

History of the Hillsborough & District MCC

Hillsborough & District Motor Cycle Club began life in the Pigeon Hall Ballynahinch Street, Hillsborough in 1947 when six local business men and the school teacher decided to re-start the sport a certain Mr Hitler had intervened in for a few years.

Northern Ireland has a long list of great names in the history in Motor Cycle Sport, quite a few of them coming from the Hillsborough area, so it seemed the only reasonable thing for these men to do. The first men were Bob McLorn, Bob Maxwell, Sidney McCreedy the first Secretary, John White, Jim Thompson, Jack Greer and Joe Gibson.

The membership grew as the sport grew after the war, and many Hillsborough Club members were to become famous in those early days. Billy Jeffers a local baker was to win 2 Irish Grass track Championships riding 500 cc Gold Star BSA's. A few years later wee Jim Moffett won consecutive Irish Grass track Championships on Royal Enfield Bullets with JAP engines. JAP engines running on "dope" – earlier bikers know what that is. There were many more over the years, like Cecil McCullough and Josh Toombs who were all front runners They raced on Grass Tracks, rode in Trials and when the Road Racing season started the tyres were changed to road tyres. Cecil McCullough broke the lap record at the last ever Bangor Short Circuit when he beat Artie Bell and he was no slow coach It was a bit different then their transport was Jack Greer's coal lorry with a couple of screw cap 2 gallon drums of petrol and a drum of water to wash in. Not quite the massive transporters and awnings of today and no sponsors so every penny went into the bikes

Over the years the Club grew in numbers and popularity within the motor bike fraternity. Naturally the riders changed men like Adrian Craig, Graham Young, Adrian Coates and sidecar men like Wallace Coates, Scobie Killough, and Lowry Burton to name just a few were all Club members, and as this is being written six young solo riders are making their way on the short circuit scene.

The names have changed but the scene hasn't. Adrian Craig has just now moved to the position of Clerk of the Course for The Sunflower Trophy. There's no escape!

Thinking back I suppose we should have found the means to have our own meeting place but like many Clubs we didn't so when a meeting place became unavailable we moved but we never moved the sport Everything went back to the riders and the sport The Pigeon Hall in Hillsborough was no longer available so we moved to Sam Brown's pub in Hillsborough (now famous as the Plough bar and Restaurant) then to the Beattie Memorial Hall in Lisburn where we stayed for many years, then on to the Distillery Football stadium at Ballyskeagh, then Davy Williamson, one of those early members, saved the day with a large portacabin. Now we meet in Ashvale Farm and Coffee Shop owned by our treasurer Edward Herron and his Family. Doesn't that name have a familiar ring to it

We didn't only run races we had a lighter side too. During the long winter months we would meet with The Temple and North Armagh Clubs for a bit of "craic" sometimes in the Beattie Hall and sometimes in the Temple Golf Club then owned by Sam McBride. Teams were chosen for the question and answers quiz, all about bike racing. Alan Farr was our most knowledgeable although so keen to show his knowledge would say the answers out loud and threw the game away. The grub was good too, sandwiches and buns enough to feed the five thousand. In our many years meeting in the Beattie Memorial Hall we had a regular attendance of 20 plus and met every Tuesday night in the year, except for holidays, as one of the guys said "there's nothing like this on T.V." (or words to that effect) The "craic" was good and still is 70 years on.

As the Club grew so did our venture into more events. We held on to the Grass Tracks. The Irish Championship Iveagh Cup Trial was run at the Dromara Hills. The first sponsored and first ever Live Televised Motor Cycle event in Ireland was the W.D & H.O Wills Trophy Scramble or Moto Cross run at Crossan just outside Lisburn. Davy wood was second in charge (at W.D. Wills then) remember him?

The Club was improving all the time from that early beginning until 1970's when we took the plunge into Short Circuits at the old Maghaberry Airfield. Harris Healey helped with good advice as we were a bit raw to short circuit racing.

Maghaberry was no longer available to us so we headed off to St Angelo on another first. The members took caravans up there stayed from Friday until Sunday night, We begged and borrowed posts and a low loader lorry from the company across the road. The perimeter circuit was in holes in places so we mixed quick drying cement and did our own re surfacing. Another first I suppose? St Angelo was a fair bit away and the roads were not like they are to-day so after a couple of years there we managed to get to Aghadowey where we stayed for a number of years and took in the Irish Short Circuit Championship the Club growing in stature all the time

The Club Trophy cabinet had grown with Trophies presented by retiring members. The Hillsborough Annual Dinner and Prize Giving became almost as famous, or infamous some might say, as the events we ran. We still have those Trophies mostly used now for our major event, The Sunflower Trophy

All this organisation meant getting more and more involved in the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland and in particular the Ulster Centre. We've had two Chairmen (and Presidents of the Centre now Vice Presidents). One of those, Denis Wilson and his father, Malcolm, are the only father and son to become Chairman and President in the history of the sport in Ireland. We are rather proud of that. Malcolm was one of the great pioneers of Motor Cycle Sport in Ulster especially in his long association with the Ulster Grand Prix.

On a lighter note, and yet as it turned out, one of the Club's greatest achievements was to make friends with Jim Finlay. Organising top class events like the Irish and Ulster

Championship short circuits had a cost that seemed to increase year by year. There was always the question of sponsorship. We got lucky, one of the great characters in the Club at that time was Billy McReynolds. Billy worked for Jim Finlay (Sunflower Foods) and convinced, or maybe blackmailed Jim, into sponsoring our event so in 1977 the Sunflower Trophy was born at Aghadowey and has continued and flourished from Aghadowey to Kirkistown and now the wonderfully prepared Bishops court Circuit.

Jim's financial support and sound advice has enabled us to bring the best short circuit racers in the U.K. (maybe in the World) to the Sunflower Trophy. They are legion and set out proudly on the front of the programme. A true stalwart of Hillsborough Club helping us through thick and thin for 40 years.

But it doesn't end there. Many fans will know that Jim was involved with some of the great riders like Tom Herron, Jackie Hughes, Graham Young and of his long friendship with Hector Neill. There's a history there all of its own that needs to be researched and written up, so come on Jim!

There are many people who make our sport happen week in and week out. People like the Marshals, Flag Marshals, Scrutineers, Timekeepers, First Aid, Doctors, Circuit Owners and many more that we cannot do without. We respect and thank all those unsung heroes for the enormous help year in year out

The Hillsborough Club therefore isn't only about running Motor Cycle Races, it's also about the people past and present. Many people, many not members of the Club, who have given their time (and money) to keep the sport alive. Yes, we disagree sometimes, but the fun in the Club is good. The characters have changed from time to time but the new characters and the spirit that started Hillsborough Club in 1947 is alive and well 70 years on.