telescopic gear change lever. BUT still it handled like a pig on stilts of course.

Anyway, spurred on by my old mate Alan Connor I decided against immediately moving it on and set about sorting the handling, but not before Alan rode it half a mile from his home and stopped. He refused to ride it further! Something had to be done to get the pig off its stilts!



*To be concluded next month*

## The Ricardo Files The continuing story of restoring a veteran Triumph

What makes the Triumph Ricardo engine unique from its Vintage contemporaries, is the use of a four valve cylinder head. However, during the process of disassembling and cleaning my own cylinder head, I discovered a fine crack in the cast iron, starting on the outside the gasket face and ending inside the combustion chamber.

Oh darn! I thought. But it did look like it had been there for quite a while. So maybe I should just ignore it and hope for the best? However, my curiosity got the better of me, and I decided to seek expert help in ascertaining whether the crack was just superficial or would indeed leak – and thus need a proper repair...rather than just a prayer.

Help and advice was at hand in the form of a visit to 'Shilton cast iron & welding Ltd' run by Nick Shilton, who can repair anything from the claw foot of a Victorian bath to a massive 36 tonne gas turbine for a power station...and hopefully my cast iron cylinder head. On arriving at his premises (just off the A5) Nick carefully inspected the head and then proceeded to spray what looked like very thin white paint from an aerosol over and around the crack. This thin white paint substance actually contains very fine iron filings, and with the help of a strong magnet placed behind the crack, the pool of white paint simply disappeared into the offending crack, proving it was in need of a proper repair.

I always feel rather anxious in leaving rare vintage parts with people, after all, these parts don't grow on trees! What would I do if the cylinder head melted in the process, or what if a freak asteroid destroyed his workshop???...OK, the loss of life in the surrounding area would be terrible, but what about my rare cylinder head!

After a few anxious weeks, I got a call from Nick to say my welded/repaired cylinder head could be collected. My 1927 cast iron four valve prize now looked in much better health, with the crack repaired and the gasket face all milled and shiny. The



bonus was, all the dried oil, carbon and muck had been blasted away in the process. All that's required of me, is to apply a coat of black heat proof paint and re build with valves. I have included a picture of the proprietor Nick, holding my repaired and diminutive cylinder head against a backdrop of another of his ongoing projects – this time, one of 4 very early cast iron water main junction pipes in need of repair for a council down south.

It's good to know that certain skills and knowledge still abound in our high turn over/throw away society.



## Reliving my youth

writes Mal. Baird

I was living in Cumbria some years ago and decided to 'relive my youth' in the late '60s by getting back into motorcycles.

In late 1995 I spotted an advertisement in a magazine offering a Panther 350, in a bike breakers in Durham, and went along expecting to see a 4 stroke single.

What I found was a 1958 Panther Model 45, a 2 stroke twin powered by a Villiers 3T 324cc engine, with Earles forks. As my first bike as a 16 year old was a Villiers engined Francis Barnett, my interest was even more aroused. It was a tad rusty but complete, as far as I could tell, and the mileage on the clock said it had only done about 9300 miles.

The vendor said it was going to be broken if it didn't sell, and that they could only get it to run on one cylinder. I rode it around their courtyard on the one pot, that sounded fine so I took a chance and brought it home.

Starting from basics, but thinking "it can't be this simple," my first job was to swap the coils and magically it ran on the other cylinder. I decided on an 'oily rag' restoration, and ordered a replacement coil and drive chain from Villiers Services in Birmingham, and new tyres and inner tubes. A bit of a clean up, and it looked and sounded more than acceptable, so after a total investment of under £300 I booked



my "kitten" in for an MOT in June 1996 and he passed first time... as he did every year for the next 4 years. As I had never passed my test, I took my CBT at the age of 45 and gained my full license. My Panther not only acted as my daily transport to work for the next 4 year but for trips from Penrith to Cleckheaton and Kidderminster for Panther Owners Club annual rallies. We even won the trophy for "Best 2 Stroke" at the Kidderminster rally but actually my M45 was the only 2 stroke there!!!



In 2000 I was visited by 'The Big C.' and my Panther was consigned to the garage for a while... which turned out to be 17 years but I always held out the hope that one day I would be able to have him properly restored. That turned out to be just a couple of years ago when an inheritance supplied the funds, and the gentlemen of Anson

Classic Restorations of Shepshed undertook a complete strip and rebuild of frame and engine from the ground up. Needless to say, a tear or two flowed when I finally collected him and brought him home but recurring health issues and Covid isolation have prevented me from putting more than a few miles on his clock.

I was fascinated to learn some history of my Panther along the way !!! Although listed as a "1959 Model," factory records show that my bike was built in late 1958... but not registered until August 1960. He was ordered by 'mail order,' crated in Cleckheaton by Phelon and Moore, and delivered to the railway station. A couple of days later he was delivered to, and collected from, the station at West Wemyss on the north bank of the Firth of Forth in Fife, Scotland so how he ended up in a breakers yard in Durham we will probably never know!!!



