

# THE FRENCH CONNECTION

Houghton CC and Le Tour .....the missing links.....and more(useless information).

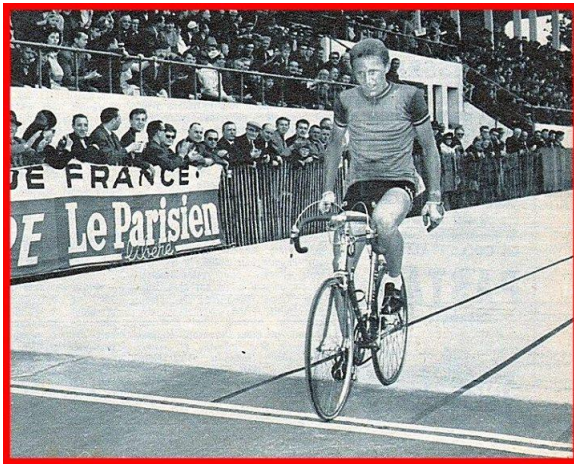


In this historic year of the 2014 TdF Grand Depart taking place right here in the North of England, The Tootler has collected together a few interesting facts associating our great club with the worlds greatest bike race and some of the heroic riders who make the connection; roughly, possibly. Admittedly they are loose connections but there are worse things than being loosely connected so taking the advice of Ernest Hemingway to “write drunk, edit sober”, in this late night conceived and rambling compilation

Tootler will attempt to connect Houghton CC, the late great Chis, the Vaux Grand Prix road race and the Tour de France. Firstly some relevant background information. For the benefit of recent members (and those under sixty five) the great Chis was a Houghton grammar school boy called Peter Chisman who joined the club in 1954 and who, apart from a wonderful career as an amateur and a professional also inspired hundreds of kids to take up bike racing. In the north east, at least in bike racing terms, the nineteen sixties and seventies were the belle epoque, the beautiful



era, a golden time. Friday night at the clubrooms would be packed. There was a separate time trial and road racing notice board. The time trialling notices, race details and start times would be displayed on the RTTC notice board; and the BCF notice board would detail all road races, entrants, times, meeting points etc for those members racing on the road that weekend. Thirty or forty guys would be riding time trials; as many more would be racing in massed start races as they were called then.



For open road racing Houghton would have two or three squads in local third cat/junior races, another two squads in second and third cat races and our sponsored Houghton Vaux team of first cat men would be competing in regional and national races and Star Trophy (today's Premier Calendar) events. Tootler and his pals were in awe of the great man Chis; when he

came into the club we would just stand and gawp at him. His racing career was most impressive, notable mainly for his overall win in the 1963 Tour Of Britain and a stage win in The Tour Le Avenir, then regarded as the amateur Tour De France; but his palmares was both extensive and impressive; 25 major stage victories including 5 Tour of Britain stages, 8 general classification wins in events such as the Tour of The South West, Tour of The Lakes and the Red Rose Grand Prix amongst many many others. When club members met him on the road he was invariably on his way home after a hard hundred mile plus training ride.

Tootler remembers his advice to us young members was 'train don't strain'. Team mate and good friend of the great man, our chairman Eddie McGourley has many memories of Chis. One is of them both riding a 25 mile TT in Lancashire one Saturday afternoon followed by a 50 mile TT next Sunday morning then entering a

75 mile road race the same afternoon. Eddie got a second and third place in both TT's but Chis won all three races. Another story is of Chis snapping a crank on the first stage of a two-day race in Liverpool but despite getting it fixed the Chief Commissaire wouldn't let him start the second stage so he rode home for the miles; from Liverpool. Long hard training rides were the norm for the iron man of Houghton.





Chis came to prominence in the club by winning races, and won the first race he entered, a club promoted cyclo cross race. In the fifties when Chis first joined Houghton Clarion as it was then, we were predominately a time trial club but Chis, who could time trial with the best, was more interested in open road racing or 'massed start' racing. To

