

# The Banbury Star Cyclists' Club

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The origin of the Banbury Star Cyclists' Club is a bit of a mystery.

According to members, and indeed as blazoned on the kit, it was established in 1891.

However, the club is in possession of a framed montage of photos (below) with the title "*Banbury Cyclists' Club – Established 1875 – The oldest cycling club in the world*" and the Lord Mayor of Banbury is named as club president.



This suggests that there was an earlier club, founded some 16 years prior to the founding of Banbury Star Cyclists' Club (BSCC), which raises the questions: did the two clubs merge, or was there some form of takeover?

Both Banbury clubs were certainly amongst the earliest cycling clubs in the UK, although nationally the first is generally accepted to be the Pickwick Bicycle Club, founded in June 1870. That club, which is still going today, was formed when six cycling enthusiasts met at the Downs Hotel, Hackney Downs, East London.

Banbury was not far behind. Confirmation of the formation of The Banbury and District Bicycle Club, as it was first known, and the enrolment of 26 members, was printed in the *Banbury Advertiser* on 11 February, 1875. The word District was dropped after a couple of years and then, following the annual meeting in 1883, the club decided on a further (and final) variation as the "Banbury Cyclists' Club (BCC)". Their first ever club ride took place on March 29th 1875 from Banbury Cross, with seven riders taking their "ordinaries" (Penny Farthing style cycle) on a 61-mile ride up to Coventry and back.



A D Rudge & Co. 'Ordinary' bicycle, built 1884 ((Wikimedia.commons)).

Confirmation of the creation of **another club**, the new Banbury Star Cyclists' Club, can also be found in the *Banbury Advertiser* on Thursday 12 February 1891, which recorded "Formation of the Banbury Star Cyclists' Club announced – Mr. J Phillips as secretary, Mr. J. Kilsby as treasurer and Mr. E. Allit as captain, along with Mr. E. Barden as bugler'. No mention was made of Banbury Cyclists' Club in the announcement.

It now appears that the two clubs co-existed quite amicably with club officers often attending each other's annual dinners. Amalgamation was discussed on a number of occasions and formally proposed, but nothing ever happened. However, records show that some members did move from the Banbury Cycling Club to the Banbury Star Cycling Club; in particular, Mr C. F. Edmunds, who was Banbury Star's first President but who had also been one of the first Vice-Presidents of BCC. He made it clear that there was some potential rivalry, even if there was also 'perfect harmony', in an after-dinner speech to the Banbury Cycling Club at the White Lion Hotel, in 1895. He said he "would not enter into a discussion on amalgamation". When he consented to become president of the Star Cyclists' Club, he did so on the understanding that there was no rivalry between the two clubs and that was the only condition on which he would be its president. There was perfect harmony between the two clubs and he was very glad to see members of the Star Club present that evening. He was pleased to be the president of one club and a vice-president of the other and would

leave the question of amalgamation to the working members. Clearly, he didn't wish to get involved.

It does appear, though, that the Banbury Star Cycling Club soon became the larger of the two and at the turn of the century the membership and club ride numbers of the earlier organisation gradually declined. Multiple factors were probably at work. The BCC members may have found the costs high (the membership fee at 7s 6d, though later reduced to 5s, was quite expensive for the time). Or events put forward by the BSCC may have been more enticing.

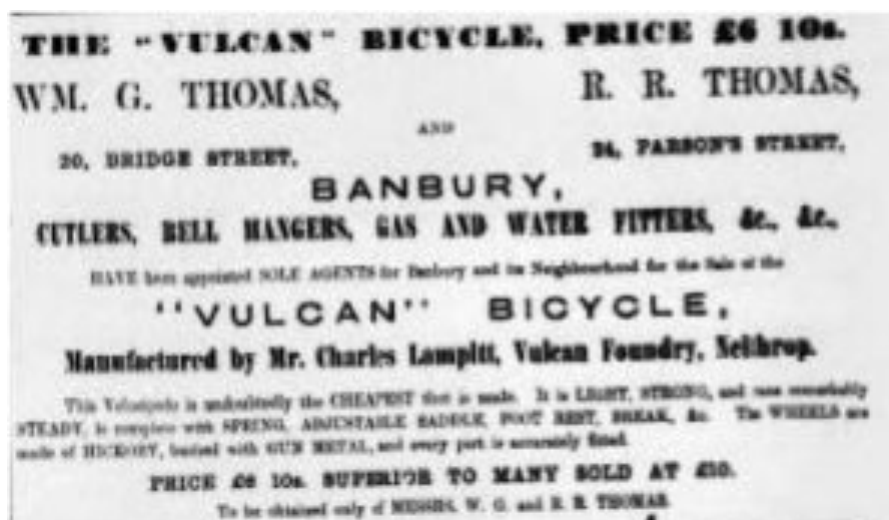
Cycling proved to be a very popular sport amongst the middle classes at a time when Banbury was becoming extremely prosperous. Early membership included many local dignitaries and influential people who were evidently able to afford a new bicycle, which in 1890 would have cost around £12. Eventually, the decline in membership of the BCC became too much and although the exact date of the Banbury Cycling Club's demise cannot be fixed, it is thought to have been circa 1908. If amalgamation had gone ahead, then Banbury Star Cyclists' Club could justifiably claim to be one of the oldest cycling clubs in the world and would be close to celebrating its 150th anniversary, but the opportunity was lost. However, looking into the earlier history has proved that Banbury was at the epicentre of the growth of cycling in the late nineteenth century.

