



# Wheelrights

the Swansea Bay cycle campaign group



Newsletter No. 68 Summer 2024

[www.wheelrights.org.uk](http://www.wheelrights.org.uk)

## Cycling should be simple.



This photo was taken a few years ago (15 actually) in the Netherlands. The two ladies in high vis. jackets are followed by a group of children. I took this to be a school party on an outing. It illustrates how in that country cycling is simple: no special clothing; nor, it appears, are helmets necessary.

The measures underway here to make it easier and safer for kids to walk and cycle to school are steps in the right direction, as is also the new 20 mph default. So it is good to include another article about a school successfully promoting active travel. (the last was in issue 58 which featured Penyrheol Primary.)

The articles on cycle helmets in this issue and the last give the pros and cons but both make it clear that the wearing of one is up to the individual. What is important is that there is no legal requirement to wear one. While it may be too much to emulate the Dutch we can try and get the message across that cycling to work and for other utility purposes should be the norm and does not require special clothing – just a bike. As John Sayce notes in his article (p. 4) it is the 'critical mass' of people who cycle in the Netherlands which correlates with their good cycling safety record. That is what we need here.

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### Copy deadline

Material for the next issue should be sent to David Naylor by mid August.  
Email: [david@davidjnaylor.plus.com](mailto:david@davidjnaylor.plus.com)

### This issue

We kick off with an article about active travel in *Maes Derw* school, Cockett.

On p.3 we introduce Ken Skates, the new Minister whose remit includes cycling; and on p.4 Stephen Williams, our new AT Officer. Also on p.4, our Chair responds to my article on cycle helmets in the last issue.

Then our President reminisces on the North Gower paths. He follows this with an obituary of Barry Norris. Finally: my 90<sup>th</sup> birthday is celebrated.

**David Naylor**

**Chairman:** John Sayce

**Secretary:** Dareyoush Rassi

**Treasurer:** Chris Walsh

**Webmaster & Newsletter:** David Naylor

For their contact details visit:

[www.wheelrights.org.uk/aboutus](http://www.wheelrights.org.uk/aboutus)

## An Educator's perspective

I feel that the models run in cities in the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries show that cities can be unlocked from cars with increased levels of active travel. A lot of areas in the UK are far behind their European cousins. I think most people have experience of riding bikes as children but that tends to decrease after people learn to drive a car. I think a lot of people thinking about commuting by bike have genuine concerns about cycling on the road and their personal safety. Infrastructure is gradually improving but some of it is of a poor standard. Reducing speeds of motorised traffic will help to make roads safer for children to use as will the provision of quality cycling infrastructure.

We're equipping children with bike handling skills and providing them with a safe space to learn the basics of cycling. Children are becoming more sedentary with the advent of digital devices, and obesity levels in Wales are on the increase. Giving children the opportunity to become confident in their ability is key to them advancing their skills so that they can ride safely on shared pathways or even roads. We have been providing pupils with a repair service and, with the support of Sustrans, we've run Dr Bike sessions to give children the necessary skills to be able to undertake minor tweaks and fixes to their own bikes and scooters. We have found that some children are keen to ride but neither they, nor their parents know how to perform simple repairs, so by enabling pupils with these skills, we have removed a potential barrier to children engaging in cycling activities. Our hope is that by giving children the necessary skills, they are more likely to cycle both for recreation as well as a means of transport. Staff at the school have also embraced cycling with increased numbers regularly cycling to and from school. The council operates the Cycle to work scheme from which staff have benefited



Cycling to school, it seems,  
was not enough for Jayden!

...

These active travelling children had the following to say:

"Cycling is fun. I like it when I go fast. It is good for the environment as it doesn't take fuel".

Harry aged 9

"When I learnt to ride a bike at school I said to myself: 'I can actually do this!' Now I love cycling every day."

Riley aged 8.

"When I cycle fast I feel happy".