further his ambitions in road racing he left Houghton and joined the Cheviot Road Club to team up with Norman Taylor and Benny Dobson and to train with and race against the Baty brothers of Tyne Velo, Don Sanderson of Northern Couriers, Tucker McElvogue of West End RC, Derek Hepple of Tyne Valley RC and many more of the big hitters in and around Newcastle at that time but he returned to ride for Houghton when road racing became more popular and the club secured team sponsorship by Vaux Breweries. The photos chosen for the Chis part of the article show 1) Peter Chisman receiving the accolades of being crowned Tour of Britain winner; 2) taking an historic stage win in the Tour Le Avenir, then the amateur version of the TdF at a packed Roubaix Velodrome; 3) and 4) Chis racing in Houghton Vaux colours prior to turning professional. The colour photo also has our beloved Chairman whizzing into the shot, third wheel back of Chis. The Houghton Vaux team became one of the top amateur racing teams in the country. Chis, along with prolific winners Eddie McGourley and Paul Blackett, Ray Holton, Jack Wright, and later both Dave Farrar and Dave Cummins all raced with honour and success in Houghton Vaux jerseys. In bike racing terms this was a beautiful period, a true 'belle epoque'.

**Houghton CC** Sponsored by  
Vaux & Associated Breweries Limited, Sunderland.

Paul Blackett  
Ray Holton  
David Farrar  
Eddie McGourley  
Jack Wright

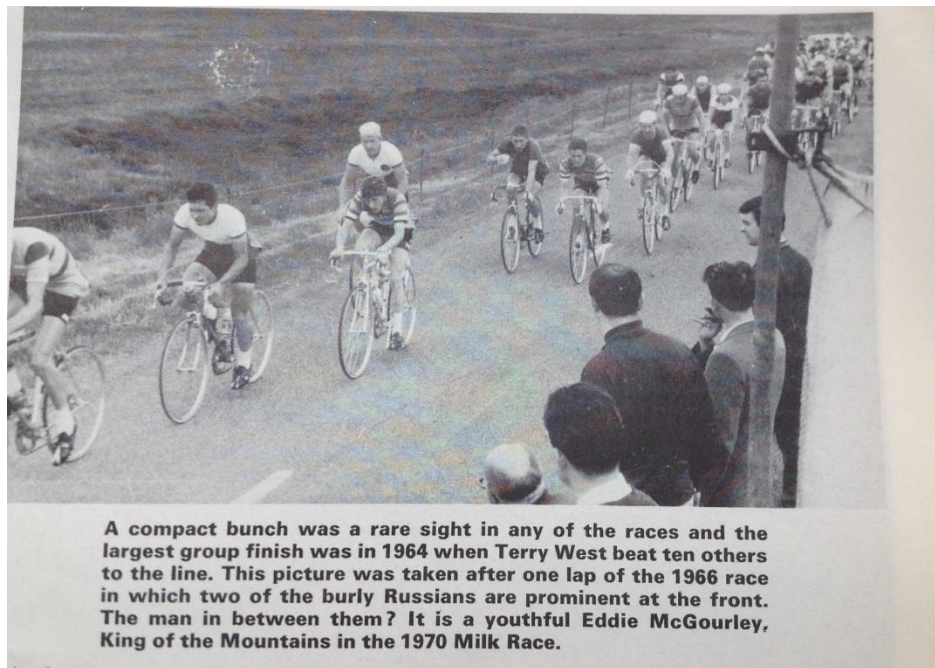
David Farrar      Jack Wright      Paul Blackett

*Photographs by John Goodrich and Alan Crozier*

**Some Recent Performances**

- 1st Houghton Road Race
- 1st Crescent Criterium
- 1st and 2nd Kilhope Moor Road Race
- 1st Team Richmond Road Race

The North East was a hotbed of bike racing in those days. Great riders like Chisman, McGourley, Bill and Norman Baty, Derek Hepple, Ray Weatherell, John Sutcliffe, all achieved



A compact bunch was a rare sight in any of the races and the largest group finish was in 1964 when Terry West beat ten others to the line. This picture was taken after one lap of the 1966 race in which two of the burly Russians are prominent at the front. The man in between them? It is a youthful Eddie McGourley, King of the Mountains in the 1970 Milk Race.

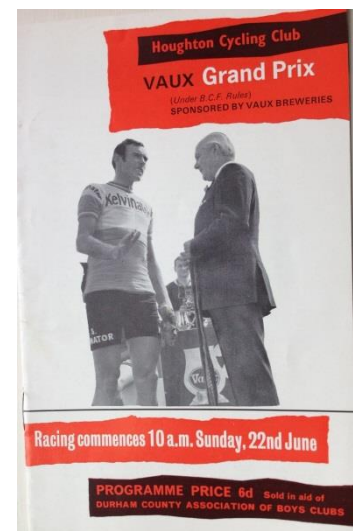
international status on the road, representing GB and the region at home and abroad; and later Joe Waugh would represent GB in the 76 and 80 Olympics and won a gold medal at the 1982 Commonwealth games in Brisbane. This was up there with the best, both regionally and nationally and his years with Houghton CC before turning professional are an important part of this story. More historical background information before Tootler hits the TdF connect button; Tommy Rennoldson was club secretary during those years and Brian



