

Images Of Victorian Cycling In The British Isles

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When one views early photographs of any category one's mind interprets what is most familiar. Be it a child running along the grass or a wave on the ocean, we deem the aspects most recognizable to be familiar territory and that is what we tend to focus on. There was an incident in my personal history of showing a lady friend an important circa 1882 photograph of a pub in Ightham in Kent. I was thrilled to have the image of the inn keeper, structure's architecture, visitors & family, tricycles and overall scene of this Victorian village. When presented with the image, this friend immediately focused on the shadow on the road and how attractive it must have been to be there at that time of day. That was an awakening and a learning experience. With photographs we all see the same object, but interpret the image differently.

The focus of this presentation is based upon cycling's social history, sport and technical developments from circa 1860 to 1900, covering Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England. I had originally selected about 300 photos to cover the topic and the final selection for the presentation of 100 images left a canyon of gaps. Now practicality demands but a handful for this record.

Although similar scenarios in cycling history developed simultaneously elsewhere, the United Kingdom was the epicenter. The main reason for this was the very advanced and quickly developing cycle industry of which England was a world leader from the very end of the early 1870s through to circa 1890. Rapid changes were developing within the market, but England was the hub of the world cycling industry for that period of time. It also had a substantive middle and upper class, who could afford these machines. By the time other countries had

established a cycle industry somewhat parallel to England's, which was fully established, with a world market, they were too small to create an independent infrastructure.

Social history and fashion went hand in hand with the cycle's development from the Quadricycle through to the pneumatic diamond framed safety. Tricycling was very common in the early years of the 1870s to the mid-1880s as it was easier and safer for adults to learn to ride and consequently transport themselves on these vehicles. Women's fashion took on dramatic changes during this period from constricted, "socially acceptable" apparel to loosely fitting tops with split skirt (or pantaloons) style garments. The development of female fashion exploded with the two wheeled diamond framed pneumatic vehicles, which took over the market.

When perusing the following contemporary images, I hope you can imagine the corresponding sounds, smell and feel of Victorian England. Space does not allow me to show the comparatives from other countries that illustrate this view. Worthy of note is the fact that Queen Victoria lived during this entire time frame.

All the images presented here were selected because they subtly, or boldly, indicate a UK origin. Look for those fingerprints and enjoy. ●



Figure 1. AN EXCURSION OF OUR 'ONGAR CYCLING CLUB' (ESSEX) View at the Ongar Railway Station in Essex. Note the Starley style tricycle to the left and CMC lever driven Rotary Style Tricycle on the right. Third person with an ordinary starting from the left side is Leopold Pierson who belonged to the BTC/CTC and LAW (see Figure

7. with Facile). Tricyclist on the right has a Bugle in hand. Two of the ordinaries have hub lamps. Selected for its variety of machines, location, social relevance, including the assembly of spectators with two police constables at the rear left. Circa 1881. This albumen photograph is approx. 10" x 6". Not mounted. No photographer's identification.



Figure 2. THE THOUGHTFUL FAMILY Man, with his velocipede and family at a church doorway. The man sitting holding a child appears to be the pastor. Ten people in the photo. Other photos in the album came from Berrick in Scotland. Michaux pattern Velocipede has some cloth covering the moustache foot rests, indicating that it is likely this bike was well used on country roads. Selected to illustrate a velocipede in a family setting. Clothing, church and other photos from a contemporary album gives this an English flavor. Circa 1869. Albumen photograph. 4-1/8" x 2-1/2" mount. No photographer's identification.



Figure 3. A SAWYER QUADRICYCLE - GENTLEMEN, I AM READY Henry Hill Hodgson on a Sawyer Quadricycle (see similar photo in King of the Road by Andrew Ritchie p. 42). Hodgson was a bookseller and auctioneer, having his sales room at 115 Chancery Lane in London. He first acquired his Sawyer Quadricycle in 1856, which he rode consistently for extended distances. Selected because it illustrates an early front-drive, rear-steering Quadricycle. Identified as Henry Hill Hodgson on the reverse. These early historic vehicles originated in England. Much more information about Hodgson is available from the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford. Circa 1860. No photographer's identification. Size of mount is 4-1/8" x 3-1/8". Albumen photograph mounted on board.



Figure 4. A SPIN IN THE COUNTRY Three men on ordinaries with Ariel wheels. * Two bicycles on the left are Haynes and Jefferies, made circa 1874. Example on the right is likely a CMC Spider circa 1875. Selected to show the start of clubbing and early social travel. One gleans a feeling of freedom out in the countryside. Note the hats and formality of the riders. Image circa 1875. Albumen Cabinet Card is 6-1/4" x 4-1/4". No photographer or other identification marked on this photo. * Glynn Stockdale has a duplicate of this photo marked "Amateur Bicycle Club".

Figure 5. AS READY AS WE NEED BE

British military cyclist on his 3rd pattern Rover hard tired safety. Rank is that of a Corporal from what appears to be the Middlesex Volunteer Corps (of cyclists). It is his jacket that is likely atop the bicycle handlebars. Binoculars are in his right hand and a canteen slung over his shoulder. Across his chest is an empty ammunition belt. The bike sports his rifle with the clips attached at the top of the downtube where it meets the head and the top of the seat stay. Note the small tool kit under the saddle. Selected because of its early use of a bicycle in the military as well the early Rover. Circa 1888. Albumen Cabinet card photograph (4-1/4" x 6-1/2"). Taken at the Charles Grey Military Photographic Studio, located at 67 Lewes Road in Brighton.



