

# 25 County Ride



**St John's Methodist, United Reformed, Church, Stone**

Well it seemed like a good idea at the time. First of all a little bit of background information, for those of you who have not had e-mails from me during the ride.

Our church hall at St John's Methodist/United Reformed Church, in Stone is at this moment out of use due to problems in the roof. The hall is a wooden building which was erected as a "Temporary" building over fifty years ago. As you will appreciate the building structure has reached the end of its lifespan, As a church we have made the momentous decision to build a new hall with modern facilities including requirements under the Disability Discrimination Acts.

This present building over the years has been a great asset to the community, being the accommodation for:

- Guides, Brownies,
- Mums and Toddlers,
- The Stone male voice choir,
- Ladies Fellowship, and an Art group, (to name just a few.)
- Elections
- Community meetings
- Church use and Social functions

- Designated for Emergency use ( in the event of disasters etc)
- As part of our future plans we envisage a "Luncheon Club" for elderly people in the area. In addition accommodation will be provided to enable "sensitive meetings" to be held in a private and secure manner.
- Until the recent problem the building has been in regular use seven days a week.

So in my wisdom, I offered to do a sponsored ride. My BMW being a 1987 R65, which made it 25 years old, and myself a 1935 model, (*with modifications*) making me 75 years old, together we clock up 100 years. Well you guessed, it I decided to try and get 100 sponsors to raise 25 pounds each. For this I would ride to a "St John's" Church in each of 25 counties, from the M25 to the Scottish border. The idea was received by the church with great enthusiasm



Well the bike was prepared and all we needed was the right kind of weather. Just to break myself in gently in March I did a couple of local counties, Cheshire and Shropshire. The first one in Shavington near Crewe was easy; because it was at this church I met my wife.



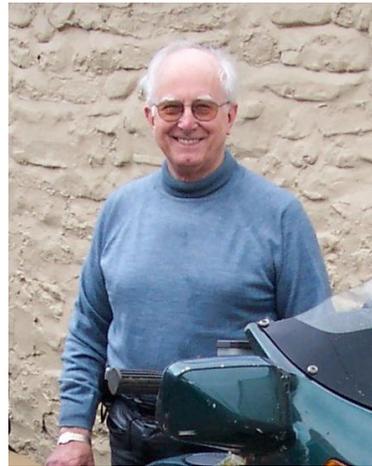
**St John's Methodist Shavington Cheshire**

Then into the wilds of Shropshire to Whitchurch This was very much a trial run and I realised that finding towns is quite easy but finding churches in a strange town is sometimes quite a challenge.



**St John's Methodist Whitchurch Shropshire**

Things seemed to be in order with the bike so after a quick bacon butty at the Midway Truck stop I returned home. Here my journey to an unexpected turn, a great motorcycling friend of mine died of cancer and I needed to go to Paul's funeral in Northampton. On this part of the run was accompanied by my riding "Buddy" John Falconer. It was a great ride, but temperatures never got much above freezing.



God Bless you Paul, you will be greatly missed. Especially by the Fellowship, of Christian Motorcyclists <><

I think Paul would have been pleased that I took the opportunity to call at four churches on the way.



**1Newhall Swadlingcote Derbyshire**

Well they say "No-One is perfect" I actually called at two churches in Leicestershire, in the same town.



**Whitwick, Coalville**

And



### **2Hugglescote Coalville Leicestershire**

Reaching Hugglescote we were welcomed by the Rev. Olwen Woolcock with a very much appreciated cup of tea, (*and use of facilities*) and a nice chat. All to soon it was back on the road and on to



### **Kingsthorpe Northamptonshire**

This is a lovely village setting complete with village green even though it is in the city of Northampton. From there John and I went on to Paul's funeral, or rather Celebration Service. It was lovely to see FCM well represented and share some time with Paul's family. After the service we headed for the rather boring part of the ride, that is the M6 motorway home. The sun was going down and so was the temperature, so it was home as fast as we could make it in rush hour traffic. The journey would

have been uneventful had it not been for the fact that all my lights, except the headlight. Failed. Not recommended on a Motorway at night. Thankfully John was able to ride behind me and illuminate the rear reflectors on my bike so that we arrived home safely.