Hogarth was Road Race secretary. Tommy is pictured left with Dot Metcalfe, Ena Douglas, Ruth Todd and an extremely youthful George Pickering extreme right. Both Tom and Brian Hogarth played important roles in the development and success of the club in that golden era. Tom was

the inspiration behind the Vaux Grand Prix cycle race and was voted Organiser Of The Year in 1968 by the British Professional Cycle Racing Association for his sterling work in promoting the Wolsingham based classic.

The Vaux Grand Prix classic road race started life as a Houghton CC 3<sup>rd</sup> cat race with one lap of a circuit starting in Wolsingham taking in Hill End and Bollihope Common and finishing back in Wolsingham. With the backing of Vaux Breweries the third cat race morphed into firstly the Vaux International Grand Prix and then eventually The Vaux Gold Tankard over four laps and 116 miles of the gruelling moorland parcours including the steep climbs of Hill End and Bedburn Bank as well as the long drag up and over Bollihope Common.

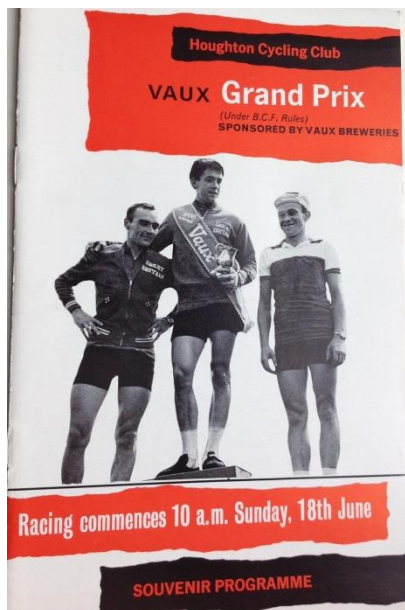


From 1961 to 1965 it was a race for amateur and independent riders; in 1966 for amateurs only and from 1967 until 1970 for professionals.

Many great riders graced the Houghton CC Vaux Grand Prix race during the years including Jupp Ripfel, multiple national Sweden champion. Ripfel (pictured right) would win the 1963 version of the Vaux Grand Prix. Gosta Petterson, whose tubular tyre rolled off within sight of victory and the finish line in 1964 went on to finish 3<sup>rd</sup> to a young Eddie Merckx in the World Amateur Road Race Championships later that year in Sallanches. Before the race turned professional the Vaux Grand Prix would attract many European national teams from Poland, Sweden, France, Belgium, Spain, Hungary and Portugal. In the questionable 'amateur' race of 1965, Leonid Sabko of the USSR won the race from a tenacious Jimmy Leitch riding for the Scottish national squad. The Houghton CC promoted Vaux Grand Prix became one of British cycle racings top one day classic races with the first prize Gold Tankard, top prize money, top names, extensive press coverage, huge public support and was well known for the tough unyielding nature of both the terrain and the race.



The club organisation was on a massive scale; Friday night before the race the club would hold a briefing meeting; officials, judges, marshalls would be given their instructions. Transport would be organised and members were expected to do their duty and support the club.



As young members we were assigned marshalling duties; firstly camping in fields in Frosterley then as we got older we were elevated to bed and breakfast overnight in the The Bay Horse in Wolsingham and then in the final year of the race's history, we got to stay at the Black Bull in Wolsingham. Only senior club members and race officials were accommodated in the Black Bull so it was a great honour to be billeted in this hostelry. Pre race preparation was intense and very precise but drinking sessions in Wolsingham Working Mens Club and afterwards in the Black Bull often resulted in a groggy start on race day morning. It was and still remains one of the golden memories of the Tootler's youth; intensive, exciting, but with the carefree acceptance of the young. Mixing memorable weekends with seeing our heroes, forging lifelong friendships with people we still ride with today, doing your duty for your club; it was just an amazing time. Even now if we head up Weardale or Teesdale for a potter we still ask 'will we go round the Vaux Circuit' as it will forever be known. No wonder Houghton Cycling Club has played a huge part in the lives of many many people. Other than the great names Tootler will attach to the Houghton CC/Tour de France links in the final part of this rambling missive the Vaux Grand Prix race included winners such as the well respected fifties and early sixties hard man Bill Bradley(61 and 62 winner) who rode the Berlin Warsaw Prague 'Peace Race' in both 60 and 61; Les West (1966 winner) who had the best palmares of all and any home based professional with dozens of major wins including the Vaux Grand Prix in 1966 before turning professional for Willem 11 – Gazelle followed by ten years with Holdsworth Campagnolo GB; and Bob Addy (1969 winner), who would ride his only Tour de France, albeit a gutsy and worthy performance for Holdsworth Campagnolo in 1968.



