# FOX BROTHERS OF NEW BUCKENHAM

Peter Fuller

his story is constructed from the 1913 diarry and stock book of an initially unidentified cycle shop. The book came into my possession through helping with the clearance of a garage full of old bicycles.

Effectively a time capsule of one year in the life of a Norfolk village, the shop had recorded details of its stock and customers, but tantalisingly nothing of itself and unfortunately no serial numbers. From the addresses of the customers it clearly served the Attleborough area of Norfolk. Incredibly it only took one text message, one phone call and one evening to reach a local historian who not only named the shop from information provided, but also checked with his brother-in-law who had bought his first machine there.

The shop was Fox Brothers, of New Buckenham and Forncett St Peter, Norfolk, 'Cycle and motor agents & repairers; depot for Stars, New Hudsons, Swifts & Royal Enfields; motor spirit, oil and grease'. Once the shop had been identified it was possible to cross-check many of the names and occupations recorded with an on-line Kelly's Trade Directory for Norfolk, 1912.

So the year is 1913. Stainless steel is cast for the first time in Sheffield, Henry Ford has reduced the time to build a Model T to 1½ hours, and ominously, Vickers introduce the Experimental Fighting Biplane No 1, the first aircraft to have a machine gun mounted on it. Even a village as small as New Buckenham lost sixteen sons to the Great War, the stock book list-

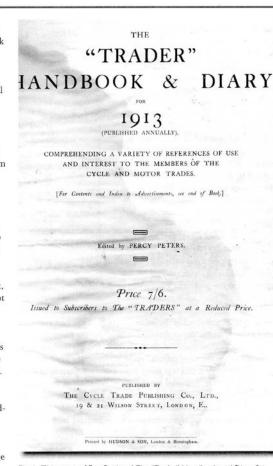


Fig. 1 Title page of Fox Bothers' The "Trader" Handbook and Diary for 1913.

ing five family names that were to appear a few years later on the New Buckenham Roll of Honour.

The diary entries start in February and with it the need to stock up. The shop bought a dozen new cycles that month, three New Hudsons, one each of Model B. C and G for the Forncett St Peter shop, followed by two Calcotts, an 'all Black', a Road Racer and three Champions for 'OT' (own transfer) for New Buckenham. On the 14th two more OT, one gent's, one lady's, and a pair of gent's New Hudsons, a model A and a model 51. Three of these machines were destined for the hire fleet. and trade must have been quiet in the Forncett St Peter shop as two of the cycles appear to have been recalled and sold in New Buckenham.

The rental year had already begun by then in a quiet way, with five machines hired out in January, all ladies' machines, followed by fourteen in February, again all but one were ladies' cycles. The hire fleet included a variety of machines, including New Hudson, All Black, Calcott, Coventry X, Enfield, Hazlewood, OT, Preference, Royal Enfield, Royal Ruby, Rudge, Singer and Triumph.

The sales pattern was rather the reverse of the rental market, with sales of 36 gent's and twelve ladies' cycles passing through the stock book during the year. Clearly the men of New Buckenham bought their bicycles, while the ladies rented theirs. Perhaps the explanation is in the economics of the time?

For the ladies the most popular cycle was a 24" Coventry X that was hired out 19 times in the year, followed by a lady's Hazlewood which went out twelve times. Assuming the minimum rental was one day, the hire charge appears to have been about 6d to 8d per day, with a week usually costing 2s 6d to 3s 6d. Indeed until the middle of March it was the ladies who provided most of the demand for rental machines, which perhaps suggests neces-

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sity rather than pleasure. Mrs Derisley was the best customer during this period, having hired the Coventry X for two weeks and the Hazlewood for a third. Over the year the gentlemen eventually equalled the rental pattern of the ladies, but not until the end of the summer months.

Easter week was extremely early in 1913, Easter Sunday falling on 23 March, one day later than the earliest possible day. In preparation for this event the shop stocked up again in mid-March, buying two each of Cheylesmores, Swifts and Comets, and a single Royal Ruby. Four of these machines went into the hire fleet,

Fig. 2 Page from the stock book listing sales for February 1913.

one of the rental Cheylesmores eventually being sold to one of the shop's loyal rental customers, Mr Beales. He must have been on the tall side as he never rented a machine smaller than 25". In fact the Beales family were very good rental customers, with bikes going out to Mr, Mrs, and on occasion Master and Miss Beales.

