



## Home win! The match

Looking at the hats, the gaiters, the bicycles with chains and lights, I think it's around 1903.

The chap in the middle seems to be wearing a different sort of hat to the other two. The chap on the left has a collar or it could be a scarf. My father would wear a coat with a

shirt collar like that in his school uniform. I think they've been cycling and they're looking at a match. If they stand on their saddles, they can just peer over the fence to watch the match.

I have a feeling that they probably know each other because of the proximity. The one in the middle has got a uniform on. A flat cap in that era could be the army. The Post Office cap was dark blue, I can remember, and they had piping on their trousers. So he may well be territorial army. But the coat he's wearing doesn't really fit with the army element. Could he be a telegram delivery boy? Of course, they used to call them 'boys' but they could have gone on working at that until middle age as far as we know!

I think the chap in the middle's hat has probably got a peak to it, either to keep the sun out or the rain off. It probably has an emblem and if we could see the emblem, we'd know who he belonged to. He's got button-up boots and plus-fours, with a bit of a sock and that could be to prevent the chain of the bike catching on his trousers. At the turn of the century, one of the biggest challenges was the footwear. The only reason I'm saying that is that I'm from Northampton, and shoes are in the blood! And it wasn't until the First World War that the mass production of shoes really altered fashion. Perhaps he was wearing another pair of boots wherever he's come from and changed into those. Although times were hard and you only had one pair of boots! He arrived late to this party from the territorial Army. He was late getting off parade and he was the last one to appear. The other two were there before because the bicycle that he's standing on is in front of the other two.

They could be looking at a football match. It might only just have kicked off. The strips were quite simple back then. The teams are wearing long black shorts and a red top or a green top. They can also see the crowd, but the crowd are not in stadiums like we have these days; this is a football pitch where everybody is stood around the side. I think it's late autumn and there's a slight chill in the air. It always was colder when I was a boy. They can see the excitement of the crowd. This is a big game. It's an important game. It's a town match, a crucial one, a local derby. But these people can't get in; it's at capacity and they haven't got tickets. We're somewhere in Nottinghamshire. The boots and the bicycles, you see. They're war-issue-type bikes. You had to go everywhere by bike in those days.

The bike on the right has got a little rack on the back. He's got his sandwiches on it. Cheese and pickle in greaseproof paper. He's not going to share them with the other chaps! The one on the left has a light. The middle one looks like it's got a bit of a saddle bag. It could fit telegrams in because they were only short messages. They weren't very big or very prolific. You weren't

given half a dozen telegrams; the idea is that it's as instant as it could be. He could have just come back from delivering a telegram; he could be cycling back from the GPO, which worked six maybe even seven days a week back in those days.

The bikes do look solid. I think the owner of the one on the left is younger than the other two people. I think that bicycle is of the basic variety in comparison to the other two. The one on the right-hand side has a casing for the bicycle chain. Now that would be an advancement! I also think it's got a pump on the main spar going up. One of them must be a Raleigh, they were around in those days. The one on the right side is a very up-market bicycle compared to the one on the left, which is cheaper or perhaps a hand-me-down bicycle. I think they definitely looked after their own bikes. You had your little puncture repair kit in a tin and you just got on with it, and your dad helped you.

The boy on the left is probably a grammar school boy because that uniform looks very similar to my father's. And you couldn't get to school without a bike, and those were the days when there were bike sheds, of course. He probably did jobs to save for his bike. He could have been a part-time delivery boy delivering groceries, although there isn't a basket on there. There were two types of bicycle at that time: the A-to-B-type transportation bicycles and the racing bicycles. But these aren't racing bikes; they're a functional mode of transport to get from A to B.

Have you noticed the chap on the right's hair? It's not what you would expect for that era because it's very long. And his trousers are very narrow! If it was war time, there would have been less opportunity to get your hair cut because people would have been conscripted into the army and they would have their own barbers. It's not particularly cold because none of them are wearing gloves.

The chap on the right is called Albert. He's in his late 30s. He's a white-collar worker. He's got nice shoes, not boots. He works in an office. He's a junior clerk in one of the local banks and that's why he's got a nice bicycle. He's one of these people who saves up and knows where to put his money. He's been around a bit, but he's never really progressed that much. He's doing OK for himself and is definitely a bit older. The thing about the hair is that he's slightly rebellious. His personality is one that he just likes to push things a little bit. He would have saved his sandwiches but unfortunately he's eaten half of them already because one of the wrappings is down on the floor by the back of his bicycle. He's so excited because of the match, he said "Hmm, I've got to eat it now!" It could be part of his sandwich down there. He could have had it in his hand and he was scoffing it and then he lost his balance a bit and he dropped his sandwich. Or it was a goal and he cried "Yeeeeaaaah!" and the sandwich fell out of his hand! I think he is happy with his lot. I think his bicycle is very well kept. I think he takes a lot of pride in that bike. For someone to do that, they need to be happy with the world around them. I think it's a black bike but with stainless steel rims which would be very shiny. They're gleaming; he polishes them every single week. He could be a tool setter, used to handling things and making things clean. I think his hand is an old hand. The young lad on the left is really holding onto that corrugated iron, which would be sharp. They really didn't want anybody in there! And I think that chap is slightly shorter than the others. He's clinging on with his fingertips just to see in there.

There'd be a lot of background noise so you couldn't really hold a conversation unless you were showing your face to each other because then you could almost lip read. There'd be a lot of clapping and yelling and booing if the referee had got it wrong. That corrugated iron fence is riveted to hold it to the two wooden beams at the back. And it's sturdy; they don't want people getting in. And it's a tall fence, way over 6-foot. And they have cut it so that it's difficult for people to do what they're doing. You'd never climb over it. You'd need a ladder so only people with bicycles could really look from there. This a purpose-built 'Keep Out' kind of fence. And they're there because they just can't get tickets.

It's a Saturday. The one on the left has been at Saturday morning grammar school and it's an afternoon kick-off and he was on his way home and decided to literally 'get on his bike' and look over the fence. They're not just passers-by who want to see a bit of the game; they would stay because they want to see the result. They'll be clinging on and feeling a bit cold holding onto that metal fence because it could be quite breezy up there.

If they're all supporting the same team, and one of them may not be, they're going to be really happy because it'll be a good result for them. When they get down off their bikes, the young lad is just going to jump down, the middle chap is going to carefully get himself down, and the gentleman at the end is going to wait until they're down before gradually getting himself down. When they are down, there's going to be a conversation between the one on the right and the one in the middle, but the young lad is just going to cycle home quickly because he has chores because it's Saturday afternoon and if he's not home, he's going to get told off!

The chap in the middle is called Graham and he's very reliable. He goes out in all weathers and I think he's in his mid-20s. I wonder if he's got a pair of binoculars in his left hand. Because we don't know how far away the pitch is from the fence; it could be quite a way. We can see a pole beyond the fence. Could be a flagpole. That's the bit that puzzled me. There's quite a gap between the corrugated iron fence and the start of the pitch. There's a huge, great dense body of people watching, and I think that flagpole is on this side of the pitch and they can't get in because it's just so full. He could also be holding a drinking flask. Something to keep the cold weather out? Purely medicinal. He was keeping it in his jacket pocket. It's a little hipflask with a little something to keep the cold night air out.