

My Lord Mayor, Lady Mayoress, Mr Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Mrs Clark, Honoured Guests, Prize-winners and Fellow Cyclists.....

I am honoured tonight, as President of C&NWCTC, to offer my own welcome to Chester and to our year of celebrations commemorating the 70th Anniversary of the foundation of what, until recently, was the Chester and North Wales District Association.

I very much regret that, because of the constraints of Victorian building technology, a significant number of you in this room cannot see me - and that to you, I am just a disembodied voice. Shortcomings in 19th Century architecture are not my fault, so please do not pillar-y me for it!

I am also aware that there may be an equally significant number this evening who wish they could not see me – let alone hear me.....!

It has been said that, speaking on a occasion like this is like marrying into royalty – that the honour is greater than the pleasure....

And thus, I stand here before you at the outset of tonight's proceedings, in theatrical terms bottom of the bill, the warm-up act, singing, as it were, for my supper...

So, first of all, welcome, my Lord Mayor, to the company of my fellow cyclists. This of course is a special cycling weekend for your City, a weekend which sees the inauguration of its new status as a CDT.

We look forward in the coming months to a big increase in cycling in Chester – bags more bicycles, and lots and lots of cyclists – in fact (as the Romans might have said) legions of them. Let the whirr of a thousand bicycle wheels echo within Chester's walls!

I understand, Sir, that our newly created Local Authority (I do wonder if there was any hidden symbolism in the choice of April First as its birth date) plans to do its utmost to embrace the environmentally-friendly, health-giving culture of cycling. We welcome this wholeheartedly.

Perhaps, Sir, in this context, you could confirm the current rumour that Chester's CDT team has a Deva-ious plan to replace the Mayoral limousine with a carbon-neutral Mayoral tandem for you and your Lady Mayoress.

This means that, equipped with your new mayoral helmet and Lycra robes, you will be able to free-wheel through the rest of your term of office on your bicycle made for two.

As Chester's Lord Mayor you also, I understand, bear the ancient title of 'Admiral of the Dee' - a further reminder of the historic past of the old port of Chester.

Long may this maritime tradition continue, I say, and in this respect, perhaps you could also confirm the other rumour current in the City that we shall soon be seeing the Admiral of the Dee pedalling away on a new, state of the art, custom-made, Mayoral pedalo.... That would be an admirable sight!

I doubt, Mr Under-Secretary of State, that we shall soon be seeing pedalos on the Thames at Westminster, but I trust that you will return to London and, as a spokesman for cycling, urge your parliamentary colleagues to set a bicycling example to the nation and to cycle round their constituencies. 'Going for a spin' would then acquire an entirely different political meaning.... It would be quite revolutionary!

Recently, I read, that your ministerial colleague Lord Adonis travelled the length and breadth of the country sampling train services.

Following his example, I wonder if you plan to explore our native land by bicycle? To pedal the highways and the byways on your own Rural Rides. There are plenty of experts here to advise you. Perhaps to get geared up to go from Gillingham to Gretna Green, to bicycle from Brighton to Blackpool, to pedal from Penzance to Penrith or even, in the long summer recess, lead your staff on a leisurely ministerial progress from Land's

End to John O'Groats.

I recommend it - and I speak from personal experience, for cycling is such healthy exercise.
A day on the bike always brings a colour to my cheeks – if only from my saddle!
And as you might say, that is the bottom line

As for myself, I am proud to serve my fellow cyclists as President in this our Anniversary Year. I am only the figurehead - for our current strength in Chester and North Wales owes much to the work of many of our members, past and present, over many years, and I thank them warmly for it.

As the Book of Common Prayer suggests, three score years and ten is a long time and I am so pleased that one of our founder members of 1939 – and a distinguished former President – Jim Skelding is with us this evening. I welcome him on your behalf, too.

I have now to crave your indulgence further to admit a personal note of celebration, for it was 60 years ago last month that I asked my father for an advance on my pocket money to buy a 3/6 postal order to send with my application form to join CTC.

In those days the CTC was based in London at Craven Hill and was run more like a gentleman's club of old. I was told that my application for membership would be displayed on the Club's notice board for 28 days. This, I was told, was so that any member who did not think I was suitable to be a member could object. This was a procedure known a 'blackballing'. I don't mind telling you that, as an innocent teenager I was apprehensive about this - it sounded quite painful.

Fortunately, no one objected, and I was admitted as a member. So this year, I am proud to have completed my CTC membership diamond jubilee.

The following year I asked my father for another advance – this time to be able to take out a new girlfriend who wanted to go cycling (I could not believe my luck in finding her!) For nearly 60 years now we have cycled together. (Well, we have stopped for meals from time to time!)

A short while ago, I heard a potential new member asking what he would get out of joining CTC. I resisted saying he might get a wife.

The answer, of course, is not what you get out of things but what you put in that matters and most of you here have put a lot into promoting the pastime that we love.

And so, I wish all of you a convivial evening, some equally pleasant cycling on the rides we have specially arranged for you tomorrow and, of course, I wish you all an enjoyable meal....

You have waited too long for it already!

Mike Cross
President
Chester and North Wales CTC

25th April 2009