

The Early History of the Royal Albert Cycling Club



The Inauguration of the Royal Albert Cycling Club in 1901

The recent revelation that the Club was first formed in 1901 was contrary to previous beliefs and this history aims to explain both the true position and why the previous misunderstandings arose, as well as highlighting early club activities. It is felt necessary to provide an explanation as to why it was previously thought that the start date was much earlier, and to make known the sources that were central to the investigation from which the year 1901 emerged.

The Club was established for the first time in 1901, as confirmed by evidence produced from Dennis White's exhaustive research. The main investigative work began in 2012, at which time a report was submitted to the Club Committee, and again in 2019, by which time more conclusive evidence had come to light.

The Scottish Referee, dated Wednesday, 3rd May 1901, which clearly states, and proves without a shadow of doubt, that RACC was first formed in late April/early May of 1901:

"Another club has been formed in Larkhall. It is the Royal Albert C.C., and the office bearers are as follows: - President, Thos. Boyes; vice-president, R Cockburn; honorary secretary, W Crow; 58 Brandon Street, Hamilton; treasurer, R Clarke; captain, L Finlayson; vice-captain, T M'Ewan; members of committee – Messrs W Anderson, A Archibald, A Gold and W Thomson.

The club will hold runs twice weekly, on Saturday afternoon and Wednesday evening, leaving Charing Cross at half-past three and half-past six respectively. It is intended to promote a race for the championship of the club, and also one or two handicaps during the season. The run tomorrow is to Wishaw."

The Scottish Referee had been publishing Club Runs on the road for many years and, on 10th May 1901, for the very first time, the list included the Royal Albert Cycling Club. In the same edition it reported, 'On Tuesday evening a general meeting of the members of Larkhall Temperance Cycling Club was held at Thomson's Hall, Charing Cross (Larkhall). A meeting of the Royal Albert Cycling Club was held in the same place later in the evening.'

The Scottish Referee's Runs list included the Royal Albert's run from Charing Cross to Biggar on 31st May 1901, and to Tinto on 21st June.

The Hamilton Herald and Lanarkshire Weekly News reported on 24th January 1902, that the Royal Albert Cycling Club's dance was held in the Public Hall.

There was a gap from 1902, at the end of the Boer War, till 1906.

RACC's Revival in 1906 – enter Jock Miller

On 15th August 1906, the Hamilton Herald & Lanarkshire Weekly News reported the following, 'For a number of years now, we have had no cycling club, but a number of enthusiasts have seen to that matter, and a revival of the old "R.A.C.C." has been accomplished. Their opening run takes place on Thursday evening, starting at Charing Cross at 8.30, the destination being Lesmahagow. Cyclists who wish to take part in the run will be heartily welcomed. The club intends to have a sports meeting some Wednesday evening shortly, and some challenges that have long been spoken of will be run off.'

On 22nd August 1906, the same paper reported that the newly-formed (revived) cycling club had their opening run to Lesmahagow. Here they had a jolly half-hour with songs, readings etc. Meet tomorrow (Thursday) at Charing Cross, destination Kirkfieldbank.'

On 25th August, the same paper reported that 'good time was made to Kirkfieldbank, although the tandem pacers were slower than usual. A pleasant hour was spent, the chief item being Miller's rendering of the immortal "Tam o' Shanter". Home was reached thoroughly dry, "Father" (Jock Miller), on the tandem, put in some hard work.'

Other articles concerning the club runs appeared in August and October. On 11th May 1907, the same paper reported that a meeting took place in Menzies Hall, with Mr John Miller in the chair. The following were elected office bearers – President – John Miller; Vice president – Robert Docherty; Secy – John McCulloch; Treasurer – John Robb; Captain – Angus Niven, Vice-Captain – Frank Colvin; Committee – G Chisholm, J Meikle, J Cameron, P Greenfield and A Williamson. Auditors – Messrs D Harper and W Frame. A set of rules was afterwards drawn up, and the opening run for the season for today (Sat), Darvel being the destination. The week-night run will take place on Wednesday to Kirkfieldbank. The framing of some of the rules called forth considerable discussion.'