The new rental stock for Easter proved to be the right move, with nine machines going out over the weekend, but no new sales. However, the following weekend must have been more relaxed for both the shop and the local clergy, the shop proprietor picking out a quite expensive 25" Triumph Model 5 with Dunlop tyres for 'own use', and the Rector of Carlton Rode stretching his legs by renting a gent's OT Champion.

In April rentals all but disappeared with only three machines going out, and two of those only for one day. Was everyone busy on the land? Sales, however, were steady, with two New Hudsons, two Triumphs and a Star Fixed Gear Racer passing through the shop. At this point dates in the sales ledger unfortunately dry up, but a further batch of six New Hudsons and four Calcotts were bought and sold, together with three Coventry Xs, Enfields, Populars and a single Rudge Whitworth Crescent Racer. Of interest too were single Triumph and Douglas motor cycles, and a gent's 25" Triumph 21B going to New Zealand with a Mr Godfrey.

The month of May saw the rental business pick up again, with 10 machines going out over Whitsun weekend. The Beales family almost kept the business going, renting five times in the week approaching Whitsun. Mr Beales in particular was clearly trying out different machines as he never hired the same machine twice. Perhaps he was not happy with the Cheylesmore he had bought in March. June and July kept up a steady rental business, with 18 of the 25 hires taking place on Saturdays and a roughly equal number

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of ladies' and gent's machines going out. Perhaps there was some time for leisure before the harvest started.

August brought the Bank Holiday weekend, Monday 4 August being the day. Much more than just one day off, it turned out to be the busiest rental week of the year with 27 cycles going out over the week, helping to make August the busiest month of all. The spiritual guardians of the area also took to two wheels this week, the Rector of Bunwell taking two machines for

Fig. 3 Stock book entries for cycle hire through the first few months of 1913.

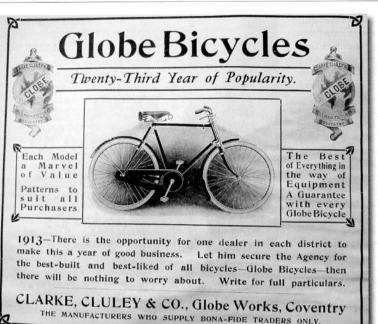


Fig. 4 Diary advertisement for bicycles, manufac by Clarke, Cluley of Coventry, supp 'bona-fide trader:

Bank Holiday week and the Vicar of New Buckenham joining him on a gent's Royal Ruby.

On a couple of occasions we see the maid being sent to hire two machines — usually on a Saturday, and usually 1s each, suggesting a hire for the weekend. The maid at Clowes was sent for two cycles on a couple of occasions, a Triumph being paired first with an Enfield and later with a Singer. The maids at Holt's and at Hall's were also sent for two cycles on single occasions.

Ladies' machines continued to dominate the rental side right through August, Saturdays continuing to be the busy day. Gradually, as we move into September, the balance starts to tip towards the gentlemen—is it fair to assume the harvest was in by then? Saturday 27 September looks like an

organised ride, with Messrs Hewitt, Sadler, Barker, Hunt and Grant hiring Calcott, Royal Ruby, New Hudson, Calcott and Preference, respectively, for the weekend. I wonder where they went on their ride?

October saw the year begin to tail off with 15 rentals leaving the shop, only three of which look like weekly hires. The gentlemen predominated again except for Wednesday 22 October, when four of the ladies appear to have got together for a day out, renting Singer, Hudson, Preference and New Hudson. The ladies provided all but two of the November and December rentals. Mrs Howling and Mrs Robson were hardy and frequent customers as the cycling year came to a close, providing the only two rentals in December, Mrs Howling showing a preference for Preference, Mrs Robson for New Hudson.

#### New Buckenham Society: 1889 - Walnut Tree House, Forncett St Peter (Forncett End) acquired and owned by David Fox, thought to be Fergus Fox's father or grandfather.

