

Pedal Powered Memories

My first pedal powered machine was a red trike.

Was it a Triang tricycle like this one?



I have no idea where this trike came from but I am fairly sure it was not new. Was it for my third birthday? If so, that was June 1950. I imagine this trike would have made me popular with Sonny (aged 8?) and Sessie (6?), scallywags who adopted me into their large family. This friendship was to curry favour with my Mum so they might share in the bonanza of jeely pieces she provided through the window of our ground floor single end, part of a mews building accessed from 84 Greenview Street, Pollokshaws.

Our single, small window with its jawbox sink and cold-water tap opened on to a large communal area we called 'The Greenie', a back yard which was overlooked on all sides by tenements, most of which would be swept away in the late 1950s when Pollokshaws was redeveloped during the wave of Glasgow's slum clearances of that era.

My trike had a bell. The tinkling cover for this bell disappeared leaving the innards exposed. I bumped off a pavement and my chin hit the bell mechanism. The flow of blood could not be staunched by a wet cloth and in a panic, with my head wrapped in a towel, still in her pinny and clutching her purse, my Mum rushed me to hospital in a funeral limousine, which in my memory was a Rolls Royce. I think this happened in the spring of

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1952, just before I started in P1 with Miss Walker at Sir John Stirling Maxwell School, one in a class of forty-eight children, part of the post-war baby boom. If so, my Mum would have been expecting my brother Douglas (born 7 May). However, this memory is vague, probably embedded by hearing it told and retold. From those retellings I know my Rolls Royce was driven by Mr Fraser, the owner of Frasers Funerals whose office was in the 'front building' at 84 Greenview Street.

We were deposited about two miles away at the Victoria Infirmary and charged **one shilling and sixpence**, a sum which in 1952 seemed exorbitant to my mother who never missed an opportunity to tell of the man's mean spiritedness. On our return on foot, passing Woolworth's in Shawlands, I was gifted a toy, (was it a Yo-Yo?), this for being a 'brave boy'.

When I was five, I got my first two-wheeler. I believe it was a hand-me-down from my cousin Kenneth who was about five years older than me. I was a favourite recipient of his discards. In my memory it too was red. It was much smarter than my Triang and had been repainted and refurbished, so it was nearly but not quite new. It had a single brake on the front wheel. I think it looked a bit like this one but without shiny chrome mudguards.



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As a child I was slow to pick up new skills, a trait which has never left me: those who know me, think football, sailing, golf, fishing, singing. It took me a long time to master the art of balancing on two wheels at a time when stabilisers had yet to be invented.

Did I inherit slowness and timidity from my mother? Betty (Bettina) Bremner was very risk averse, always fearing the worst. Perhaps this was because her father died when she was seven, leaving her as the youngest child in a family of seven to be raised by Granny (Mary) Bremner. I remember her as a tall, slim attractive white-haired lady, well-spoken but stern, always 'in charge' of her domain, a compact room and kitchen with a tiny inside WC but no washbasin. It was the only flat on the ground floor of a dark, narrow, awkward corner close at 19 Govanhill Street. The entryway and upper hallways were tiled and Granny's neighbours were all were much more well-to-do, living in grander accommodation.

My grandfather Donald Bremner was a stonemason and chimney sweep who died of a heart attack, according to his death certificate in the archive. However, I remember being told as a child that he fell from a roof while inebriated. Widowed long before the welfare state, Granny Bremner seemed to get by miraculously, living on fresh air and the apprentice wages of her oldest son, my Uncle Dan, (also Donald Bremner). Uncle Dan was born with a cleft palate but despite his marked speech impediment, he rose through the ranks, starting as a fitter/turner to become Workshop Manager at 'Dubsies', (Dubs and Co, Locomotive Builders, Polmadie). This information of Uncle Dan's 'greatness' was imparted to me by Mum, who adored her eldest brother. It is entirely possible she may have exaggerated, as she was prone to do.

At this point I should mention my Dad, Jack (John Bonthron) and tell you of his cycling exploits. In their early teens, Jack and his older brother, Uncle Bonnie (William), were keen hobby cyclists, part of the many Sunday cycling groups who met at Anniesland Cross to swarm around the lochs and glens to the north of Glasgow, spending the entire day in the saddle, leaving at first light and returning in the gloaming. Of course, in those pre-war times, rural roads were almost free of motorised vehicles.