So now for the connections between our Houghton Cycling Club, the late great Peter Chisman, the Houghton CC Vaux Grand Prix and Le Grand Boucle the Tour de France.



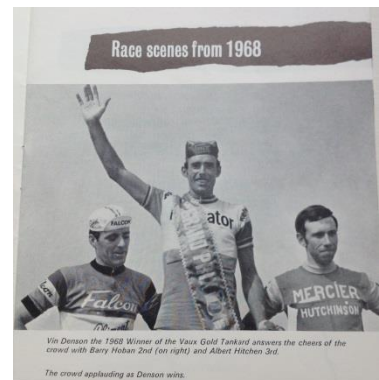
The above photo shows the Tour de France 1967 Great Britain pre-race team line-up. Prior to 1969 the tour regularly featured national teams as opposed to 'trade' teams to counter the commercialism critics and to bolster national pride in cycle racing. 1967 would be the penultimate occasion when national teams would feature in Le Tour. Far right in the GB stellar line up is the first connection of Tootlers Houghton CC / Tour de France links, former Houghton CC man and local hero, the great Chis lining up to start Le Tour. Chis's 1967 tour would be short lived, a number of serious mechanical problems isolating him from the peleton from which Willy Van Neste of Belgium would go on to win the bunch sprint and take the stage win. In those days when a rider punctured, crashed or had a mechanical the team car stayed with the team favourites, so riders other than the team leaders were left to their own devices to get to the finish line. Sadly Peter finished outside of the time limit on stage 2 from St Malo to Caen and his Tour was over.



Next to Chis in the group photo is Vin Denson, a super domestique along with Jean Stablinski to the enigmatic Jaques Anquetil during the Ford France and Bic years. Denson was not a prolific winner but did win a stage in the 1966 Giro and tells of another day when he was sent up the road by his captain Anquetil to

chase down the Italian flyer Gianni Motta through the streets of Naples. The partisan Italian crowd threw spaghetti and tomatoes at him and tipped garbage bins over him as he pursued Motta. Vin won the Gold Tankard in our Vaux Grand Prix (pictured above and right) riding for Kelvinator in 1968 in a hard fought battle with Barry Hoban and Albert Hitchen, the former 1965 British National Champion.

Fourth from the right in the Tour line-up photo is Albert Hitchen himself, another man of iron who also finished second in the Houghton CC / Vaux Grand Prix race to Jupp Ripfel of Sweden in 1963.



*Vin Denson the 1968 Winner of the Vaux Gold Tankard answers the cheers of the crowd with Barry Hoban 2nd (on right) and Albert Hitchen 3rd.  
The crowd applauding as Denson wins.*



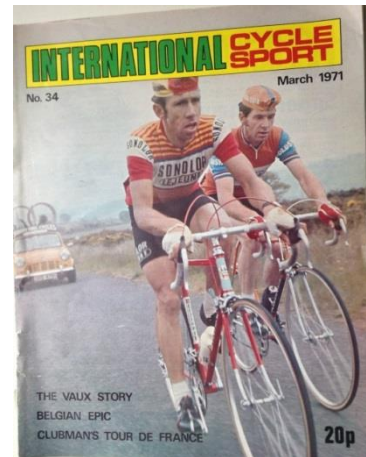
Next to Hitchen in the GB line-up is Yorkshireman Barry Hoban (pictured left winning Gent Wevelgem) who, with eight Tour wins held the GB record until Mark Cavendish recently began compiling his impressive list of stage wins. Hoban rode for Mercier BP along with French hero Raymond Poulidor for most of his career

but his Houghton CC Vaux Grand Prix/Gold Tankard win from Colin Lewis and Les West in 1970 saw him in Sonolor Le Jeune colours, winning the sprint in a two man all day break from Colin Lewis with Les West finishing alone in third place.