Jayden aged 9

**Martin Thomas**  
Maes Derw school  
Outdoor Education Co-ordinator

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## Ken Skates

Following the recent reshuffle within the Senedd, members of *Wheelrights* may be curious about the new leadership's stance on active travel, especially with Lee Waters, a prominent supporter of cycling, moving on. Taking up the mantle is Ken Skates, now appointed as the minister responsible for transport in Wales, succeeding his prior position as Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport from 2016 to 2021.

In 2008, he was elected a community councillor. Ken's stated policy interests include manufacturing, mental health, sport and leisure, eliminating poverty and political economy. Skates was appointed to the Welsh Government as Deputy Minister for Skills and Technology in 2011. He was then appointed Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism in 2014. From May 2016 to December 2018 he was the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills, and was the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales until he stood down in May 2021. Though formally known as Welsh Ministers and Deputy Welsh Ministers, those serving in the Welsh Government often go by the titles of "Cabinet Secretaries" and "Ministers" respectively.

In light of his reappointment to the transport brief, *Wheelrights* members looked into Ken Skates' background regarding his involvement in active travel:

- During his tenure as the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport, Skates allocated the initial £10.36 million to local authorities across Wales to support active travel schemes. This allocation was part of a larger £60 million fund earmarked for advancing active travel initiatives outlined in The Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan Mid-Point Review 2018.
- Skates has disclosed interests in running and hiking, but cycling does not prominently feature among them. He is not affiliated with any walking or cycling organisations.
- A media article last autumn saw him express criticism of the Welsh government's decision to halt road construction, particularly in relation to his local area of NE Wales.

As Ken Skates steps into his new role, members of *Wheelrights* will be interested to see how his leadership will influence the advancement of active travel and cycling initiatives across Wales.

**John Britton**

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## Cycle Helmets: the case for.

[Ed: The article on cycle helmets in the last issue summarised Cycling UK's position. Its key point was that helmet wearing should not be compulsory, noting a lack of evidence that they were effective in countries where they were compulsory. While giving reasons for not wearing helmets it did not give reasons for wearing one. This note by John Sayce looks at the other side of the coin.]

The latest research that I could find on the effects of bicycle helmets on serious head injury and other injuries among crash involved cyclists is dated 2017. 55 studies from 1989 to 2017 were included in a meta-analysis. The use of bicycle helmets was found to reduce head injuries by 48%, serious head injuries by 60%, traumatic brain injuries by 53%, face injuries by 23%, and the total number of killed or seriously injured cyclists by 34%. Bicycle helmets were not found to have any statistically significant effect on [cervical spine injury](#).

Of interest was the finding that bicycle helmet effects are no different between adult cyclists and children. It is also likely that bicycle helmets have larger effects among drunk cyclists than among sober cyclists, and larger effects in single bicycle crashes than in collisions with motor vehicles.

In summary, the results suggest that wearing a helmet while cycling is highly recommendable, especially in situations with an increased risk of single bicycle crashes, such as on slippery or icy roads

In addition to the study above, we know that there are higher rates of collisions and injuries in areas with low cycling rates. The Netherlands for example has very low injury rates alongside high cycling numbers. It seems that once there is a critical mass of cyclists, motorists start driving with more caution, as I have personally seen in Oxford. Unfortunately, Swansea has some of the lowest cycling usage among major cities in the UK and also some of the scariest roads for cycling on e.g. Carmarthen Rd!.

So whether to wear a helmet in the U.K. is down to your personal choice! [Ed: This is also Cycling UK's position.]

**John Sayce**

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## Stephen Williams

This will welcome Stephen who has taken over as Active Travel officer from Jack Palmer.

Stephen previously worked as a civil servant dealing with business throughout the UK. He is from Swansea, although has spent time working in Australia and the U.S.

He decided on a change of career and to move into Active Travel, having seen how this will become a vital part in creating successful, vibrant and healthy communities.

He completed a master's degree in urban planning at the University of the West of England in 2023. His research dissertation focussed on exploring the gender gap in the use of E-Scooter micro-mobility schemes.

Swansea Council – supported by the Welsh Government & Transport for Wales – have lots of schemes and initiatives in the pipeline, and he looks forward to working with us to make Swansea a healthier, happier, and more active city!

## North Gower Trail: Memories

Those were the days my friend!

