

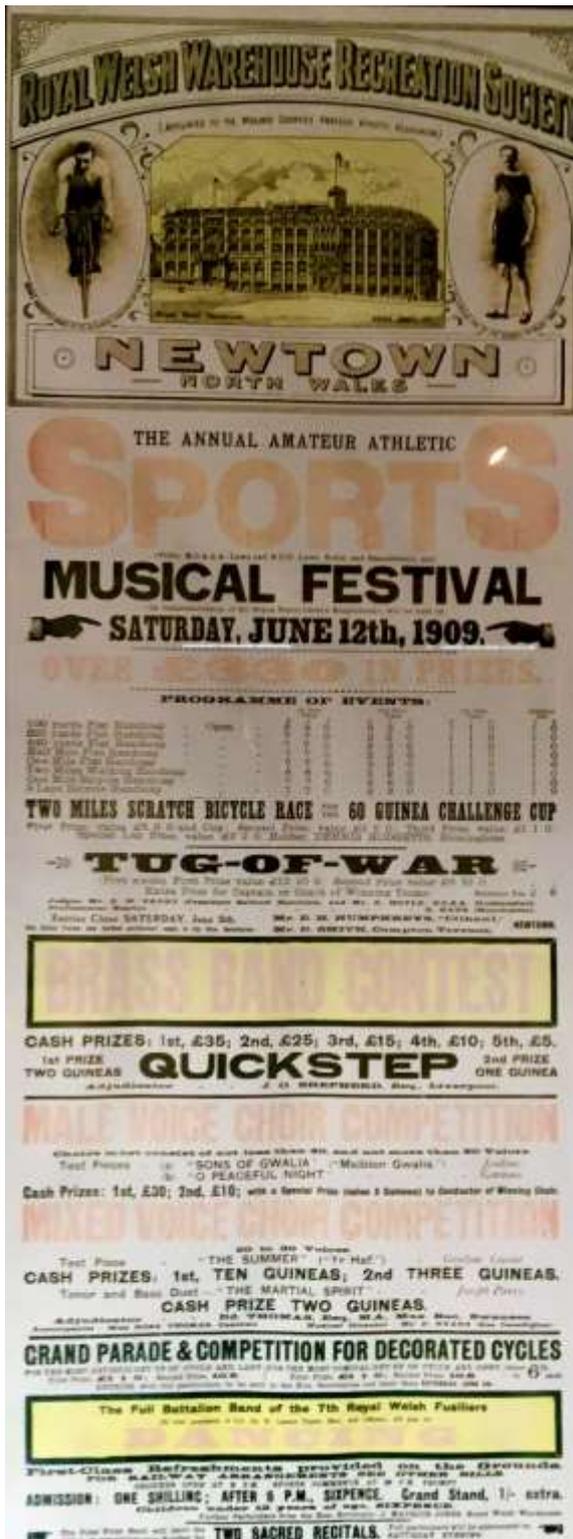
1903 Cycling Club

No lycra is visible, but there are plenty of middle-aged men in this 1903 photograph of members of Newtown Cycling Club. To be fair, the age range is quite broad with young boys as well as some very mature looking men, but no women!



The invention of the safety cycle (as its name suggests, a safer alternative to the Penny Farthing) in the 1870s started a revolution in travel for all classes of society. The bicycle brought a level of freedom never seen before. Indeed, its invention has been credited as the single greatest contribution to expanding the human gene pool. For the first time, ordinary people had the means of travelling respectable distances under their own power. Parish records across the country show a marked rise in inter-village marriages during the bicycle craze of the 1890s.

It wasn't long before cycling became organised, with cycle clubs established and cycle racing, including time trials, massed start road races and track racers becoming a major sporting activity. In Newtown, the roots of organised cycling is associated with the Royal Welsh Warehouse Sports Society, which had its own cycle club, established as early as 1891.



Our poster for the annual sports of 1909 is headed by representations of a racing cyclist in order to attract spectators and competitors alike. The one mile and three-lap races attracted a first prize of 7 guineas each - probably a good two weeks wages for an ordinary worker.

Local newspapers had their own cycling columns, the County Times featured notes by 'Pump Harder', whilst readers of 'The Montgomeryshire Express' could read the weekly musings of 'Direct Spoke'.

As can be seen from our photo, cycling was a dignified affair with riders wearing breeches, jacket and waistcoat, collar and tie and a variety of head wear - but no helmets! Club rides were semi military affairs, with the club captain leading the peloton and the Deputy Captain bringing up the rear. Order was maintained by the bugler: one blast to mount up, two to dismount: a succession of blasts to speed up and a prolonged blast to slow down. Club members were also prohibited from smoking whilst passing through

villages, and under no circumstances should they ride on pavements!