Back to my first two-wheeler. I expect my inability to get going on my new bike must have been a great frustration to Dad over those early weeks when fear and incompetence meant I failed time after time. Eventually, after many tumbles and hot tears, I did manage on my own without Dad running alongside gripping the saddle to keep me upright.

In my circle of friends at that time, very few children had bikes of any kind. Unlike me, these kids had to make do with 'bogies', usually cobbled together from the chassis of an old pram. The great disadvantage of a bogie was it required a 'pusher' to propel it along whereas, on my bike, I could zoom ahead, leader of the pack. Being a generous sort of boy, I expect that giving other boys 'shots' (turns) on my bike made me popular.

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That old red bike was my trusty stallion until I was ten (or was it eleven?) when I got my first grown up bike, a *Sun Supalite*, another hand me down from Kenneth. I should explain about Kenneth's life-changing accident on this bike before it became mine.

To Kenneth it was a brand-new bike, his fourteenth or fifteenth birthday gift, I think. Sadly, within weeks he was involved in a road accident and lost most of his right ear, (or was it his left?), the flesh scraped off by the roughness of the road surface. Thankfully Kenneth was otherwise unhurt. A year or so after the accident he was provided with an artificial ear which clipped into place with clip-on studs. This prosthetic was both obvious and uncomfortable to wear and was soon abandoned. Instead, Kenneth grew his curly hair longer and his missing ear was less obvious. Later still, as a married man, he cut his hair shorter and used his missing ear as a conversation starter. Kenneth was a great talker!

After this accident, the damaged bike was fully restored but Kenneth gave up cycling and the bike was mine. However, it was not red as shown but two-tone, black and pale blue and, with pale blue mudguards and, with its replacement front fork of shiny chrome, it was probably unique.



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It had five-speed derailleur gears, white wall tyres and aluminium brake handles with knurled wheels which, in theory, made it possible to adjust both front and back brake tensions directly from the handles. Although my racing bike was a very fine example of its kind at that time, by the standards of today, despite its name, it was VERY HEAVY.

This adult bike was almost too big for me. However, by then I was proficient on two wheels and managed to ride it successfully with the saddle hard down on the stalk.

We had moved from Pollokshaws to Arden and my bike was by far the best among my new friends at 22 Kilvaxter Drive, an eight-family tenement close. Here I was one of nineteen school aged children living in compact two and three-bedroomed flats. These tenements were made of 'no-fines' concrete slurry which was poured into reusable steel shutters. Although our new homes were a vast improvement, these buildings like many other similar developments of that time were constructed by the SSHA (*Scottish Special Housing Association*), new homes rushed up as part of Glasgow's slum clearance programme. Thankfully Number 22 no longer exists, replaced by a new and hopefully much easier to heat version.

Back to my father, Jack Bonthron.

From Arden, as an itinerant joiner, Dad would set off each day on his own bike to whatever building site he was working on. He rode all over the West of Scotland often twenty miles each way, throughout the year, sun, rain, gales, fog, snow, hail and worst of all, ice. His only protection was a sou'wester over his bunnet and a bicycle cape.

One added benefit, apart from a quicker travel time than by using public transport, was that he was able to claim 'travel time and expenses', part of a national agreement negotiated with building trade employers at that time. Dad moved around sites, constantly 'chasing overtime'. He was always very frugal with himself, keeping only enough pocket money for pipe tobacco. The rest of his weekly payment was given each Friday evening to my Mum who, sad to say, was not good with money, mostly living on 'tick', a fact she mostly concealed from my father which, when discovered, caused ructions.

Two tales from Dad's 'Pedal Powered Archive'.

One winter's night returning home, wet and windy and already dark, he suffered a puncture:

"It was on the back wheel, Johnny. I had to find a dry place to do the repair on the inner tube. Then I saw this wee bridge over a stream with the water not too deep. I was wearing my wellies so I organised myself under the bridge out of the rain with my front lamp from the bike balanced on a rock so I could see to glue the patch over the hole and keep it dry till it cured. Sod's law caused the bulb to dim but I got it done just in time.