So, what were bicycles like in the 1800s? The first appeared in Germany in around 1816, but it was pushed along by the feet and had no pedals. In the early 1860s the first true bicycle was created in Paris by attaching cranks and pedals to the front wheel hub. The well-known "Penny Farthing" style of bicycle was invented in 1871. It was in the 1890s that the bicycle craze took off seriously, following the development of the "safety bicycle" with its chain-drive transmission, and the subsequent invention of the pneumatic tyre. The first well known chain-drive bicycle was the "Rover" produced in 1886 by John Kemp Starley, which is on display at the British Motor Museum, Gaydon.



The 1886 Rover "safety bicycle" (with permission of British Motor Museum).

In addition, nearby Coventry was already establishing itself as a world leader in bicycle manufacturing, although bicycles were also made in Banbury. On 22 July 1869 the *Banbury Guardian* carried an advertisement for the Vulcan bicycle manufactured by Charles Lampitt at his Vulcan Foundry in Neithrop. Lampitt was a maker of stationary engines and portable steam engines who had exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851. The two agents licenced to sell the Vulcan bicycle were William G. Thomas and R. R. Thomas, both among the founders of the Banbury Cyclists' Club.



1869. Advertisement in *Banbury Guardian*.

The first records held by the Banbury Star Cycling Club include a book of committee and AGM minutes, dated between 1903 and 1929. Prior to that the only information which survives are the details of all the club's main officers in the year the club was founded, 1891. The first club president was Charles F Edmunds, a millionaire partner in his family brewing firm. There were no fewer than five Vice-Presidents, L M Wynne, who stood for Banbury as an MP in 1892, W H P Jenkins, who lived at Upton House, B Samuelson, an industrialist who was later knighted, Rev. C F Porter, who became canon of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford and Lord North, who was the last Lord to live at Wroxton Abbey. The great and the good were well represented.

It is not clear how long Charles Edmunds remained president. He died in 1907, but by 1903 the rôle of president had passed to the 4th Earl of Effingham (Henry Alexander Gordon Howard) who was president for over 20 years until his death in May 1927. During his stewardship, and subsequently, many club rides **were made** to Tusmore, his ancestral home. The longest serving president was John Broughton, who held the position for over 30 years until 1981.



The first club photo, believed to be early 1900s and possibly taken at Tusmore (unknown photographer).

The earliest club photo, taken around 1900, clearly shows a man with a bugle (second left, front row) – probably Mr E. Barden. The club bugler was an important person in cycling club life in the early 1890s. On club rides, he rode next to the club captain and used his bugle to call out signals to other riders: to speed up, slow down, dismount, or ride single or double file. The club minutes also reveal there was always a sub-bugler and both posts changed on a fairly regular basis. It would seem that the role of the club bugler ended sometime in the 1930s.

The popular belief is that the name, Banbury Star, came about due to the fact that most of the club's early rides took place in the evening, often under the stars. Alternatively, it may have been adopted to distinguish it clearly from Banbury Cyclists' Club as the words 'Star' and 'bicycle club' were used throughout the UK. 'Star' probably originated from the double star arrangement of the spokes on the first safety machines and in the late nineteenth



century at least 15 clubs in the UK had 'Star Bicycle' or 'Star Cyclists' in their name. (We note that an Edward Lisle founded a "Star Cycle Company" in Wolverhampton in 1883. Ed.)



1891 – the Star crest.

The club's inaugural run was on 10 April, 1891 from Banbury Town Hall to Middleton Cheney, departing at 7:30 pm. In its early years, twice weekly runs were the main activities of the club. On the sporting side, grass track racing was very strong and the club joined the Banbury Harriers for many years in their Annual Whit Monday Sports Meeting. Like other clubs around that time many social activities were organised such as smoking concerts<sup>1</sup>, dances, swimming days and whist drives. The club was even a member of the local Air Gun League. Early membership numbers were around 70, with a membership fee of 1 shilling in 1903. Some years later, at the 1909 AGM of the Club, it was reported that the average attendance at the runs had been 38, 'which, considering the unfavourable weather was very good'; this must have referred to the active members. (*Banbury Advertiser*, 9 December 1909). Members were also active nationally, suggesting that Banbury members were well regarded; AE Kilby, the Honorary Secretary was appointed a National Cyclists' Union assistant judge in 1928 and from time to time there are references to others who did more than ride in Banbury.