On 15th May 1907, the paper reported that the opening run to Darvel took place. The captain appointed J Meikle to take the lead with himself, and J Miller to bring up the rear and keep an eye on the less experienced riders, so as not to allow them to exceed their pace.

On 26th October 1907, the same paper reported that 'the Royal Albert Cycling club had promoted a fancy dress parade with the assistance of the Ambulance Waggon committee. The cyclists were marshalled in pairs by J Miller of the cycle club, and headed by the Silver Band, proceeded to take up their position in Caledonian Road with the rest of the procession. The pipe band supplied the music for the procession and Jock Miller, dressed as Rob Roy, collected the largest amount - £1:17:1d.'

In June 1908, an AGM was held in Menzies Hall and Mr John Miller presided. The Office bearers for the ensuing year were elected as follows: President – Robert Dewar; Vice president – Frank Marshall; Treasurer – John Reid, Hareleeshill; Secy – J Miller, Hillside, Machan; Captain – Angus Niven; Vice Captain – James Forsyth; with William Duncan, John

Niven and George Reid as members of the committee. The question of renting the Raploch Track was discussed and it was agreed to accept the track conditionally.

On Monday 31st May 1909 an AGM was held and the Office bearers were elected as follows: President – Joseph Brown; Vice president – David Brown; Captain – Robert Dewar; sub-captain – John Robertson; Whip – John Miller, Asst Whip – John Hutchison, Secy – John Miller, London Street, Larkhall; Treasurer – Robert Dick, Montgomery Street, Larkhall, with a large working committee. All the officials changed except John Miller and Robert Dewar.

A small weekly sub was fixed. Agreed that runs be held on Weds, Sats and Suns and committee set up to draw up fixture card. Lesmahagow tonight (Wed), Perth at the weekend, starting on Saturday midnight, and returning on Sunday. Other impromptu runs will be to Stirling, Kilmarnock, Peebles, Dumfries. Portobello, Melrose, Trossachs and Carlisle are sure to find a place on the fixture card for weekends. Lanark, Lesmahagow, Strathaven, Rouken Glen and many other places will be selected for afternoon runs.

On 11th June 1909, the Scottish Referee reported that Jock Miller and 11 other RACC members cycled to Perth and back. Miller was on a tandem and there was a problem with one of the wooden wheels (probably bamboo). It was an epic ride and the report on this was posted on the club's facebook page on 17/11/18. It made fascinating reading.

On 28th February 1910, the Scottish Referee reported that, 'At the annual general meeting of Royal Albert CC, Larkhall, the officials for 1910 were appointed – President – Mr Joseph Brown; vice-president - Mr John Miller; captain – Mr Robert Dewar; vice-captain – Mr Angus Niven; whip – Mr J ?; secretary – Mr Frank Marshall, Montgomery Street; treasurer – Mr Robert Dick.'

On 14th October, 1910, the Linlithgowshire Gazette reported on RACC's first open 50 mile TT – 'James D Nathaniel, Millbank, Uphall, distinguished himself on Saturday last by winning the fifty mile road cycling race promoted by the Royal Albert Cycling Club, Larkhall. The race took place on the Glasgow and Carlisle Road, and ten runners (cyclists) took part. Mr Nathaniel did the fastest time, covering the distance in 2 hours 39 minutes 34 seconds; George Herd, Vulcan Club, Edinburgh, who came next, taking 2 hours 45 minutes 35 seconds.'

On 12th May 1911, the Scottish Referee reported, 'The Royal Albert CC will assist the football club of the same name to run a sports meeting at "Larkie" on June 10th. The wheel events will be half-mile cycle, handicap (confined), quarter, one mile, and two miles open handicaps.'