The following morning things were worse that I feared. All my electrics on the bike had failed, including the ignition. It took John and I almost four days to sort out the problems, two days to trace the faults and two days waiting for parts. However, job done garage locked and home for tea. Next morning I went into the garage only to find that my petrol tank had sprung a leak (*again*). Disaster. I was left with three choices, finish the run in the car, not what people were sponsoring me for. Abandon the run all together (*No Way*) or get another bike from somewhere.

After a lot of prayer and soul searching, I called on my friendly bike shop owner, an my way home from church and arranged to go in to the shop on Monday morning to sort out a new (Second hand) bike to continue the journey, on the one condition that I would be on the road that day. God Bless em, the lad's at the shop pulled out all the stops and at 3.00pm I was riding home on a Yamaha Fazer600 a very different bike from my old BMW.



### **My Pit Crew, Foley Motorcycles Fenton**

Nice one lads.

So 0800am on Tuesday morning I set off on the next leg taking in five more counties. The start was rather foggy and damp, but by the time I got to my first stop the fog had cleared and the sun was trying it's best to get through the clouds.



Shobdon Nr Leominster Herefordshire

Shobdon Church is a hugely important work of architecture. It has a direct connection to Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill in Twickenham and the members of the "Committee of Taste" which strongly influenced its design. Its amazingly intact interior and matching furniture are the sole example of this Walpolean Gothick style of Georgian church architecture and furnishing.



From Shobden in a beautiful parkland setting I headed for the City centre of Worcester.



St John-in- Bedwardine, Worcester

St John's church dates from about 1165. Originally it was one of two chapels on the west bank of the Severn, the other being at Lower Wick (the remains of which -- St Cuthbert's -- can be found in the farm buildings behind the Manor Farm eatery). By 1371, after the Black Death, it was decided to close the Lower Wick church (which had, for a short while been the parish church) as it was in a neglected state and very poorly attended. On the other hand, St John's was a flourishing community near the bridgehead where the drove roads out of mid-Wales converged, and since 1287 had been the place where the vicar lived. St John's was made the parish church on February 17th 1372.

The church building is of some interest as the comparable city churches of Worcester were nearly all rebuilt in the 18th century -- so St John's is the only one today that gives some impression of what the features of a 'town' church in Worcester might have been. Like many of our ancient churches, St John's have just completed a massive fund raising effort to cure death watch beetle in the beams that hold the bells in the tower, Well done to all concerned.

Time for another bacon Butty and a coffee before setting off for the City of Gloucester. St John's Methodist church is a city centre church and using my makeshift Sat. Nav. I would have found it quite easily if they had not decided to dig up the main street. I could see the church but

by the time I had been round and round the streets when I finally got there to take a photograph I was completely disorientated.



[St John's Methodist Gloucester](#)

At last time to leave the busy cities and head for the Cotswolds, My next stop Banbury in Oxfordshire. Now I don't know what happened next, but the young lady on my phone Sat Nav. Took me to All Saints Church, Well! Who am I to argue? I suppose All Saints would have covered St John, but I carried on and found



[St John the Evangelist RC. Banbury](#)

Just up the road from the famous Banbury Cross but I didn't see any fine ladies on horses. I do apologise for the picture but I did have to stand in the middle of a main road to get it.

Again this was a most impressive interior, although I didn't go in, in my noisy motorcycle gear, I could see someone at prayer so I just took a photo though the entrance door. It is great to see churches open in the daytime, during the week.



[St John the Evangelist Banbury, Oxfordshire](#)

Time was now getting on so quickly off up the M40 for a while to my next stop



[St John's Kennilworth Warwickshire](#)

There I met some lovely ladies who had just finished a dancing class, and a wonderful lady (from Edinburgh) made me a cup of tea to go with the sandwich that I had been carrying around all day. Nice to stop, take a breath and have a chat, before once again setting off into rush hour traffic up the M6. This time though quite uneventful. I arrived home at 6.10pm and after ten hours riding; I enjoyed a hearty meal and a soak in the bath.