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After that, working in the dark, I had to refit the tube inside the tyre and get the wheel back on the bike and the chain in place, working by feel with the rain pouring down. Ach, but I suppose when you've been doing it for years it comes as second nature."

Another tale:

"Johnny, it was icy, treacherous. I could hear the bus behind me, right up my backside. I was close into the pavement. As the bus revved to change gear to overtake me at the corner, I felt the bike slide, so I let go and fell onto the pavement, pulled up my legs and then scrambled away. I looked and saw my bike under the bus. The driver climbed out of his cab on the other side and came round and shouted to me, "Hey, that fella on the bike, is he all right?" I said, "I'm the fella and it's my bike that's under your bus." Thankfully, both Dad and his bike were undamaged.

On my *Sun Supalite*, I was top dog in my circle of biking pals for quite a few years. We rode all over, miles from home, exploring, mainly train-spotting, hoping for 'shielders', locomotives with name badges. Although there was more road traffic by the mid-1950s, generally we were safe, although I did suffer one almost serious accident.

We were racing for home. I was in the lead, head down, pedalling hard. Cresting a steep hill, I found myself heading for a parked car with another one speeding up the hill towards me, filling the other side of the road. I pulled hard on both brakes and went right over the handlebars. The driver stopped and ran back to me. I had a bump and graze on my head and a badly skint knee. I think I was about twelve, maybe thirteen, too big a boy to cry. My bike was slightly damaged. Anyway, I was too shaken to try to mount it. Surrounded by my pals riding their bikes slowly, I limped home to have my wounds bathed clean with stinging Dettol and coated with Germolene.

Dad fixed my bike and gave me a relatively mild if repetitive lesson on braking: "Johnny, always brake the rear wheel first, well ahead of the front brake. But you know that, don't you?"

Later, when I worked as an apprentice marine plumber at the well-known Clydeside shipyard, (Alexander Stephen of Linthouse), I rode my *Sun Supalite* to and from work every day, emulating my father. We were now living in Govanhill. Checking on Google, this is about five miles distant, a thirty-minute each way bike journey. Like my Dad, I used my bike in all weathers, starting my day of manual labour either hot and steamy or cold, damp and miserable.

There was another lad from Govanhill who used the same route through Pollokshields. Sandy Gordon was a few years older, an apprentice draughtsman in the Engine Design Office, I think. He had a fancy sports bike and used to ride alongside me dressed in his proper cycling gear which he wore both riding to and from work. He must have kept a

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change of clothes at this office. I think he was a member of Glasgow Wheelers. I looked him up on Google and realise now that he was an important figure in Scottish cycling in the 1960s and 1970s when he was in his heyday. After a few minutes chatting, Sandy would put his head down and shoot off like a rocket leaving me in his wake, wearing my denims and work boots and, in winter, my parka.



Years later, when I had not seen Sandy for a while, I heard he had been in a team race in Switzerland and had been badly injured. (I can find no record of this in Google so it may have been just a rumour.) Decades later I met him briefly on a ferry returning from Arran where he had been climbing and camping with friends. I'm not sure he remembered me. In any case, I was too worried about upsetting him to ask about his Swiss cycling accident.

My next tale is from late autumn, probably November 1963 or 1964. I left Linthouse at the end of my shift in a pea souper, cold dank fog and coal smoke mingling and trapped by a temperature inversion, a piece of science I would learn about much later when I made it to university as a mature student. (Some readers may remember the *Clean Air Act of 1956* and wonder at the reference to coal smoke but checking on Google, it seems the act was slow to take effect and it was not until it was amended in 1968 that most coal fires were eliminated or converted to smokeless fuel.)

With the wisdom of age and the experience of hindsight, I realise now on that foggy November evening of long ago, I should have walked home but instead I rode my bike, following the tram lines knowing I was safe. (In Glasgow trams had stopped running in November 1962.)

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However, this feeling was an illusion reinforced by the silence and isolation caused by the fog. The reality was I was at risk from the near silent trolley buses which ran on that route through Pollokshields. Unnerved by the warning beep of the ghost of an overtaking trolley bus travelling slowly but at twice my speed, I continued my homeward journey riding on pavements, dinging my bell constantly to warn pedestrians ahead of me and stopping from time to time to read street names and reassure myself I was heading in the right direction.