Postscript, from Ken Gee,

1903 - Bertie Spurgeon, a shop assistant in Fox's shop, bought and added a cottage to the property, i.e. Walnut Tree House, He must have done well financially as a Fox's shop assistant!

1928 - Holly Lodge, Queen Street, New Buckenham, was bought by Fergus Henley Fox, cycle agent, from the personal representatives of Frederick Brown, deceased. Fox's cycle shop was on the opposite side of Queen Street.

1929 - Walnut Tree House owned by Fergus H Fox, and sold by him in 1947

Referring to the 1913 Trade Diary many of the names listed are familiar family names - some cur-

rent or from recent generations, for example: Beales, Davy, Smith, Brown, Kemp, Woodrow, etc.

As noted many of the young men listed in the Trade Diary for 1913 were off to war the following year and sadly some of them appear on the New Buckenham Roll of Honour in the church (www.brecklandrollofhonour.org.uk/new\_buck.htm1), for example: W Beales, A Hunt, L Hunt, J Olley, Alfred Rudd, G Self. However, it should be noted that apart from Alfred Rudd, none of these names listed in the diary have initials included, so we cannot be completely sure they are one and the same

#### "ROYAL RUBY" The Popular-Priced QUALITY Cycles.



SPECIFICATION.

WHEELS

CHANKS DINIBH D

righte with celluloid inflator, or clips, tools, oil can and tool bag.

#### Model D. Gent's Free Wheel Roadster.

PRICES:	Complete with Dunlop Tyres		25	12	6	26	0	0
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SPECIFICATION.

MUDGUARDS

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## Model E. Gent's Light Roadster.

PRICES: Complete with Sturmey Archer 3-speed Gear, Top Tube Control 28 If fitted with Sturmey Archer Tri-coaster 8 15

family member as appears on the Roll of Honour.

With a view to gathering some reminiscences of Fox's shop, I have talked to a number of folk in the village who have childhood memories of Fergus Fox, mostly during the war and post war years. It seems he was regarded as a kindly old gent, if somewhat eccentric at times! He was usually and affectionately known as 'Brother or Brer Fox', which begs the question - when and where did a brother feature - no one seems quite sure, probably in the early days of 'Fox Brothers'.

One chap I spoke with in the village

Fig. 5 Royal Ruby advertisement from The Trader diary. The Ruby Cycle Co Ltd was based in Manchester

recalls going in to the shop to buy something such as a tyre. On asking Mr Fox how much it was, he said "How much have you got?" "Only 2s 6d." came the reply. "That will do!" said Mr Fox. Happy days. The shop was remembered by everyone I have spoken with as a veritable Aladdin's Cave — and this is borne out by Gaze's Auction catalogue listing every item of stock for disposal after the business was wound up in 1960. Fergus Fox had died a short while before.

### NEW BUCKENHAM, Norfolk.

AN IMPORTANT DISPERSAL SALE OF THE COMPLETE STOCK OF

Cycles, Hardware, Tools, Components, etc.

including 1934 Hillman Car. 1955 B.S.A. Motor Cycle New and Secondhand Bicycles

Large Quantity of Cycle Spares and Components Garage Equipment including B.E.N. Compressor New Farm Tools, Hand Tools

Quantity of New Paints, Oils, etc.

Torches, Bulbs, Batteries, Dynamo Lamps, etc.

Shop Fittings.

being the Entire Stock of Messrs. Fox Bros. Stores, The Green, New Buckenbare, which

#### THOS. WM. GAZE & SON

Have been instructed to Sell by Auction upon the premises, by direction of the Exora, of the late Mr. F. H. Fox,

On Tuesday, December 20th, 1960

Commencing at 9.30 punctually.

Chartered Auctioneers' Offices:—Crown Street, Diss, Norfolk. (Tel. Diss 2291/2).



Fig. 6 Diary advertisement for the many Accles & Pollock parts available to cycle, motorcycle and aircraft builders in 1913.

Fig. 7 Cover of the auction catalogue for the sale of 'the entire stock of Messrs. Fox Bros. Stores, held on 20 December 1960.