

Two Wheels OK, Three Wheels Better, Four Wheels Drier! Sunday January 26 2009

I'd almost decided that January is no time to have a birthday, let alone a cyclemotor rally to celebrate it. However, having abandoned the run in recent years in the face of dwindling numbers and poor weather, and in need of an early-season pick-me-up, I thought I'd give it another go.

The forecast was hardly encouraging but I'd received several expressions of interest so I decided to risk a soaking and strapped the Poirier to the camper, heading for the Dover Transport Museum which had agreed to open early and get the kettle on. Carl, Roly and Will from the East Coast Pedallers were holed up in McDonalds for breakfast, Mike and Renate had stayed overnight in their camper, Geoff Hills arrived with his Quickly and after a quick coffee in the van it was off to the museum for a quick poke around.

The dedicated team of enthusiasts has been busy over the winter with a cinema frontage completed and a Police Station exhibit to complement the Morris Minor police car, LE Velocette and large model display still under construction. The site is well worth a visit if you're passing through Dover - which most people do, of course. Outside the rain hadn't stopped and, as the Gill Brothers Three from Medway Towns arrived, it was decided that most of the participants would abandon their mopeds in favour of the comfort of the cars. That left Geoff and I donning waterproofs and defying the weather gods by setting off into the downpour.

The Poirier and the NSU led a stately procession out through the Kentish countryside on mainly flat minor roads past Coldred, through Eythorne, Tilmanstone, Eastry, Woodnesborough and Staple and into Chillenden, on the outskirts of which we stopped for a guided tour of one of the last post mills to be erected, some 150 years ago. The design of the mill was already dated before it turned its' first sweep in 1868 but the Lady of the Manor hankered after a reminder of her Dutch travels and Chillenden Mill, with a style reminiscent of the mills there, was built on a small hill in direct line of sight of the Manor from where, down an impressive avenue of trees, the Lord could check that his miller was on task. It provided flour for the estate until damaged beyond use by a storm in 1949 which led to a gradual deterioration until attempts to restore it over a number of years were completed in 2002 following which it fell victim to a combination of high winds and engineering cock-ups and fell down. Further Heritage-funded restoration saw it reopen to the public in 2005 and it is now operated by a small group of locals who offer guided tours on Sundays in the summer. We were privileged to have an out-of season tour and learned much of mill construction and use with a side order of local history thrown in for good measure.

One of the interesting legends surrounding the mill is that the engine which replaced wind power towards the end of its' working life lies buried in the field next to the site. Cue Tony Robinson and the NACC Metal Detectorists, perhaps? On the second floor where most of the original machinery survives we experienced the effects of the winds which put paid to the structure in 2003 - distinct movement could be felt and I, for one, was glad to return to the tempest outside and to plant my feet back on terra firma.

And so to the Griffin's Head in Chillenden for a roast lunch and convivial conversation by an open fire where our so-called waterproofs dried out, followed by the short homeward leg to the Transport Museum where another cuppa awaited us. Christian, one of our local group of regulars, had kindly baked a cake in the form of a Cyclemaster, a stunning end to my weekend of birthday celebrations which was enjoyed by all.

The only casualty of the day had been the Poirier with a detached plug lead on the way out, easily remedied and it survived the day's drenching with merit.

Riders:

Nick Devonport, Poirier Manulette MS6
Geoff Hills, NSU Quickly

Arriving with good intentions:

Mike Hele, Puch MS50D
Renate Hele, Raleigh RM6
Carl Squirrel, Honda PC50
Roly Scarce, Honda PC50
Will Doy, Honda PC50

Arriving with no intentions at all:

Vauxhall Astra Estate William Gil, Michael Gill, Rob Gill

Many thanks to all for coming, look forward to more of the same later in the year.

Nick Devonport



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