Hoban also won two stages in the Giro Italia but among his best results were the win at Gent Wevelgem in 1974 in an impressive bunch sprint which included both Eddie Merckx and Roger De Vlaeminck and a not too shabby third place in Paris Roubaix in 1972.

In 1971 the Houghton CC/ Vaux Grand Prix was front page news in the March issue of 'International Cycle Sport' with an article 'The Vaux Story' taking centre pages regretting the loss of the race to the



international pro calendar. The magazine front cover picture (right) shows Hoban leading Colin Lewis (next in the TDF GB line-up photo) in a two man breakaway in the 1970 final Houghton CC Vaux Grand Prix classic.

The collapse and death of Tom Simpson on Mont Ventoux later in that fated 1967 Tour on stage 13 resulted in the peloton agreeing that a GB rider (Hoban assumed the responsibility) to take the next stage from Carpentras to Sete as a mark of respect. This caused great angst between him and Denson who had been Simpsons best pal for many years yet Hoban subsequently married Toms widow and they had a family together. Hopping past Bill Lawrie (next in 1967 Tour line-up) who also rode the Vaux Grand Prix but without podium success we have Colin Lewis, British Road Race champion in 1967 and 1968 and who took 2<sup>nd</sup> place to Hoban in the last Vaux Gold Tankard race in 1970.

Next up in the 1967 Tour photo shoot is Leeds born but raised in Hartlepool, the much liked and respected Arthur Metcalfe, winner of the 1964 Milk Race

and a rider who rode many Houghton CC promoted races over the years and who became a great favourite of the host club. Metcalfe, pictured left leading the bunch up Hill End, rode the Houghton CC Vaux Grand Prix many times but never won the Gold Tankard, finishing third to Bill Bradley in 1961, second to Terry West in 1964, then second again twice, to Les



West in 1966 and then again to Michael Wright in 1967.

Second rider from the left in the 1967 GB tour line up is Tom Simpson, Tootlers boyhood hero, born in Haswell just five miles from Houghton le Spring; yellow jersey holder for two days in the 1962 Tour, winner of Bordeaux Paris, 1961 Tour of Flanders, Milan San Remo in 1964, 1965 World Road Race Champion, Paris Nice in 1967, multiple grand tour stage winner and much loved throughout cycling. Tom Simpson collapsed and died on Ventoux in that years Tour, on stage 13 from Marseille to Carpentras. The stage was won by Jan Janssen and the overall Tour by Frenchman Roger Pingeon but that years tour is best remembered for the loss to cycle racing of Tom Simpson (pic right in some stress on the lower slopes of Ventoux).



The great Tom Simpson had been due to ride our Houghton CC Vaux Grand Prix in that year of 1967 and there was much excitement at race head quarters, the Wolsingham Steelworks. We were all hopping about trying to get a glimpse of the great man before we headed off to our respective marshalling points but Tom didn't turn up, he had been called back to the continent to ride in a lucrative race organised by his sponsor Peugeot BP. Tootler and his old Houghton CC mate Dave Farrar both had Peugeot BP jerseys bought from a team soigneur after the Manx International Classic in 1965. The Peugeot soigneur told Dave that his jersey was actually Simpsons which obviously sealed the purchase. The riders had just taken the jerseys off so they were a bit high but that didn't put us off; they were memorable buys as was the pair of Peugeot shorts that Tootlers brother 'The Legend' bought from the same soigneur complete with oven fresh skid marks to verify authenticity; strange how we remember such stomach turning detail. The disappointment of Tom not riding our Vaux Gold Tankard was palpable among his fans and supporters but the race was won that day by Michael Wright, the English born Belgian rider who couldn't speak a word of English (pictured below winning the 1967 Vaux Grand Prix on Knitsley Fell), riding for Wiels Tibetan Pullover-Centrale. Michael was a multi grand tour stage winner, three in TdF and four in the Vuelta Espana, and a specialist sprinter from small groups or breakaways but surprisingly throughout his career not from large bunch sprints.



Michael Wright is the last team member in the photograph of that fated 1967 GB Tour line-up standing far left in the photograph next to Simpson and pictured left taking his Vaux GP win on Knitsley Fell from Metcalfe and Lewis. Incredibly, on that

regrettable 1967 Tour de France, on stage six from Metz to Strasbourg, Wright actually won the bunch sprint to take one of his impressive Tour stage wins so there were hugely mixed fortunes for the GB team in that race with abandons, crashes, stage wins and sadly of course the loss of Simpson.