The club's finest rider was probably Eddie T Rixon, who set many local records during the 1920s which were not bettered until the arrival of Eric Wooton in the 1940s. The Edmunds Cup, the oldest trophy in the club's possession, carries both their names. The importance of the club in the annual calendar of events in Banbury can be seen from the newspaper reports of the challenge cup races when, as in 1922, the mayor was one of the judges and also attended the smoking concert after the race when the prizes were given away. The report was quite long, even including details of an accident due to wheels clashing and 'the terrible purler' the favourite rider, V Rixon (younger brother of Eddie above) went as a result; he had to be taken to be checked over at the Horton Infirmary. (*Banbury Guardian*, 3 August 1922). The same year the President, the Earl of Effingham, confirmed that the club was in a good financial position and noted that this was in contrast to 'the downfall of many other cycling clubs around them. The Star Club seemed to gain in strength and membership' (*Banbury Guardian*, 30 November 1922). Nevertheless, it was clearly not always easy to keep that up and five years later it was recorded that the club had been helped on numerous occasions by the presidents and donors of prizes when it had been down in funds (*Banbury Guardian* 10 November 1927).

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<sup>1</sup> These were men only concerts, where the audience was encouraged to smoke and discuss politics.



First awarded in 1913, the Edmunds Cup is the club's oldest trophy (unknown photographer).

Whilst the earlier Banbury Cycling Club did appear to admit women members, Banbury Star was very much a male only club, like many other clubs and organisations at the turn of the century, and this lasted right up until 1935. At an Extraordinary General Meeting, held on the 9 April that year, a motion to admit women members was proposed by Mr A W Cotterell and then passed. The annual subscription was then set at 2s.6d for men and 2s.0d for women. The first woman member was Mrs VI Thomas, who became a Vice-President, with Miss E Dale and Miss Baker becoming committee members.

Time trials have always been the bedrock of the club's sporting activities and on 20 June 1937 the club held its first Open TT. The 25-mile course was from Banbury to Sturdy's Castle, Kidlington and back, and attracted 27 entries. Two years later, just after the outbreak of war, the club held a 'Highways and Byeways' run and the report stated 'it was encouraging to see a flavouring of khaki among the members. Any member of HM Forces is welcome to accompany the club on the pleasant excursions into the countryside'; As usual they enjoyed tea but the forebodings of restrictions were noted as the report ended 'the party got home, very happy, before the black-out hour'. (*Banbury Advertiser*, 28 September 1939). The continuation of time trials was debated throughout the period of the war, as well as weekend touring which was arranged so as to ensure return before black-out. At the 1940 meeting of the club it was agreed to continue with a full programme of events, with the exception of the Warwick-and-back ride, leaving 6 time trials (*Banbury Advertiser*, 6 March 1940). Two years later, at the AGM, it was unanimously agreed that the time trials were to continue following the recommendations of the Road Time Trails Council (RTTC) (*Banbury Advertiser*, 25 March 1942). The report of the last run for 1942, which was to Hook Norton, mentions three members who had attended over 40 runs that year; such activity, particularly given the war conditions, suggests that enthusiasm was still high. Cycling was, of course, one of the main ways of travelling as well as being a sport and during the war was probably the only means of travel for many. At the 1945 AGM the club re-affiliated

themselves with the National Cyclists' Union (NCU) and the RTTC. (*Banbury Advertiser* 28 February 1945.)

After the end of the war a report in the *Banbury Advertiser* (13 July 1949) suggested that that the sport was still very popular; the Edmunds cup was won by Gerald Curtis at the age of 17, only 32 seconds outside the club record, and the report concluded that the standard of riding had increased considerably with some of the club records in danger of being overtaken. The Club's Diamond Jubilee year, 1951, was celebrated in style, no doubt partly due the need to have a forward vision in line with the Festival of Britain held later that year. A big increase in the number of junior members was reported at the meeting in January and as a result two of them were elected to join the committee for the year; a more democratic move than the founders of the Club might have envisaged 50 years earlier. Youth Hostel weekends were revived after a 12-year gap and were well supported; and a special jubilee 25-mile time trial was agreed, for which the president, A E Kilby, offered a cup. Additionally, the club offered a free ticket to the jubilee dinner to any member who could prove their pre-1905 membership, and members proposed to take part in the Banbury carnival procession in July. (*Banbury Advertiser*, 17 January, 1951). Later that year tragedy struck when a promising young rider, Tony Lemonofides, aged 16, died when he collided with a car on his way home with other club members from a ride to Coventry. (*Banbury Advertiser*, 5 September 1951). The connection between Tusmore and the Star Cycling Club was still strong in the post-war era, and in 1956 120 members were shown round the house by the then Earl of Effingham; occasional one-off reports like these demonstrate the strength of membership 60 plus years after the club was founded.