At that stage in my career, I had been encouraged by my mother to enrol at *Glasgow College of Building and Printing (GCBP)* on the *City and Guilds* course in Domestic Plumbing. At Stephen's, in parallel as a day student, I was studying *C&G Marine Plumbing*. However, the content of these two courses was quite different.

This Domestic Plumbing course involved three nights per week, 7.00 to 9.30 pm, classes I attended for five years from mid-September to mid-May, eventually earning a Full Technological Certificate, a qualification for which my Mum deserves full credit.

Tired and miserable from working mainly outdoors at Stephen's and worn out by my return bike journeys through the worst of the winter weather, I had to be 'driven' out of my comfy chair beside the fire in Allison Street to get on my bike again and make the short fifteen-minute ride to the college near George Square. Once there in the company of my fellow students, I was fine and dandy.

Using my bike for these trips meant I was free of the hassle of travelling by bus or train; I reckon I was often home with my supper inside me and snuggled in bed asleep before some of my fellow students travelling on trains and buses made it home to Castlemilk, Pollok or Easterhouse. Was there one lad from far flung East Kilbride? Was he the dapper lad with the hare lip, long sideburns who smoked aromatic Dutch tobacco in a long, slim fancy pipe?

Another quip from my father who was working on a building site in East Kilbride over one long cold winter, making the journey on his bike from Govanhill, 'UP, UP, UP into the frozen wastes'. (Google tells me that East Kilbride is 590 feet above sea level while Govanhill is about 80 feet.)

"Aye, Johnny, the best thing about East Kilbride is the road back down into Glasgow. As I was coming home tonight, down through Busby, I was overtaken by Eskimos with sledges and huskies. They were heading over to Paisley. Can you imagine anyone seeking sanctuary in Paisley of all places, eh? It just shows you how cold it is in East Kilbride. Even the Polar bears up there are wearing gloves."

At Stephen's, when I moved from the Plumbers' Workshop to the Shipyard Drawing Office to become an apprentice draughtsman, I gave up my bike, travelling instead by

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the Number 38 trolley bus from Allison Street to Paisley Road Toll where we changed to a motor bus to reach Linthouse. As an office worker, I travelled each day with a group of three Tracers, ladies who lived nearby. The oldest one, called Janet was a spinster who lived with her mother. Jean and Eileen were a few years older than me, both engaged, I think. Years later, when I moved to Hulley & Kirkwood, Eileen was already working there as a tracer and we renewed our friendship after a break of about fifteen years.

I should tell you about our 'move up' in the world as a family. I was about eighteen, which makes it 1965 or thereby. We had been living at 39 Jamieson Street in Govanhill where six of us were crammed into a tiny, top floor room and kitchen. Hot water came from a gas-fired geyser over the sink. We shared a tiny, unlit WC (no washbasin) with two other families on our landing, using a torch at nights. Beside this WC room, which Mum kept spotlessly clean, Dad and I parked our bikes overnight, always on fresh newspapers to catch the drips. For daily bathing, we strip washed at the kitchen sink supplemented by weekly trips to Govanhill Baths where we rented a bathing cubicle for half-an-hour to enjoy endless hot water in long, narrow but very deep baths, the very epitome of luxury, usually enjoyed on a Friday night to get rid of the grime at the end of the working week.

Throughout his life, my father was very wary of being in debt of any kind and he must be commended for taking on a £500 mortgage to buy our new home. This loan, made to an ordinary working man with no history of home ownership, was made possible by a scheme backed by *Glasgow Corporation*, with Dad making weekly payments to the *Clydesdale Bank* on Cathcart Road just across from our new tenement flat, never missing a payment until his debt was cleared.

After Jamieson Street, 350 Allison Street seemed vast. Once more we were on the top floor but now in a 'posh' high-ceilinged flat which comprised a large, square entry hall with doors to two large bedrooms, a kitchen cum living room with a former bed recess we used as a dining area. We had a large front room we called 'the lounge', a long thin bathroom with a narrow bath, a washbasin and WC served by a high-level flushing cistern. From an electric immersion and copper cylinder in the kitchen, we had a good supply of hot water. Luxury.

