

## Old Fire Station Cafe, Malpas - 19th April 2017

Twenty-eight of us gathered outside the **Eureka** for departure at 10am, or shortly after. Although the ride was set to go to **Malpas**, It was clear that more than a few wanted to take a shorter option which **Brian** and **Sylvia** had offered the evening before, with lunch at **Holt**. **Richard** quickly assessed that dividing us into the appropriate groups alongside the **A540** would be like "herding cats". He therefore divided us into two equal groups and said we would meet at **Churton** and people could then say which ride they wanted to continue with and order lunch at the same time.

I found myself in the second group as back-marker and we followed the usual outgoing route via **Woodbank**, **Saughall** and the **Greenway**, then via **Lightfoot St** to the **Bike Factory**. I pointed out to our leader that **Richard's group** had not gone that way - he was unaware of this and was just following the instruction to meet at **Churton**. Undaunted we continued along **Sandy Lane** whilst the other group went along **Caldy Valley Rd**, some staying on the road and others going through "the jungle" ( don't ask me!).

Our group passed the **Rake and Pickel** and headed on down **Sandy Lane** a short way before a brief stop to change clothing. Here we noticed behind us a number of riders from the "front group" looking confused about which way to go. We watched with interest as they wheeled around before heading along the **B5130**. We passed through **Saighton** and **Bruera** at a quickening pace before joining the 'B' road at **Aldford**. I was by now with just **Jane**, **Ruth** and **Julian**. As we crossed the bridge the **Garmin** said left but **Ruth** and **Julian** suddenly turned right into **Aldford** (or maybe were going to visit the Duke?) - but I suggested to **Jane** that we continue along the B road where we might meet up with others of one group or another at **Churton**.



The twenty-eight of us who arrived at the **White Horse** in **Churton** were divided into fourteen who were willing to venture on to **Malpas** with **Richard** on the left and fourteen who wanted a shorter ride on the right. I wondered what these later fourteen would have done had **Brian J** not offered to lead this shorter ride the night before? Would they have done the longer ride, stayed in bed, or done something independent? I shall never know, I thought to myself as we headed at first east, then south to **Tilston**.

We climbed about 350ft to **Malpas**. An easy climb of about 2% said **Richard** as he passed, although the **Garmin** said 8%. I quickly fell to the back, wondering where my strength had gone but held on till we reached **Malpas**. Although ten had said at the start that they wanted lunch at the **Old Fire Station**, only eight of us appeared, including two who had not been there when numbers were taken. Where were the others we wondered, and where had the other six who were riding with us gone?

Then the food arrived and these concerns were forgotten! Large platefuls of sandwiches and bowls of steaming soup disappeared quickly before we moved on to sharing the delicious cake between us. Some of those not eating with us re-appeared for drinks. The proprietor looked a little put out that she did not get the expected number of £10 notes, and although she was very pleasant and courteous she couldn't resist commenting that some of the hot drink only people had enjoyed sharing the cakes!

We quickly brushed ourselves down and headed east through **No Mans Heath**, then north to **Beeston** maintaining a very high average speed (18mph was discussed). There arose a suggestion of a coffee stop and our leader said we could have one, but mustn't ask for two (as if!)

We stopped off at the newish coffee shop near the **Castle** where the coffee is excellent, although takes an age to arrive and to my mind expensive, considering it offers no shelter. It does however now have some excellent new decking which we took time to admire.

The attendant asked us where we had been. **Malpas** we said, which produced the response, "*Where's that?*" It always surprises me how little some people know of the area within a few miles of where they live. **Richard** was starting to look impatient again by now and he soon managed to get us back on our bikes and off through the lanes on the wonderful descent to the **Shady Oak bridge**. We could go a little slower he said now that we were back on home territory. We headed on through **Huxley** and **Tarvin**. **John F** took on the role of back-marker and ensured no one was left behind.

As I cycled along I mused on the reasons that different ones amongst us found different parts of the ride harder than others. **Stamina, strength, age, weight**, all played their part I decided. **Dunham on the Hill** came and went and then we arrived at **Thornton-le-Moors**. The lanes had been wonderful till now but of course we had to suffer the very unpleasant traffic along the **A5117** towards **Cheshire Oaks**. This is a road with verges easily wide enough for a good quality cycle path, but instead we have a narrow piece of cycle lane over part of the route. My personal view is that these painted narrow lanes actually make the road more dangerous for cyclists,

rather than less, since some motorists apparently think they can pass as close and fast as they like as long as they don't cross the white line.

Our leader had planned to take us briefly along the canal here, but half the group had smelt home and were racing along in front of him so they neither heard or saw us as we turned left off the main road onto the canal and then out past the **Harley Davidson Garage**. We met up with most of those who had gone straight on here. I spotted two other riders emerge from the **A5117** onto the roundabout and after some waving they rejoined us too. I always wonder at the thought process which has a cycle path crossing the motorway slip-roads here with no safety measures. The traffic exit is light controlled, but cyclists are given no indication of the signals either to themselves or the motorway traffic.

Soon we were safely past and onto the cycle track alongside the **A494**. This is a good facility for cyclists although its getting badly damaged by tree roots, and its a shame the road crossings are so frequent and difficult. I can easily see why many regular riders on this road still ride the road rather than the cycle path and feel it is both faster and safer. People started to diverge on their way home now and I left the group at the **Capenhurst** turn. I felt fresher now than earlier and even did a few extra miles on the way home after an excellent day out. Another eighty miles to add to this year's tally

**Chris Smith**



**The Cross at Malpas**