References to the club are frequently in the context of other sporting or social activities, not all of them in Banbury. Competing with others was a feature of the club and included the triumph of Chris Goodway of Banbury who, at the age of 18, won the Warwick CC's 52-mile Tour of the Fosse by 35 seconds (*Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 19 April 1971). Two years later a member of the BSCC, Henry Duckett, was organising the national 100-mile time trial championship from the Coventry area; clearly the Club was still involved in national events.

Safety was an issue which began to loom larger as the number of vehicles on the roads increased post-war and the Club was involved with the Banbury Road Safety Committee from at least 1955 when they, and other road using clubs, presented films at the meeting on 8 March at the Town Hall. Rather curiously, no-one under the age of 16 was to be admitted, though it is clear there were plenty of young cyclists. In 1975 a team from the club won the Banbury Road Safety Committee competition (*Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 21 February 1975.)





The winner (currently unidentified) crosses the finishing line on the Queensway Circuit.

In 2002 the club founded its current 45-mile, three-lap course on the outskirts of Banbury, which takes in multiple climbs of Edge Hill. The first race, organised by Keri Williams and sponsored by construction company Bluestone, was held on 9 June and was won by Phil Blacker (Wyre Forest CRC). As well as the men's Cat 3/4 race, the event now includes a round of the British Women's National Team Championships, attracting some of the country's leading up and coming riders.



2002 –the first road race on the current course – organiser Keri Williams far right.

In April 1991, the club's centenary year, there was a repeat of the inaugural run to Middleton Cheney. The club also promoted the National Junior 25 miles Championship Time Trial in August, which was won by Christopher Saunders (Port Sunlight Wheelers) in just over 53 minutes. On 30th November representatives of many national cycling organisations and dignitaries together with members and ex-members attended the dinner and prize presentation.



2016 – club members gather for the 125th anniversary ride.

Then in 2016 to celebrate its 125th anniversary, the club released a limited-edition jersey and shorts, in time for a commemorative ride on the 10 April from Banbury's Town Hall to Middleton Cheney, again recreating the very first ride. The town's Deputy Mayor, Cllr Gordon Ross, started the 65 cyclists on their circular route that took in Little Bourton, Cropredy, Aston le Walls, Culworth and Marston St Lawrence.

It was not until 1954 that the club held its first Open Road Race, despite club minutes showing numerous attempts to organise one. The first race took place on Sunday 11 July and comprised four laps, a total of 75 miles, on a circuit south of Banbury based around the villages of Deddington, Enstone and Hopcroft's Holt. It is not exactly known for how long races were held on this course, but in 1970 a new course was created. Held close to Banbury centre, on what became known as the Queensway Circuit, this race was an integral part of the annual **Banbury Cavalcade of Sport** weekend. The first race, organised by G Walton, was held on 12 September 1970 over eight laps, a total of 48.8 miles. Due to its central location and being held over a sporting weekend, it often drew large crowds and was usually started by the town Mayor or Chairman of Cherwell District Council. However, due to increasing volumes of traffic, the last race, which was won by Simon Lillystone, was held in 1993. From 1989 the club has run two Open TTs every year between Wroxton and Ettington, returning with a climb of Sunrising Hill. More recently, 2019, a further Open TT has been organised between Warmington and Gaydon.

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 resulted in the cancellation of the annual road race and most of the Wednesday evening time trials, however, despite cancellations, Luke Norris set five new club records in the events which were actually held. The club also turned its attention to helping the community of Banbury. It delivered over 3,500 medical prescriptions by bicycle during the period of lockdown to those shielding at home and members rode more than 3,000 miles in the process, achieving national publicity for the effort. In addition, 120 bikes were given safety and service checks which were then given to

essential workers or members of the community who wanted to be part of the huge increase in the interest in cycling. As a result, club president Paul Dean, was presented with an award certificate by Amanda Ponsonby, the High Sheriff of Oxfordshire, in recognition of the club's services to the community.



2021 – the High Sheriff of Oxfordshire's award

Banbury Star Cyclists' Club continues to flourish well into the 21st century. Its 150th anniversary, scheduled for 2041 seems a long way off, but a celebration of this achievement should be front and centre in the promotional plans of its host town. The founding members would be extremely proud of the club they formed all those years ago and the people who have striven to keep the club going, even if they would be unlikely to recognise either the cycles or the protective gear now worn by almost all club members.





Wednesday evening time trials remain one of the club's highlights.