Soon after we moved to Allison Street, we had acquired a fleet of five full-sized bikes which had to be accommodated *inside* our top floor home. This close was too posh to store bikes on the landing. From entry hall there was a wide and deep walk-in cupboard. This is where our bikes were stored, the three bikes belonging to my brothers were suspended from the ceiling on individual pulley systems, with the other two below used by my Dad and me, wheeled each evening into ready-use spaces underneath. As a joiner Dad was used to installing and repairing clothes drying pulleys and I suppose this seemed an obvious solution to him but most visitors who saw our pulley arrangement were impressed by his ingenuity.

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With my move to the drawing office at Stephen's, my biking-to-work-days were over although I still rode to evening classes in good weather.

When Margaret and I married in 1972, we had an ancient *Morris Minor* and I left my trusty *Sun Supalite* at Allison Street. From 1975 to 1979, I was teaching at Strathclyde University. We were living in West Chapelton Crescent, a five-minute walk from Bearsden Railway Station and I was travelling to work by train. However, one day, probably in September 1977, I decided to reinvent myself as a cyclist. I reclaimed my old *Sun Supalite* from Allison Street, gave it a clean and a squirt of 3-in-1 oil and set off from Bearsden along Maryhill Road to the city centre.

At Wynford Barracks in Maryhill, two miles from home, I was both exhausted and traumatised in equal measure. The early morning commuter traffic was heavy and aggressive, particularly the double-decker buses with rear engines which skimmed past me at great speed before throwing themselves hard left directly into my path before screeching to a halt at bus stops, leaving me trapped behind them breathing smoky exhaust fumes. That evening, I wimped out and took my bike home by train. My dream of a daily cycling commute to work was over. Biking was a thing of my past, I thought.

When I left Strathclyde University to work for Hulley & Kirkwood Consulting Engineers, we owned an aged Renault 16 which I used to commute to our office at Charing Cross, located on the western edge of the city centre. When required, I used my car to drive from the office to projects. Later, I was provided with a firm's car and from then onwards, cycling was no longer on my agenda.

Later still, when we moved house from West Chapelton to Westbourne Drive, my decades old *Sun Supalite* was dumped unceremoniously at the Dawsholm Refuse Station, destined for crushing, I suppose. I wonder now, did these remains eventually get shipped to China or Taiwan to be reincarnated as flat pack bikes?

Stuart and Craig had become the bikers in our family but one summer we were recruited by sailing club friends the Kinsmans to join them on a week-long packaged cycling holiday to Holland, moving from hotel to hotel each day, foraging for lunch as we rode along. As preparation, we had a 'training' week cycling in East Anglia, a warm-up experience.

This holiday presented a challenge for Margaret in particular. Brought up in Havelock Street near busy Byres Road, Margaret's father had denied her bike ownership. To be able to join this Dutch adventure, she had to learn to ride a bike. Armed with advice, we visited *Dales Cycles* and bought what I think were called 'roadsters', a hybrid between a 'racer' and a 'tourer' style bicycle.

During that late spring ahead of our cycling holiday, with Margaret unwilling to be seen learning, on most evenings we walked our bikes to Thorn Park, about half a mile from our

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house. This park comprises two football pitches surrounded by a narrow tarmac path. After several weeks Margaret became reasonably proficient and we took to riding our bikes most nights, often in the dark with front and back headlights showing, round and round our circuit, building up her confidence, becoming faster with each practice session.

However, our nocturnal behaviour did not go unnoticed. One night, after many circuits as we neared the park gateway to head for home, we were accosted by a policewoman flashing her torch at us, demanding we "STOP!" From behind a younger policeman came running towards us out of the darkness, flashing his torch, as if herding us to prevent our escape.

We learned a nearby resident had seen what she thought were motorbikes using the park as a racetrack. We were admonished by the lady sergeant and told not to ride our bikes in the park again.

There was a sequel to this. Most mornings I used this park as part of an early morning fitness regime, starting with warm-up exercises in our garden then jogging to Thorn Park to run round the circuit five times against the clock then home to shower and breakfast before driving to work. I have always been an early riser, which meant this often happened in the dark, before six o'clock.

Later that year on a late autumn morning, in heavy drizzle wearing a waterproof jacket with my hood up listening to music from my Walkman, I became aware that the path around me was bathed in light. Afeared, I ran onto the grass, took off my headphones and saw a police car being driven on the path towards me by the same policewoman from our 'biking in the park' incident.