Like most, if not all, other clubs, activities stopped during WW1 and for some time afterwards.

According to an undated newspaper article passed down from Jack Campbell to his son, John, the club opened a new club room in Church Street. The opening gathering included the President, Dr John Parker, Jock Miller and Jack Campbell's father, John B Campbell. As it is known that J B Campbell restarted the club in 1926, and that Jock Miller moved away to Dagenham in 1935, the article was probably published between those years. The vice president, Jock Miller, presented Dr Parker with a club badge and gave a speech about the old

days of the club. He said that, by 1909, the Royal Albert Cycling Club was going strong, and when the first Scottish Open Un-paced Road Race was held that year, Larkhall had the winner of the fastest time, himself securing that honour. In 1911 the club members had successes in Ireland, and had representatives the following year in the Stockholm Olympic Games. In 1912, he tried the 151 miles Glasgow to Dumfries and back record, and reduced the time from 9 hours 37 minutes to 8 hours 55 minutes – a record which held good from that time, despite improvements in roads and machine technique, until last year. Concluding, Mr Miller made reference to the success of the Secretary, Mr J B Campbell, Mr R Brown, Mr J Mcintyre, Mr J Hawthorn, and other club members during recent years.

So, who was John (Jock) Miller?

According to the 1911 census, Jock Miller was born in 1881 in the US and was a ‘British citizen by parentage’. He and his wife and daughter were then living at 72 Union Street, Larkhall.

One of the club’s most famous members, he was known as ‘Jock Miller of Larkhall’, and appears to have been quite a character. He was a cycle dealer who had a shop in Union Street for many years from about 1905 till the 1930s. He accompanied G A Olley part of the way in his successful attempts to break the Land’s End to John O’ Groats in 1904 and 1908, and was out for him on the two attempts made in 1907. He won the Irish cycling Race Championship on handicap but lost on time by 1 second in 1912.

Representing Scotland, he won a medallion of merit in the Stockholm Olympic Games Road Race in 1912, when he finished 35th in the 196 mile time trial.

In 1935, Jock moved to Dagenham and became famous for his collection of 70 bicycles, including his own Penny Farthing, or Ordinary as they were called at the time. He sold these when he retired in 1955, aged 73. Sadly, he died in 1957, in Romford.



Jock Miller on one of G A Olley’s spares for one of the Land’s End to John O’ Groats successful record attempts

The Campbell 'Dynasty'

The Royal Albert Cycling Club was not active from 1914 with the First World War and so many young men joining up. Mr John B Campbell restarted the club again in 1926 and was for over 40 year the club secretary and treasurer. In 1968 the trustees of the Olympic Games Committee awarded John an Olympic Torch Replica for services 'as a backroom boy of his club, the Royal Albert Cycling Club', as one newspaper described it at the time. John was also responsible for keeping the sport of cycle polo alive and the club won many polo tournaments, for example, against the team from Johnstone Wheelers.

John also won many other awards and built up the club to a very fine standard. His sons, Jack, Charlie and Richard were all club members. Jack, who ran a well-known cycle Shop in Wellgate Street, Larkhall, later took over the running of the club for many years, organising mid-week time trials and club Sunday cycle outings. Sadly, they too have passed away but the Royal Albert Cycling Club's future is still bright with over 100 members, as well as a junior club, namely the Clydesdale Colts, with over 150 members.

The Colts started in 2012, when Dennis White introduced British Cycling's Go Ride Scheme to the club, and created the name, Clydesdale Colts. Dennis took the idea forward with John Campbell and worked with John Pardo on achieving Sportsmark Accreditation. Celia Tennant and Alan Kain immediately took on the roles of coaches and, with the help of many parents and others over the years, they have been responsible for very successfully building up a team of over 20 coaches and a fine club of young, skilful cyclists. The age range covers those on balance bikes to older children who have graced hundreds of podium places all over the country, both on and off road.

