

THE SECRETS OF THE WINGED WHEEL

Bakewell has secrets in the most unlikely places, one of which was spotted — well above eye level — by one of our readers, George Pearson, who asked whether we could discover what it is and why it's there. The mystery object is a large, round cast-iron plaque fixed to the front of a chimney stack on the Castle Hotel. It bears the word Headquarters above the letters CTC and a wheel with three wings.

It transpires that the initials stand for the Cyclists' Touring Club, the first and oldest cycling club in the world, founded at Harrogate in 1878 as the Bicycle Touring Club with 80 elected members. Within five years there were more than 10,000 members, rigged out in green uniform and issued with handbooks and guides. In 1883 the organisation was renamed the Cyclists' Touring Club, with headquarters in Fleet Street. The 'winged wheel' badge was adopted in 1886, soon to be reproduced on large cast-iron wheels such as that on the Castle Hotel, one of numerous hotels, pubs, tea rooms and restaurants recommended by and for cyclists.

CTC highlights of the past 130 years are closely linked to a wider social history, for example it was two years before the first lady member was admitted to the club, then in 1899 Lady Harberton was refused service at a Surrey hotel because she was wearing 'rational' cycling dress — probably trousers of some sort. In that same year membership reached the highest ever at 60,449, encouraging a joint venture with Messrs Bartholomew of Edinburgh to produce cyclists' maps for the whole of Great Britain.

It was largely through CTC action that the right to cycle on bridleways and long-distance cross-country routes was incorporated into the new Countryside Act 40 years ago. The national headquarters of the club are now in Godalming, Surrey, and its patron is Her Majesty the Queen, following on from King George VI and King George V.

The Singing Kettle

Officially, the iron wheels remain the property of the CTC but their website (www.ctc.org.uk) expresses concern that they are always at risk of being lost through redevelopment and ignorance of their origins. The plaque on the Castle Hotel is on their list of survivors and has a secure home for the foreseeable future, though many of the visiting cyclists who used to prop their bikes around the side entrance on Castle Street are no longer in the saddle.

Another winged wheel, painted black and white, survives above Frankie and Jo's fish & chip shop on North Parade in Matlock Bath. It can be seen in the same position on an undated postcard from around 90 years ago, when there were dining and tearooms on the upper floor. The premises are believed to have later traded as the Winged Wheel café. ***

In times past, CTC cyclists visiting Matlock Bath were regulars of The Singing Kettle café on Green Lane, just off South Parade. Aidan Leheup from Stanley Fearn Cycles in Matlock has fond memories of The Singing Kettle. As a boy, some 40 years ago, he used to cycle from Nottingham to Matlock Bath with his father at weekends, when the scene was much as today except that it was bicycles and not motorbikes which thronged the Parade. In a former life the café was Ashby's motor engineers, which also sold, repaired and stored bicycles. A CTC winged wheel is in evidence at the centre of our photograph, kindly loaned by Ken Smith, while the cycle wheel on the roof advertises the business within. It is just possible to read the words 'Accommodation for Cyclists' above the door of the stone building. The Singing Kettle underwent several changes of use and has just reopened as a Chinese Restaurant/children's play room.

Never-ending pots of tea

Aidan Leheup explains that refreshment stops displaying the winged wheel were well patronised by CTC members, who in return received a small discount. Another of his favourite tearooms was at Over Haddon, where an elderly lady named Mrs Newton served 'massive teapots, so big they could have been brewed with a full packet of tea ... cyclists would be spread out all over the lawn on summer afternoons, drinking these never-ending pots of tea'.

Our own Sally Mosley remembers Mrs Newton as 'a lovely old lady — all the children used to buy their sweets from her. At weekends there would often be a little clutter of bikers taking advantage of mugs of tea and home-made cakes — she did a roaring trade ... Sadly she died about 20 years ago.'

Adds Sally: 'The old part where Mrs Newton sold teas out of a small window (there was only a wooden hut for indoor seating as I remember) was knocked down and replaced by a new extension but the tea room closed about five years ago when the last owners emigrated to Canada.'

But does anyone know the whereabouts of its CTC winged wheel — or for that matter, of any others in the Peak?

Julie Bunting

*** Post Script: *In the 1900s this was the Victoria Hotel & Restaurant run by the Dalton family, who also kept the Central Restaurant in M.Bath*