Figure 6. AND I WISH TO

INTRODUCE Dan Albone of Biggleswade on his Cross Frame Hard Tyred Safety. He is credited with inventing this pattern of safety. Dan was a famous racer who went on to build IVEL brand bicycles. He is a very important historical figure, acknowledged as the inventor and producer of the first utilitarian farm tractor. Circa 1886. Albumen Cabinet Card photograph taken by G. A. Nichols of Stamford and Market Harborough. Size is 6-1/2" x 4-1/4".



Figure 7. TOLLGATE ALONG AN ENGLISH

ROAD A tranquil scene along a country road with three cyclists. The male in the front appears to have a cricket bat in hand across the handlebars. Two fashionably dressed lady cyclists are following behind. The scene has a very sturdy stone Tollgate house, gas lamps and the others milling about. Selected because it illustrates cycling travel in the countryside during the height of the 1890s boom. Marked in pencil on the reverse is "Donmow, Essex". Likely circa 1897. Contact photograph is unmounted. No photographer identification. Size is 4-3/8" x 3-1/8".





Figure 8. THE FORMALITY OF IT ALL *The Start. Race is being held at the Herne Hill track. The riders are identified (in contemporary script) on the reverse from the left: A. G. Fentiman, F. G. Bradbury, M. B. Fowler and A. Cooper. The Herne Hill course was near London and had the board track. Third person in the grey top hat is G. Lacy Hillier who is acting as "Clerk of the Course". The high fashion*

at the course is illustrated by formally suited gentlemen with top hats. Selected because the image illustrates the importance to which bicycle race events had become to society. Circa 1893. This Albumen photograph was taken by Charles F. Treble with studios in both Brixton and Belgravia. Size of mount is 11-3/8" x 9-1/4".



Figure 9. LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH SO WE CAN GET BACK TO RIDING *A group shot of participants taken at the Harrogate Meet held from Aug. 1st to 6th, 1884. Many notable cycling celebrities such as Sturmeay, Welford, Shipton and Hillier were at the event. In this photograph, the ordinary on the left has the recognizable tool kit with the ordinary stamped into its snap clip closure. Ordinary on the right has a hub lamp & Facile Stop bell. Six of these riders are sporting their CTC membership shield. Selected because of the structure of the photograph plus location. It captures a part of an important cycling event in 19th century England. Photo is an albumen image sized 7-3/4" x 5-7/8" mounted in a photograph album assembled by Harry Etherington to memorialize the event. It is indicated in The Wheel World, Vol. II, 1884, pp. 128 - 136, that the photos in this album were taken by W. D. Welford and Henry Sturmeay. Author's collection.*



Figure 10. STOPPING BY TO VISIT FRIENDS “Old Village” view of Shanklin on the Isle of Wight. The Crab Inn*, located at the center of the image, is still there today. Scene depicts a Rudge Rotary Tricycle parked aside the sidewalk. Selected as a somewhat typical English town scene with thatched roofed buildings. This photo is dated 1891, but the tricycle is likely from circa 1887. With pneumatics just penetrating the market, it would not be unusual for hard-tired cycles to be in use. The Albumen photograph had been mounted in an album. Size of image is 6” x 4-7/8”. The photographer is not identified.

* Our fellow Roger Street confirms many a fine meal being consumed at these premises.



Figure 12. RIDING MY FACILE ON A WINTER’S DAY Leopold Pierson on his Facile. Identified on the left as E. W. Rippon and on the right F. W. Rippon. All members of the Ongar Cycling Club. Leopold is listed in Kron’s 10,000 Miles on A Bicycle as coming from Stanford River, Romford in Essex. On the reverse it reads: “Just off for a 20 mile spin. Slipping all of snow, but not sufficient to stop cycling.” Selected for its depiction of a high wheel safety, identifications and record of winter driving and association with the Ongar Railroad Station (see Figure 4.). Dated Feb. 1st, 1888. Albumen Cabinet Card photo (4-1/4” X 6-1/2”) taken by Smith of Brentwood.



Figure 11. AND WE ARE READY TO GO, ARE WE NOT? Departure will be imminent. All quite fashionable scene with all the riders sporting their boater hats. Female curved drop frame bikes have bells, with the one lady’s bike carrying a wicker basket and a cyclometer. The social scene is very interesting. The bikes are all facing in a similar direction with the riders positioned in front of their bikes at the rear wheel. Note the people on the verandah and the two dogs. Mom or grandma, whoever she may be, has little focus or care of the cyclists. It is nothing to which she can relate. The ladies all have white handkerchiefs in hand ready to wave goodbye. A maid is standing in the window at the right. Selected to illustrate a social scene of a gentry class family. Came with other photographs from Scotland. Circa 1897. Albumen photo is 13” x 9”. Not mounted. No photographer’s identification or markings.