

## Mawdesley Meander

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December, heavy rainfall and with Mondays forecast not much better, how many brave souls would venture out? There was going to be one at least! Trencherfield Mill, 5 mins to the start time, numbers present, one, looked like it was going to be a solo ride. Fears unfounded though, just in the nick of time Denis appeared followed by Jim T and Roy, talk about cutting it fine. Next port of call was the DW; a few had said they would join us from there, as it happened only Phil and Jim H had made the effort, perhaps a few more would join us at Parbold!!!! (Wasn't holding any breath!)

The towpath from Crooke to Gathurst is a little on the wet side, even in dry weather, the rainfall of the previous few days wasn't going to help matters. An alternative route perhaps! Jim H had an answer; we would leave the towpath at Crooke, head across the fields to Shevington before picking up the Towpath again in Appley Bridge. Sounded like a plan so off we set. Martland Mill to Crooke was pretty wet; Appley Bridge to Parbold even wetter, Roy was in his element; we all know how much he likes the mud. By the time we got to Parbold he was covered in it, not only him, all of us, bottom halves anyway. Jims Plan to avoid the muddy section had sort of worked, we were spared the ordeal of riding through it, but the state we were in you couldn't tell. Just so happened the non-muddy bits were muddy as well.

No signs of anyone joining the merry band at Parbold (Elaine had e-mailed me to chicken out, but I only got the message when back at home) Change of plan from Parbold, thought we had seen enough mud for one day so a bit of on-road took us through Newburgh and onto the back lanes heading for Burscough, as it happened it actually was Back Lane. Jim H seemed to be struggling slightly, normally right at the front of the group, from Parbold however he had become tail end Charlie. Hoscar Moss next up followed by Bispham Green, treated to the spectacle of some Guinea Fowl roaming freely round the village, that's what Denis told us they were anyway, think he was sizing one up for Christmas Lunch. The Owd Barn Café was nearby and the suggested stop for a coffee whilst waiting for Jim was unanimously agreed on, thought it might give Jim H a bit of respite. All was not well though and despite the offer of a coffee break he had decided to cut the ride short and head for home. After all persuasion had failed he assured us he knew his way and duly set off back to Wigan. The Owd Barn was only about a mile away, so with renewed vigour and enthusiasm we got underway once more. Short lived though, it was closed, talk about disappointment. Not to be outdone though, we headed towards Rufford, had seen a café at the side of the canal when doing the Reccy. The Owd Barns loss was the Tastebud's gain, made us very welcome and served up a cracking brew along with cakes to die for as the lads described them. Mark that one up for the good biking guide.

Another change of plan was on the cards, intended to use the canal towpath once again to avoid the main road, not the best section of towpath though, so we braved the road (wasn't that busy really, and we were only on it for about half a mile). Croston next up, via some farm roads including a few puddles (just for Roy) and a gated level crossing, few and far between nowadays. Definitely worth it though, led us round the quiet lanes of Croston through the Church grounds and set us on our way to Mawdesley. Discussion was had about stopping for a pint, after a bit of humming and hawing, liquid refreshment of the alcoholic kind was to be the Holy Grail of our quest once back in Wigan (not so far to drink and cycle that way), not entirely daft.

Change of route yet again, no one fancied the towpath back to Wigan so an improvised route was hastily conceived, the risk assessment was right out of the window on this ride. Meandered our way round Mawdesley before heading up a bit of a climb towards Wrightington (not on the original route I assure you) made it sound worse than it actually was apparently, still took their time riding up it. Tunley Lane, Mossy Lea Road and Pepper Lane led us to Standish, this afforded us the added benefit of a downhill ride, all the way back into good old Wigan.

The newly opened Central Station Bar was our intended destination, fingers crossed it was open. Made our way through the town centre (including the odd diversion) and along Wallgate, thirst getting stronger with every yard pedalled, would it be open, would it! Turned the last corner and to our relief yes it was, we all wanted to hear those words. Whilst sorting ourselves out and preparing to lock the bikes up the manager appeared, had he seen the state of us! Were we to be allowed in? Better than that he had come out to say we could take our bikes inside, what a bloke! On seeing them he did kind of change his mind but did say that if we were struggling for locks, to take them inside "the floor will mop" the exact words he used. Don't get that kind of welcome too often.

The lads were likes pigs in shit, literally. Spoiled for choice as to which beer to have first, several tasters were consumed before a decision was made, Phil drinking Nutty Slack, Jim & Denis Totem, several of them I might add. Only problem was I'm not a beer drinker and couldn't very well ask for a shandy in a real ale pub, then I saw the cider list, the one that caught my attention (don't know why) was called Fanny's Bramble, that I had to order, just for the sheer fun of it (thought better of asking for a taste though). My choice of liquid seemed to be a source of amusement and several quips were made at my expense, leave that to your imagination.

In summary, the day seemed to have been a great success, aside from losing Jim H part way that is, he would have loved the beer! Weather was pretty good considering the forecast, even managed a bit of sunshine. Thought we were going to get drenched at one point, the sky over Rufford turned black, midnight black almost. Had the good fortune to stop for coffee stop at that point and missed it completely. Route got the thumbs up, even from Roy, so much so it was suggested we do it again, something similar anyway. Last but not least, great company as always and some splendid hospitality at both Tastebud's and Central Station, beer was excellent (so I'm told) and so was the Fanny's!

Thanks for taking part guys, see you on the next one!

(Jim H made it safely back home by the way and is now back to his usual position at the front of the group)