A local resident had reported a "suspicious character wearing a hooded jacket running 'amok' in the area". When the policewoman eventually recognised me, she saw the funny side. Retelling this story to friends I used to say, "*The policewoman advised me to ring Milngavie Police Station anytime I intended to go jogging in the Thorn Park area.*"

Our biking holiday to East Anglia and Holland was a great success.

The adventure was organised by our friend Dr Leslie Kinsman, a veritable Master of Planning, always resourceful and able to solve glitches if they arose, most definitely the person you would want as a companion if castaway on a desert island. This snap shows us on our cycling holiday. It must have been taken in East Anglia, I think, as the roadsides in Holland are manicured!

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I should explain about Leslie Kinsman and his passion for cycling. Throughout my years at Strathclyde University and later when I had moved to Hulley & Kirkwood, Leslie was regularly biking to Glasgow College of Technology, an establishment which became Glasgow Caledonian University in 1993 when it merged with Queen's College, Glasgow. Leslie's 'all seasons work bike' was a ruggedised upright bicycle with no frills, designed and maintained to make these seven miles journeys through heavy commuter traffic from his home in Torrance, trips he did fearlessly for around forty years.

One morning I saw him on his way to Glasgow Caledonian. I think it was the mid-1990s. As I recall it, I was heading directly to an early meeting near Stirling. When I spotted him, Leslie was about a mile ahead, climbing the steep hill out of Torrance to the roundabout where I would turn left and he would continue rightwards for Bishopbriggs and then into town.

Behind him was a long queue of traffic with me near its tail.

On that bright clear morning Leslie was riding steadily up the steep hill, just slightly faster than walking pace, three feet from the pavement edge, far enough out to make it 'dangerous' for following vehicles to attempt to overtake without putting themselves in the path of oncoming vehicles. Later, when I asked him about this approach, he told me this 'three-foot rule' had been recommended in the magazine of the *Cycle Touring Club* as a safer way to ride in heavy traffic.

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For leisure cycling Leslie has a second bike, a tourer with drooped handlebars. Nearing eighty, long retired and living in North Yorkshire, Leslie is tall, slim and as fit as a fiddle. Although nowadays he is mainly a walker, he is still biking up to a hundred miles each week along narrow, winding country roads, defying the dangers of speeding cars, hurtling motorbikes and trundling tractors.

As they have done for many decades, Leslie and Marge continue their cycling-based holidays across the UK. Pre-Covid they regularly made trips throughout Europe. The Kinsmans are indeed veritable cycling intrepids!

In the immediate afterglow of our cycling holiday experience, I became obsessed with the notion of owning a Dutch upright bike. I researched it as best I could but at that time the information from the Internet and elsewhere was meagre. Leslie counselled strongly against this proposed purchase, pointing out these upright Dutch bikes are VERY heavy to provide stability in windy conditions, this weight and the high riding position making them quite unsuitable for the hilly terrain around Glasgow.

Over several weeks, the Dutch bike notion faded but one Saturday morning I mounted my trusty holiday roadster to make a trip to Hulley & Kirkwood's office, to meet with a colleague to finalise a rush submission we had been asked to put forward for a new project.

To avoid busy roads, I used the towpath alongside the Forth and Clyde canal, joining it at Westerton Rail Station and leaving at Speirs Locks, giving easy access to Charing Cross. What I did not know until that morning was Scottish Canals had installed locked gates at intervals of about two hundred metres. These 'hurdles' were to stop motorbikers from using the path in contravention of their byelaws. Stopping to lift my holiday bike over these gates made for slow progress. Another factor was the amount of broken glass on the path and the worry of a puncture. When I eventually reached the office, I was wobbly-legged and sweaty. After my short meeting, I decided to return home by train, leaving my bike at the office to be collected later using my car and bike rack.

As planned, I retired early from Hulley & Kirkwood on 29 June 2001, on my fifty-fourth birthday. Over the previous decade my weight had soared to nearly twenty stone. (Too many business lunches and dinners and too many meetings with coffee and choccy biccies.) A few weeks after retirement while on holiday in Rosemarkie with our caravanning friends Paul and Judy, I learned about 'The 7-Day Cabbage Soup Diet', sometimes called *The Birmingham Diet*, designed to help patients to lose weight during a pre-operation regime. Please note that I never once used cabbage in my various soups!