While working in West Wales with a small Sustrans team, comprising a foreman and a few machine drivers, I worked on a New Deal trainee initiative on many schemes, usually constructed on former railway lines. This effort was often complemented by a volunteer workforce, mainly local supporters, on a weekly or fortnightly basis or just on weekends.

I had an opportunity to look into a North Gower Trail on the former railway that ran from Gowerton to Llanmorlais, built mainly for transporting coal from the mines along the way.

That was around twenty years ago! We had the total support of the County Council, Welsh Assembly and many other groups, in particular the Crofty, Llanmorlais and Penclawdd (CLP) association and many volunteers. Money was tight and we had to use a variety of small funding sources, making it a very low cost operation.

There began a process of speaking to landowners, and where possible agreeing purchase or leases, getting planning permission and raising funds for construction.

An incremental approach, bit by bit as land was obtained, resulted in a gradual section by section build. The former railway provided the original engineered route, and following site clearance and drainage work a sledge (Shown in the photo. It was developed by Sustrans for such work..) produced the stone sub base to line and level. It was basically a metal box towed by a dumper that tipped the stone into it and dragged it along the formation. Contractors subsequently laid the tarmac surface.



### The Crofty to Llanmorlais section

As well as considerable site clearance and the pavement construction by sledge there was significant drainage work. Contractors provided the blacktop surfacing afterwards.



The drainage work mainly involved a stone French drain alongside the path, manholes and crossings. There was an element of fencing, recovery of the boundaries “borrowed” and other interesting works including, the reburial of pet remains. Mostly we set up camp at the Plant Centre where we had enormous support from the owners, and the Crofty Inn figured large in our evening entertainment.

We also had praise from the BHS for putting a stone path alongside the tarmac for horses.



### **Berthllwyd Section (now Rake and Riddle)**

This was built in several parts, requiring a bridge over the stream to connect with the section built in the 1980's by the Council. It continued towards Half Way House as far as the acquired section of land. Building on the earlier BHS support at Llanmorlais we put a path alongside the tarmac again but this time using local cockleshells which provided a softer surface for horses (and walkers). In time this grassed over, and horse use has been minimal, not helped by the fact the route was not completed to connect with the existing path at the Gowerton end.



Again the work camps and hospitality at the nearby Plant Centre was brilliant and made camping a real pleasure. As well as refreshments we provided lunchtime snacks for the volunteers (The inset picture shows Laura and Anne and their 'Diner'. It was located to the left of the upper picture.). There were social evenings on site and at the local hostelrys: a very enjoyable and indeed memorable time for all involved.

### **Remaining Link to Gowerton**

The next section running alongside the carriageway towards Pontycob Road. required more engineering design, and being alongside the carriageway was not suitable for our type of operation. The County Council took on its provision from about 2006 following Planning Approval but despite several subsequent attempts to satisfy the landowners the job stalled.

Some 15 years on and with the Active Travel initiative (with significant funding) this scheme is now in process again and hopefully will be realised in the not too distant future.

These times, now past, provided a great facility, cost little and were truly memorable for the volunteers who constructed them. There couldn't have been a more beautiful location either!

It is unlikely we will see the like again hereabouts but those involved can reflect on those memories.



**David Judd**

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## Barry Norris: RIP

I am truly sad to inform members that Barry Norris died of cancer in March at the age of 66.

It is difficult to express a lifetime of achievement in all aspects of someone's life in a few words, but in Barry's case impossible. A loving husband, father, grandfather and friend to many he led a remarkable life both in his work in education (HMI Inspector with ESTYN for 30 years) and his manifold interests (and ability) in music, athletics, sport, walking, and exploring.

A keen lifetime cyclist, it influenced his whole family life and is reflected in his children and grandchildren. He has cycled in France and taken part in many cycling events over the years including Brecon to Cardiff with colleagues (as usual the oldest but also fittest) and Gower Bike Rides to mention a few.

For the last few years he was a member of *Wheelrights* and he, with his family (daughter, Isobel and grandson, the remarkable young Adda), supported many of our rides and attended and contributed to our meetings. Although a serious athlete in several sports he enjoyed the casual friendly rides we put on and we greatly valued his presence.