After a few days break it was back on the bike to face the part of the ride I had not been looking forward to. The first day was not the easiest of rides or the prettiest (Sorry) but that was due to the fact that the ride took in a blast down the M6/M1 to the first church in Bedford. The weather was absolutely fine, but the traffic (*The next few words have been censored*). I didn't hang around very long at Bedford

because the Mum's and toddlers were beginning



**St John's Bedford**

to arrive, and I think a strange man in motorcycle gear would have been viewed with suspicion. So Back to the saga which is the M1 and down to Amersham in Buckinghamshire,



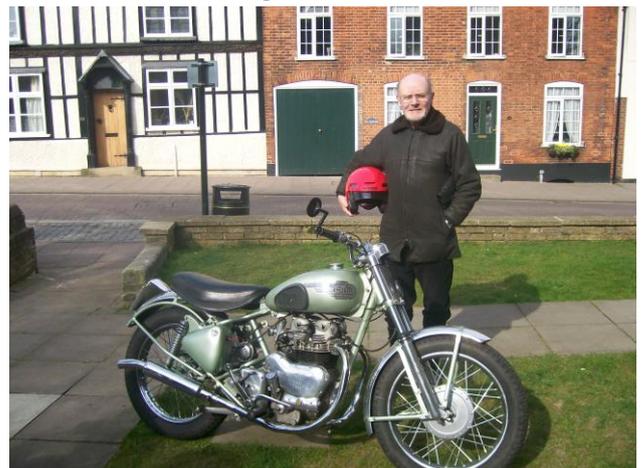
**3St John's Methodist Amersham**

Now for a Northerner the next church, St John's Methodist Potters Bar, Hertfordshire, was one I expected to have difficulty finding, but it was surprisingly easy. I just rode through the huge car park, known as the M25, passing motorists with cobwebs between their foreheads and the steering wheel, startled by the exhaust note of my bike as I filtered through. I think they thought it was their alarm clock. Then into Potters Bar, then back onto the M25 round to junction 27 (*Hello Sir, didn't I pass you earlier?*) and off into the real world, or so I thought, up to Cambridgeshire, the address I had for the Church was Green Street Cambridge,



**4Potters Bar Hertfordshire**

(Ha!) it actually turned out to be Green Street Duxford Cambridgeshire some eleven miles from Cambridge, This lost me over an hour, so beautiful as it was, I did not hang around in the village of Duxford, but quickly headed off towards my next port of call St John the Evangelist in Bury St Edmunds, alas arriving as the light was fading, so the picture I took was not very good. However, I was greeted by my host for the night, the Reverend Bob Torrens, a fellow motorcyclist, who said we could take some in the morning.



So off we went to Bob's home for a wash and brush up and a change of clothes. Then we sat down to a very welcome meal and lot's of motorcycle chat and then as they say in all the best children's TV "Time for bed".

The following morning, Friday, Bob not only gave me a tour of St John's but also Bury St Edmunds cathedral, where we were able to take communion together, at 7.30am. If you ever get to Bury St Edmunds both the church and the cathedral are well worth a visit, too much to tell

you here unfortunately.



### St John the Evangelist Bury St Edmunds

The next part of the journey has to be the best, riding out of Suffolk, which is a beautiful county in it's own right, into the wide open spaces of Norfolk.

The Norfolk church was in the village of Oxborough, a church that is three quarters ruin, and yet services are still held in what was the original chancel. Originally the church had a huge spire which was compared to that of Norwich cathedral, but after it was struck by lightning it had to be rebuilt and it lasted till seventy years, till 1948 when the spire fell onto the church, closing it for eight years. (*and we think we have problems*).



### Oxborough Norfolk

Then from Norfolk into Lincolnshire and the

ancient market town of Stamford, St John's Stamford is now a redundant church but is still open to the public.



### St John's Stamford Lincolnshire

Then for my last port of call, St John's in the little Rutland village of Ryhall,



### St John's Ryhall Rutland

There are many places where one feels that it would be right just to sit and enjoy the surroundings, and on this journey I experienced that feeling in a great cathedral and in tiny village churches, but alas, the time had come to head home past Rutland Water and home. Nine counties, in two days, and five hundred and thirty three miles. Just six more counties to do, but my journey will continue after the Easter celebrations, On April 26<sup>th</sup> I will be heading North, so watch this space.