Returning to John B Campbell, his grandsons are all keen cyclists! The youngest, David gold Campbell, races and trains in Yorkshire. The oldest grandson, Stuart B Campbell, is a keen mountain biker and a very experienced mountain climber having climbed above Everest base camp! Next is Douglas Campbell, his racing days now past, is still riding for general fitness. John Campbell, as stated above, continues to play a major role in the Club, as a dedicated committee member and originator and organiser of the Tuesday Night 'JCs Chain Gang' in the summer months.

In May 2016, John also set up and started a Club road race named 'The Jack Campbell Memorial Road Race', in memory of his late dad, Jack Campbell. John took part in the race in 2017. This is now a successful annual event over the hilly roads round Poniel, Red Moss, Abington, Wiston and Rigside. As a young man, Jack loved training over the road race course down near Leadhills in South Lanarkshire among quiet roads and beautiful scenery, and did so well into his 70s.

The 'Fathers' of the Club

Jock Miller (from 1906) and John B Campbell (from 1926) were the first two 'fathers' of the club, the third being Jack Campbell, and the fourth is his son, John, who has been the glue that's held the club together over the last number of years. That's three generations of the Campbell family covering almost 100 years and what an amazing record that is!



Jock Miller at the back and John B Campbell on the right



John B Campbell on his Polo Bike



John B Campbell and Jack Campbell, his son



'Big Jack' Campbell's 1st prize on the track



'Big Jack' racing on the road



Track team, Jack 2nd from left



John Campbell, 2nd from right, finished 3rd out of 80 riders in this Mid Scotland Road Race



Classic shot of John Campbell during a sub-55 minute 25 mile TT at Dundee

Explaining the Past

For many years, it was understood that the Club was established in the 19th century, first of all it was thought to be in 1872, then 1887 took hold, and the years 1872 and/or 1887 were proudly proclaimed, at various times, on the club kit and website and facebook pages. A claim that the club was ‘one of the oldest in the country’ was also made on the back of this.

Although some members were disappointed to hear that the club was not as old as they had been led to believe, it should be remembered that 119 years since it was first formed is still impressive by any standards!

It is important to understand why these earlier dates became accepted over decades. The year 1872 was adopted due to an old medal of that year, which carried the legend Royal Albert CC and the year 1872. It had been handed to John Watt by an old man in Kirkmuirhill in the early 1980s. He gave it to John because he often saw the club riders passing, and John gave it to Jack Campbell. Unfortunately, there was no evidence that our club actually existed at that time and the name, ‘Royal Albert CC’ on the medal could have related to a cricket or curling club, for example. There was a Royal Albert Cricket Club in Greenock in 1868, so this medal may well have related to it.

When Dennis White’s initial research took place in 2012, Jack Campbell had told him that he believed the club started in 1887, but again no evidence for this could be found. According to a celebratory card held by a club member, John Robertson, the club had even celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1937, based on this belief.

On 16th October 1896, The Scottish Referee listed the addresses of the cycling club secretaries and, of course, the Royal Albert Cycling Club was not included as it did not exist at that time.

Then the year 1898 raised its head when a medal of that year had come to light during Dennis’s research in 2012, bearing the name ‘The Royal Albert Cycling Club’ and the winner’s name, which was ‘Alfred Summers’.

In 2012, the picture that Dennis presented to the club Committee was that the club may have started in 1898, based on that medal, but further research would be needed. When the in-depth research resumed in 2019, evidence ruled out the 1898 medal as it was proven that this medal, and the winner’s name, related to a club of the same name in Ilford, Essex (‘Sporting Life 12th September 1898).

Incidentally, there was an Albert Cycling Club in Dundee and Glasgow.

So, how could the year 1887, as a start date, have come about?