The diet is based on supping unlimited amounts of vegetable soup. To stave off hunger pangs, soup could be supped as often as desired through each day. Oh, did I say? This is

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an alcohol-free diet with no snacking on potato crisps or other calorific treats permitted. No bread or cakes or biscuits or sugary desserts, only fruit and raw vegetables and, surprisingly, quite a lot of meat and bananas! Yes, this diet is strange - look it up on Google.

In my new regime, I supped soup for breakfast, lunch and supper and ate lots of raw vegetables. In those first months of retirement, this low calorie food regime was combined with daily walking with my 'best pal', our Border Collie called Fleck. Later, I estimated that during those first months of retirement I walked around twenty-two hours most weeks. This change of lifestyle had its effect. Week on week, my weight loss was noticeable, and I was encouraged to hope for a new, slimmer me. Over the period from July to Christmas 2001, I lost just over five stones and celebrated with a new wardrobe of clothes while basking in the praise from all who witnessed the transformation. As you may have guessed, sadly I have reverted to my former self and my weight has climbed again.

Now a few final cycling tales from the noughties.

While Stuart was still living at home and studying for his finals at Strathclyde, he decided one afternoon to take his mountain bike out for a spin with Fleck running alongside.

By serendipity he made his way to Castlehill, the site of the yet unexcavated Roman Hill Fort which formed part of the Antonine Wall, the most northerly boundary of the Roman Empire. The Antonine Wall was established under Emperor Antonius Pious who reigned from 138 to 161 AD. It runs for 37 miles from the Firth of Clyde to the Firth of Forth. It was formed by creating a deep ditch behind which there was a raised steep turf rampart with a roadway on top along which Roman Soldiers patrolled between forts roughly two miles apart. I learned only recently that the Bearsden Fort near present home had a garrison of 400 soldiers. To the south of the wall, the natives were quelled and civilized while to the north the 'pictish peoples' were resisted and persecuted.

Back to Stuart and Fleck.

At the summit of Castlehill, while stopping to catch his breath, Stuart was accosted by a tattooed ruffian with a huge barking and snarling Alsatian on a lead. The man issued the challenge:

"Duz yoor dug want tae fight ma dug."

Departing downhill at high speed with Fleck racing far ahead of him, Stuart replied over his shoulder:

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"No, but thanks for the offer!"

In the Spring of 2002, still basking in the afterglow of my weight loss and seeking opportunities to expand my palate of physical activities, I borrowed Stuart's mountain bike, fixed it to my bike rack and drove to Mugdock Country Park, with Fleck in the boot. The bike was heavy and fitted with wide, chunky tyres.

It was mid-afternoon, dull, dreary and cold with spits of rain in the air. The park was deserted. I set off, heading over rough ground, bumping along familiar walking paths, Fleck ranging ahead. However, I soon discovered pedalling over soft ground, particularly uphill was hard work, very hard work. In fact, I just could not keep the bike moving with enough momentum to keep my balance. Exhausted, I was forced to give up and push the bike back over the rough terrain to the car park.

I was home within an hour of leaving. Margaret was surprised. Fleck was confused. I needed a hot shower and a glass of wine.

This failed adventure was my last time on a bike.

Footnote:

In Abingdon, Stuart and Debs are both keen cyclists and take Zac and Rory with them using buggy and trailer seats with Matthew pedalling alongside. There are many good cycling paths in that area and the terrain is much flatter than Glasgow.

In Netherlee, Craig has become a mountain biking enthusiast, encouraging Lee, Ethan and Drew to join him. Both Craig and Lee have had lessons from mountain biking professionals. As a family they are regulars on pump tracks and downhill circuits during holidays and weekends.

More recently (April 2022), during our 'combined family holiday' on Tenerife to celebrate our Golden Wedding Anniversary, Stuart and Craig spent a day on a mountain biking experience, a trip both exhilarating and challenging. Simply listening to accounts of their exploits was scary enough for us!

For the record, I have no immediate plans to go biking in any shape or form.