To be continued.....

OK Easter celebrations over, back to business. Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> of April started colder than the glorious weather over Easter, but 8.15 am saw me on the road to Kirby in Ashfield, (Nottinghamshire).



**St John the Evangelist Kirby in Ashfield**

The weather may have been colder but the reception was amazing. Quite a reception committee, led by the Reverend Mary Essex. We invaded the vicarage and sat round eating bacon butties and croissants. The conversation varied from motorcycling to my Lancashire roots and quite a few offers for the job as pillion passenger. After a group photo session it was all too soon time to be on my way.



**Friends in Kirby in Ashfield**

The next leg was to St John's church in St John's Square in Wakefield. Quite simple you might say, but the town seems to have been rearranged even since the birth of Google maps. The route I had ended at a row of bollards and about eight stone steps, Down I may have managed but up? No way! However, with a little bit of humility. I asked directions.



**St John's Church Wakefield**

Then came the longest leg of the outward journey to Birtley in Chester-le-Street, Co Durham. Quite a hard ride really as I was riding into a head wind. However I did eventually arrive, and the countryside got better and better as I rode North.



**Birtley Chester Le Street**

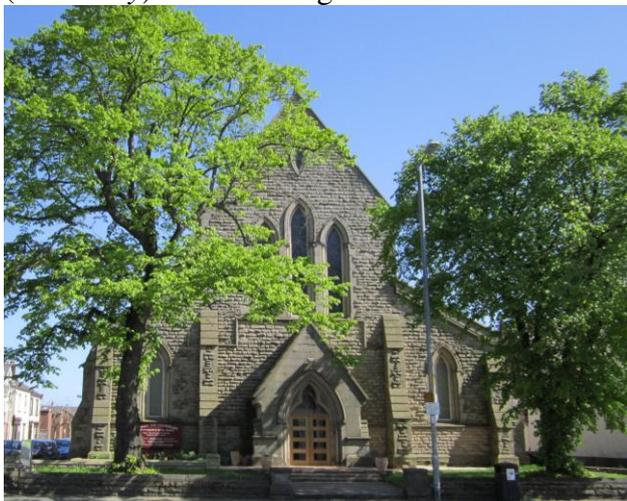
Then a circular route around Newcastle-on-Tyne, past the famous Angel of the North. Unfortunately it isn't easy to take a photo while

travelling on a fast dual carriageway. My next stop was St John's United Reformed church in Wideopen, Newcastle, Tyne and Wear.



St John's URC Wideopen Tyne and Wear

While taking photos from the car park I was greeted by the Minister Rev Philip Gray and his wife who promptly invited me to their home for a cup of tea. Of course only to discover that they were also motorcyclists, and proud owners of a BMW 1200 RT. Well I suppose you can imagine how the conversation went. Seriously though, it is always a great pleasure to meet other Christians and of course if they are motorcyclists then that is a bonus. All too soon it was time to leave and be on my way to my B&B in Hexham, for a good night's sleep. Thursday morning saw me up bright and early (*well early*) and off along the A69 to Carlisle.



St John's Evangelical Church Carlisle

Carlisle looks a very interesting place but it was now lunch time and I was very much looking forward to the next leg of my journey. I left Carlisle taking the A6, rather than the M6, over

Shap to Penrith and onwards to Kendal. This is the route I cycled in my youth. (*Yes I was a youth once*) There reluctantly I returned to the M6 and down into the most famous county of all Lancashire. To take my last photo in the town where I was born Horwich (*now you know what Lancashire is famous for*). This is not the church as I knew it, I was married, the first time, in St John's Church or as it was known in those days Brunswick Methodist. After that they knocked it down and built a brand new church. (*There must be a moral to this story*)



St John's Church Horwich LANCASHIRE

All That remains of the previous church



In all a day of many memories, and time to return to Stone and back to reality.

**Total mileage 1529.1.** Total money raised to be announced.

It only remains for me to thank all the people who have supported me in this venture, and there have been many. I hope that we, together, can build something to that will be of use in our community for a very long time to come. So God Bless and a very sincere thank you. Cyril <><