

“Your Road to Happiness” – by John Crighton *(CTC Touring Handbook 1960)*

Memories of a Coventry CTC member

I joined the CTC Coventry section in the autumn of 1960 when I was 22 - it was a turning point in my life and all for the better. I have made lifelong friends and have happy memories of the people I met, the places I visited and the adventures I had. All this, even although I lived in Coventry for only two and a half years and It was all thanks to Gordon Mead.

I had moved to Coventry to start work with the GEC and was very fortunate there, to be under the guidance of Gordon, a design engineer. That was in Radio Works, Crow Lane, the former Rudge Cycles factory. Wherever practically possible, Gordon managed to incorporate cycle components such as a chain or downtube gear lever and cable into his designs. His inspired creations were often hatched after a bit of quiet reflection studying a drawing after a refill of tobacco in his ever-present pipe.

Early in my training, when I was still new to Coventry, Gordon introduced me to the CTC and life became much more interesting, enjoyable and eventful. It gave me the chance to have fortnightly escapes from my digs for the whole weekend and to explore places such as the Peak District, without question my favourite area.

One memorable Youth Hostel weekend was when Gordon and I were the only people in the group who had breakfast provided while the rest did DIY catering. It was a beautiful sunny morning. We were sitting at a table next to a window looking out at the warden's garden filled with flowers in full bloom. The full English breakfast had been placed in front of us and everything on the table sparkled in the sunshine. To complete the picture, the radio was quietly playing 'In an English country garden'. I was half way to paradise – Gordon was half way through his breakfast!

Mind your Language (Jim and Janet Willis)

Janet helped me to master the English language. She was mildly amused at my Scottish pronunciation of some words including “nougat”. My version was as in nugget, not as in *nooogaaaah*. I mustn't complain because she joined in with Jim and the rest of the group when we were having a singsong and my contribution was

the Scottish children's song "Three craws sat upon a wa' (it's for 3-5 year-olds so we all managed it) and don't forget the fourth craw – he wasna there at a'.

One memory of Jim was when I was acting as his chauffeur to prepare the route for the section's 1963 BCTC (British Cycle Tourist Competition) local heat and we visited a stately home where he hoped to have a feed station. His relaxed easy manner while chatting to "her ladyship" was a joy to behold. A salesman par excellence.

The Hallowe'en party (George and Brenda Illsley)

George had organised games at a Halloween party in a youth hostel. It was great fun. The one game I particularly remember was indoor hockey. He had made small wooden hockey sticks and a tight wee bundle of scrunched up socks for a ball. A chair at each end of the 'pitch' served as the goals. Pitch markings were non-existent. You've heard the term 'moving the goalposts', well that's what it was like with the goals targeting the ball instead of the other way round. Nobody cared about the rules - that eliminated the possibility of cheating. It was hilarious.

The warden very kindly let us all have an extra hour in bed because of the late finish. What he had forgotten was that the clocks changed that weekend, so we had a 2-hour lie-in!

Brenda was there too, always giving George support in her own quiet way. Thanks George and Brenda for a great weekend.

Ride Leader Debut (Frank and Kath Shipley)

Frank is responsible for me becoming a ride leader when he reckoned it was about time I took my turn, especially as I was by then a committee member. Yes Frank, I needed a kick up the backside.

It was a challenge, because I was still unfamiliar with all the routes and café stops, but once I had opened up the Bart's half-inch map and the CTC handbook (first issued in 1879), I began to look forward to it. It was a YH weekend to Derbyshire and it all turned out better than I expected. A few of the group asked how I had found a particular café which nobody had known about. The CTC handbook was the key.

Recently I obtained the 1960 version of the handbook on Ebay and it is a mine of information. If you want to know the ferry and steamship charges from Kyle of

Lochalsh to Glenelg they are (in old money): Passenger 1/10; cycles 2/7; tandems 5/4. The handbook is sadly no more.

One tip for a ride leader from Jim Willis, which I don't think is included in cycling UK's current ride leader training programme, was "whatever you do John, if you get lost, don't let on, keep going".

A Scottish Wedding (Pete and Liz Robinson)

Liz Walker, whose parents came from Paisley, married Pete Robinson on 17th March 1961 and I was very happy to be one of the guests.

It turned out to be a traditional Scottish wedding. At the reception, a piper strolled among the guests playing the bagpipes inside the hotel – bliss (maybe not everybody's cup of tea).

The happy couple's departure was spectacular. Ray Hudson drove them off in his VW Beetle with Pete standing up through the sun roof waving energetically while Liz was in the back. I think the piper was there too! Was Pete trying to tell us something?

The Three Wise Men (Ray Hudson, Mel Cox and John Crighton)

While still new to a life in Coventry, I went by train to a motor show in Birmingham. By chance, I met Ray Hudson and Mel Cox who were at the same show, although at that time I didn't know them very well. I returned to Coventry with them in Ray's VW Beetle. There began a lifetime friendship with countless happy memories for me and my family.

Mel came to my rescue in my time of need during the last few miles of the return leg of a YH weekend north of Coventry.

We had been pushing on a bit and I had not realised that I was about to experience my worst ever attack of the bonk. A pathetic sight, with legs like jelly etc. You've been there?

Fortunately for me, Mel was quick to find a sweetie shop and soon thrust a bar of my favourite chocolate Tiffin into my hand. I wish he had stuck a bit of chocolate into my mouth. I was in such a state I could only manage to rip off the paper wrapper and stuff a big chunk of the bar into my mouth without even removing the aluminium foil – aargh, a big mistake! Foil, tooth fillings, and saliva were creating that chemical reaction which triggers an indescribably weird taste.

Mel tells me that even today, nearly 60 years later, every time he passes that wee sweetie shop on the outskirts of Coventry he thinks of it and smiles.

As for Ray, he often rode at the back at a slow pace, for him, but might pass us and disappear ahead to be seen at the café stop drinking a cup of tea. He did enjoy a cup of tea.

As a former time trial winner, Ray's cycling expertise was clearly demonstrated during the Coventry Cathedral consecration 100 in 8 standard ride. We were rolling along enjoying the run, when suddenly Ray shot past shouting something about us not going nearly fast enough to finish the ride in time. Our speed shot up as we made a lot more effort until the rider setting the pace with Ray, a lad from Rugby who knew Ray from his racing days, suddenly took severe stomach cramps and the whole ride ground to a halt. Whatever happened next I can't quite recall, but we must have made it. I still have the certificate.

Connections, foreign holidays, weekends together and visits to us in Scotland still continue until today, sadly without Ray, with three dates in particular which stand out.

In 1967, Ray, Mel and Bill Lightfoot were among the guests when I married Helen. Ray made many visits for years afterwards and our two girls, Elaine and Hilary, have fond memories of their 'Uncle' Ray. He was at Hilary's wedding in 2002.

Mel's most recent visit to Scotland was to join family and friends to help celebrate our Golden Wedding anniversary in 2017.

Finally,

On the subject of anniversaries, this seems to be the appropriate point at which to say very many congratulations to Coventry CTC for a magnificent 100 years of fostering life-long friendships through participation in cycling. Lang may your lum reek!