**A couple of helmets I saw on line. Makes mine look boring!**

In February's news letter (no. 19) Harry Wiles told of his introduction into motorcycling in the army. His exploits conclude in this second part:

When on a live shoot the guns fire from a number of different firing positions during the day, once they hit a target they move to the next position, while they are firing from one position an officer goes off in a land rover to locate the next firing position

and one of my jobs was to follow him, once he had confirmed the next position I then head back to escort the guns to that location.

On one occasion we had left a dirt track we were following across Salisbury Plain and were heading across the plains through knee high grass. I thought the only way I would be able to track my way back was to ride right down the middle of his landrover tracks making a distinctive three track guide for me to follow back. On the return journey everything was going well until I came over a crest and the whole area of grass in front of me was a mass of wheel tracks and impossible to see which one was mine. In the distance I could see some poles carrying power cables and could remember seeing some of those near the firing position I was heading back to, so rode up to them and turned to follow them, after a short while I heard a helicopter above me and a loud speaker boomed out telling me I was heading straight into a live target area and to turn back immediately, a quick U turn and I rode as fast as I could across country eventually finding the guns and I managed to escort them back to the new firing point without incident.

They say things happen in threes and they did, on the way back from Salisbury Plain. We had just gone through Southam, back then there was no by-pass, the road ran straight through the middle of the town. It was my turn to get to the front of the convoy and hold the traffic up at the cross roads in Dunchurch, no traffic lights there then either. I was making my way past the convoy when we got to the sharp bend close to where Draycote Water is now, there was a woman in a car dithering about behind the lorry I had caught up with and did not show any sign of overtaking. As I approached the bend I could see over the hedge and could see the road was clear so I started to overtake the car. Just as I drew up alongside her car she suddenly pulled out to pass the lorry leaving me no know where to go, I could see the lads in the back of the lorry just cover their eyes with their hands, fortunately there was an open field gate to my right that I managed to dive into and came out the other side unscathed. There were many more incidents over the years, fortunately none that caused any injuries.

After a couple of years or so on the bikes I passed my driving test with the T. A. in a one ton lorry with a crash gearbox. It was not long before I upgraded to towing guns, this was not easy as there were two units to tow behind the lorry, an ammunition limber attached to the lorry with the 25 pounder gun attached to the limber. After about a year the army introduced a lorry that had ammunition carriers under the chassis of the lorry so it did away with the limber and made gun towing much easier. Normally when live firing the gunners could not see the target they were aiming at so a spotter guided them in on it. We did however run a competition where we shot at old tanks that we could see. The idea was that as soon as you hit the tank you moved positions and started all over again, the gun crew hitting all four targets in the shortest time was declared the winner. On one occasion we were on the penultimate target and my gun crew were dead level with another one so it was a race to get the guns loaded and onto the last target. To my surprise the other gun crew got loaded and away much quicker than us. A short time later it became clear how they managed to get away so quickly, as mentioned earlier the platform the gun is pulled up onto is held in place by

up and over clamps, to save time the sergeant on the other gun decided to cut corners and just hung the platform on the clamps without locking them in place. As the gun was bouncing along the platform jumped off the clamps and the gun pulled up onto it stopping the gun dead and ripping the towing bracket clean off the back of the lorry.

The Territorial Army were trained as home defence units, akin to Dad's Army only more serious but still used the same old equipment. In the mid-sixties the T.A. was disbanded and replaced with The Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve which was equipped, trained and paid exactly the same as the Regular Army with a job to do alongside the Regular Army in times of conflict. The Royal Artillery in Rugby did not figure in this restructuring and was disbanded so, as I had been in an Infantry Unit in the Army Cadet Force, I opted to join the Warwickshire Fusiliers based in Coventry rather than go in the Signals Unit that was left in Rugby but that is a story for another day.

## Secretaries Shorts

I recently received the items I ordered from the new range of '75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary' items from VMCC HQ. I even bought the T shirt! Have you ordered yours yet?



I have a white Triumph Tiger 90 on which, last September/October, I travelled 1900 miles on a ride from John O'Groats to Lands End (plus getting there and back home). A couple of months ago I rode it for the first time in a good while, what with Covid and falling off a ladder – my shoulder is still not right. It started losing power and popping and banging.

Back home, amongst the checks I found one cylinder was 40 psi down on compression so I took the engine apart. No broken rings and the bores looked perfect. Then I had a hernia operation so work stopped for a few weeks. Over the past 2 weeks I have been reassembling it in preparation for riding it round Wales (600+ miles) from 17<sup>th</sup> May. This is my first time working on a 4 stroke bike. Talk about 2 steps forward and 1 back! I will write an article about it later!

It refused to spark properly last Sunday! But after charging the battery overnight it soon started and sounded fine.....but it is leaking copious amounts of oil from 'somewhere underneath'....a place I have not touched! so will I get it ready for next week? I am hoping to be on it at Dog Lane Fishery next Sunday.

Ride there safely. Barry.

**We are still in need of another committee member so please consider offering your services.**

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