We send our sincere condolences to his family for their loss and know his memory lives on with family and friends from all of his past activities and interests. It sounds trite to say he will be sadly missed; his was a remarkable life.

David Judd

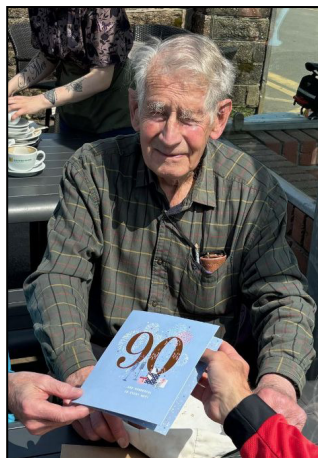
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## A birthday celebration

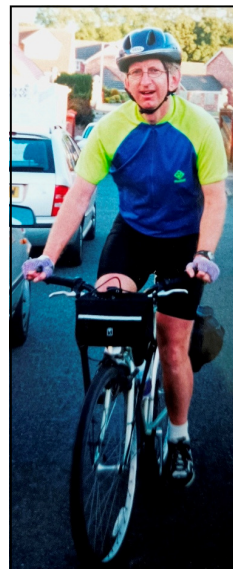
Yours truly turned 90 in May. I was honoured not only by the number of birthday cards and good wishes I received but by CTC Swansea (The local branch of Cycling UK) who made my birthday a feature of their morning coffee ride on 10 May (the day after my birthday), and in addition I was presented with a birthday cake at the Routes Group meeting in Ripples Café the following day. This was given to me by Dennis Dwyer (Ripples proprietor and *Wheelrights* member).

The photo was taken at the Three cliffs Café in Southgate where the CTC stopped for coffee.

I hope to continue to be active with *Wheelrights* and also support Sustrans and Cycling UK. But I need to cut back: first the website – and measures are in place to replace me. Also someone should take over this Newsletter. Any offers?



David Naylor



## Forthcoming events

(This information and more is provided on the 'Events' page of [www.wheelrights.org.uk](http://www.wheelrights.org.uk) .)

### **Wheelrights Routes Group meetings.**

These are held most months; in the summer usually at 10.00am on a Saturday in Ripples Café, and in the winter over Teams on a Monday evening. The next is scheduled for 15 June in Ripples Café.

### **Wheelrights public meeting.**

A late summer or autumn meeting is planned. (To be arranged.)

### **U3A and Cappuccino Rides.**

The U3A rides take place monthly. And the Cappuccino rides are underway. See the Events page for both.

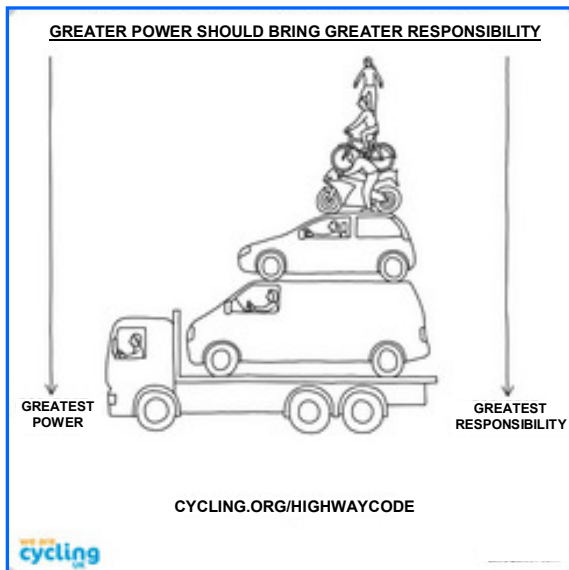
### **Other**

**Swansea and Gower Cycling Festival** runs from 29 May to 2 June.

**Pier Street Party:** 8 June: 10:00 – 14:00 in the Environment Centre, Pier Street, SA1 1RY. There will be organised rides to it. See the Events page.

**Bike week** is from 8 to 16 June.

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In case we need reminding!