No one now knows the specific answer to that question, but despite the fact that no comprehensive club records survive, the background to it is actually quite simple. To understand this, we will need to look at another Larkhall club - the Royal Albert Football

Club. The Football Club's website states that it was formed in 1878. Its cinder cycle track around the pitch was famous across Scotland for its sports days, athletics and track cycling.

Thousands of people attended the sports days and racing events at the track (where betting was rife!), and the Royal Albert Football Club was the first in Scotland, outside Glasgow, to provide a cycle track, back in the days of the Penny Farthing. Almost all football grounds had a cycle track at that time and, indeed, some still had one until relatively recent times.

Therefore, the word 'cycling' in the Larkhall area became synonymous, at various times, with Royal Albert Football Club, Royal Albert Athletic Club and Albert Football & Athletic Club, as they all organised, sponsored and took part in cycle events on the track at Larkhall.

Therefore, the identity of the Royal Albert Cycling Club (RACC) was later inadvertently caught up in a profusion of 'Royal Alberts' connected to the cycle track.

This is especially the case given that the regular and numerous reports and results of cycle race events at the Raploch track presented in newspaper and magazine articles in the 1880s/90s were usually flagged up as 'Royal Albert', but of course referred to the Football or Athletic clubs. It is not surprising then, when RACC club members looked back at this picture in later years, that speculation and misunderstanding created a 19th century start date for the club.

In addition, it would not be pertinent to say that RACC existed prior to 1901 just because cycling took place on the Royal Albert Football Club's track. RACC was a completely new and separate road cycling club from its inception in 1901, and its primary aim was to organise road time trials and club runs on the road.

Therefore, it is logical, and true, to say that the club's '50th celebration' that took place in 1937, as evidenced by a 'celebratory' card of that date shown to Dennis White by John Robertson in 2012, was organised in error due to the historical confusion referred to above.

The Local Cycling Club Scene in the 1880s/90s

Larkhall Cycling Club, Motherwell Cycling Club, Wishaw Cycling Club, Hamilton Cycling Club and Clydesdale Cycling Club were all up and running in the 1880s. A report in the Glasgow Herald on 4th May 1885 states that 44 clubs (including some of the above), involving 420 members, marshalled at a 'meet' in Woodside Crescent, Glasgow. There was a Stonehouse Cycling Club in the 1890s, and a Lesmahagow Cycling Club in 1899.

Although starting a few years later, the Royal Albert Cycling Club is now older than any of these clubs were at the time of their demise and, crucially, is still going strong!

Cycling connections

It is of interest to note that Dr John Parker, the club's President mentioned above, founded the Larkhall Medical Practice in the 1940's, which Practice later included Dr Gregor Smith, who

was appointed as Scotland's Chief Medical Officer during the Coronavirus pandemic in April 2020. Interestingly enough, Dr Smith is also a cyclist...

The next part of the story

The wider history of the club since these earlier days is still to be written up and it is to be hoped that this can be done soon. This is important both for posterity and to ensure that the history of RACC does not once more slide into confusion at best, or oblivion at worst.

Here's to the next 100 years of the Royal Albert Cycling Club and Clydesdale Colts, with many dedicated club cyclists and strong committee members and enthusiastic club members.

The future is looking good for this great club.

John Campbell Junior
Dennis White
April 2020

Sources

The sources researched, both in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, and online (British Newspaper Archives) were:

Scottish Referee, The Scotsman, The Glasgow Herald, Motherwell Times, The Scottish Cyclist, Sporting Life, Hamilton Herald & Lanarkshire Weekly News, Greenock Telegraph & Clyde Shipping Gazette and Linlithgowshire Gazette.

During the 1880s and 1890s, The Scottish Referee in particular, carried a profusion of results and articles about cycling events on the Royal Albert Football Club's track. None of them in reality referred to the Royal Albert Cycling Club, as it had not yet been born.

Between 1901 and 1911, however, there were regular press articles in four of the above newspapers specifically referring to the Royal Albert Cycling Club.

Photos - from John Campbell's collection.