

## CHAPTER THREE

# The War Years

It was the period of the "phoney war", and many of the Club's activities went on as usual. Nearly 40 attended a successful Opening Run in 1940, followed by an Easter Tour to the Grapes Hotel, Maentwrog, in North Wales.

The Manchester & District T.T.A. promoted several events from 25 miles to 12 hours, but whilst a number of other clubs in the area promoted open events on the road it was decided to restrict our activities to the promotion of Club events for members only, this programme being supported by an average of around ten riders.

A major decision was that the Race Meet would not be held again until the end of hostilities. The Journal stated the reasons were "few spectators and fewer riders".

Saturday Club runs averaged around 12, the fact that they were very close to Manchester giving many a chance to get out even after a full day's Saturday work.

The Sunday lunch runs suffered badly from the seven day week worked by so many of our younger members who were on "war-work".

The Club's name had virtually disappeared from the Start Sheets of Open Events and the only successes reported during the first half of the year were those by Reg Harris. By the end of 1940, 25 members were on active service.

The South King Street Club House was found particularly useful during the early war years and the 58th A.G.M. was held there in March, 1941 with a moderate attendance of 20.

An Opening Run to Alderley in March 1941 found only 15 attending, whilst only 7 members continued to fly the flag and support the Easter Tour of that year.

The Club was now experiencing a sharp fall in income due to the loss of subscriptions from members serving in H.M. Forces, and this resulted in an appeal to Life Members for donations towards Club expenses.

The stagnation in Club activities began to lead to some concern and in January 1942 Johnny Berry suggested that consideration should be given by the Committee to the necessity of attracting new members. As a result of this initiative the 23 members who attended the A.G.M. of February 1942 adopted a proposition to explore the possibility of progressively increasing the Club's membership.

It was subsequently decided to insert a maximum of three advertisements in each of the two Manchester Evening papers inviting applications for membership.

Each individual member was requested to make a personal effort to try to introduce at least one new member during the current year. A radical change from the conditions of over half a century was that members would be given the choice of buying or supplying their own meals on Club runs. Other recommendations were that Manchester Wheelers' members should join local Youth movements and also that the Club should promote a series of Road Races and Saturday Track Meetings.

Many of these ideas were little more than wishful thinking and the results were disappointing as no influx of new members was forthcoming.

In May, 1942 Johnny Berry reported to the Committee details of the newly formed Manchester Athletic Club Track League. The intention was to organise a weekly series of evening meetings to organise and stimulate competition for track racing. The officials of the League were drawn from different clubs in the Manchester area by August of the same Summer these evening track meetings were creating a good deal of competition and interest.

Unfortunately, although we provided quite a number of the officials, only two or three riders from the Club were interested, a number which was insufficient to form a team.

The important job of organiser, collector and distributor of the Forces Comforts Fund was now taken over by All Hughes who, from his premises in Ardwick as a watch and clock repairer, earned the gratitude of our Forces Members for his regular despatch of parcels to serving members. Johnny Berry had previously had the responsibility for this task but as was the case with so many members in 1942 he was directed to war work instead of his cycle manufacturing business.

Towards the end of 1942 increased activity was being taken in the question of Massed Start Racing on open roads but the N.C.U. Manchester Centre stated that they were opposed to this form of cycle racing and requested that member clubs followed a similar line of opposition.

The Christmas Dinner run to Holmes Chapel on the 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1942 found only four Members attending.

Unfortunately, donations had declined from £51 to £12, due to a lack of effort on the part of the officials concerned with the difficult task of obtaining donations.

The 60<sup>th</sup> A.G.M. was held in January, 1943 and as this was the Club's Diamond Jubilee Year there was lively discussion among the attendance of 25 members and a number of suggestions considered to mark this Diamond Jubilee.

The balance sheet for 1942 had shown a breakeven position, so that little opposition arose against the decision to promote an Invitation Open Scratch '50', a Social and/or Dinner and a Ladies Evening.

Later in the year the R.T.T.C., in line with the N.C.U., declared its opposition to Massed Start Racing on public roads and somewhat inevitably the Club declared its official policy would be in line with R.T.T.C. and N.C.U. decisions. Nevertheless it was noted that members looked forward to a day when the law of the land would be altered to permit cycle races on public roads similar to the Tour de France and other similar events held by many European countries.

Invitations were sent to various parts of the country to all the available top riders to Compete in our Diamond Jubilee '50' with the result that a first class entry of 18 riders completed the Start Card. Despite travelling difficulties there were only two non starters, George Fleming the outstanding '25' and 50 mile champion and Tommy Givan from Northern Ireland who had the misfortune to lose his cycle during the journey from that country.

The Lowcock Taylor Silver Trophy and Prize value 5 guineas, went to Doug Hartley from the Duckinfield C.C. The event was followed by lunch at the Royal Oak Hotel, Alderley, and 52 members, riders and friends applauded the Prize Winners.

The Jubilee Dinner held at the Club House, 4A South King Street, in July 1943 was well supported, one living founder member, Mr. G.L. Darwent being present, together with ten past Presidents, a testimony to the loyalty and continuity of many of our Life Members.

Twenty two members attended the 61<sup>st</sup> A.G.M. in January, 1944 and were informed that there had been a loss on the year of approximately £100 being principally due to special events connected with the Diamond Jubilee Year.