There is no doubt that many more riders in our Houghton CC organised Vaux Grand Prix races over the years will have ridden in the Tour de France at some point in their careers but the above riders are those that either won or took podium spots at the Wolsingham based classic and rode the Tour de France. The next Houghton CC Vaux GP rider Tootler will highlight however went one step further than riding the Tour; a huge step in fact.

In the final Vaux Grand Prix of 1970, Barry Hoban, who won the race, was supported in the Sonolor Lejeune team by a 24 year old unknown Belgian rider named Lucien Van Impe pictured right in



the bunch on Bollihope Common just behind Arthur Metcalfe (leading).

Whether Van Impe could have finished higher than 19<sup>th</sup> in that final Vaux Classic had he not been riding for Hoban that day is left to conjecture but in the following years he became one of the most feared climbers in the pro peloton, winning the polka dot King Of The Mountains climbers jersey in the 1971, 72, 75, 77, 81 and 83 Tours de France.

Van Impe (pictured below) won 2 stages of the Giro in 1982 and 83, was



Belgian Road Race Champion in 1983 and finished in all 15 tours he would eventually ride in his long career. He would finish 3<sup>rd</sup> to Bernard Thevenet in both the 1975 and 1977 Tours but these achievements were all overshadowed in 1976 however when he took the Tour de France yellow jersey and overall classification win; a tour where he put second placed Joop Zoetemelk to the sword on in the Pyrenees. After a long stage which featured the Col de Mente and the Portillon, Van Impe gave chase to a early lone

breakaway by Luis Ocana. It was so hot that day that the asphalt on the roads melted making the climbs very tiring and the descents impossible; and afterwards the riders had great difficulty in removing the molten tar from their legs. Zoetemelk thought Van Impe was just chasing mountain classification points so let him go and stayed with the yellow jersey group but Van Impe caught and worked with Ocana on the Col de Peyresourde to open up a gap which the chasers could not bridge and went on to forge a time gap he would hold into Paris for a victory of over 4 minutes. Van Impe and Ocana went so hard in that final break over the Peyresourde that 45 of the remaining 93 riders in the race finished outside the time limit that day; although they would be reinstated by tour officials the following morning. Raymond Poulidor finished overall 3<sup>rd</sup> which would be his 14<sup>th</sup> and last Tour; and our old friend from the Oudenaarde Tour of Flanders Museum, Freddy Maaertens, won 8 sprint stages. Van Impe lost the final Mountain Points polka dot jersey by one point, protecting the yellow jersey instead of going for mountain prime points in his preferred climbers category. In recognition of his incredible climbing feats he was later inducted into the Top Great Climbers Hall Of Fame alongside Fausto Coppi, Charly Gaul and Federico Bahamontes (The Eagle of Toledo); an elite group which in later years would also include Marco Pantani, Lance Armstrong (Mmmm) and Alberto Contador, none in this latter group of whom can claim to have ridden 'solo pan e agua' unlike their earlier counterparts.

Who could have imagined on that summers day on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June 1970 at Knitsley Fell near Wolsingham that the rider finishing in 19<sup>th</sup> place in a Houghton CC promoted Vaux Grand Prix would go on to achieve the ultimate success in cycle racing and be feted as one of the greatest climbers of all time. He is



pictured right in the polka dot jersey in the 1981 Tour. We remember him so I wonder if he can remember us? Possibly, but probably not.

Sadly that Vaux Grand Prix race of 1970; featuring the unheralded appearance of Lucien Van Impe and the Gold Tankard win by Barry Hoban was to be the last as Vaux Breweries withdrew their sponsorship of the race in Spring 1971. While Tootler fingers the Dutch ace Joop Zoetemelk (notated above beaten into second place in La Tournee by Van Impe in 1976) but who went on to win the Tour de France in 1980, finished 2<sup>nd</sup> a further six times in La Tour, won the Vuelta in 1981, Paris Nice three times, Tour de Romandie, Criterium International, Tirreno Adriatico, Paris Tours in 77 and 70, Amstel Gold in 87, La Fleche Wallonne in 76, and .....pause for breath World Road Race Champion in 1985; Tootler can now explosively reveal that the same Joop Zoetemelk was beaten to the finish line by both our Chairman Eddie McGourley and our Hon Sec Dave Cummins in the 1968 Greenall Whitley Two Day just the season before he turned professional with Mars Flandria. Our Chairman and Hon Sec are too modest to mention this mind blowing statistic so it left to the pen of the Tootler to highlight this otherwise forgotten achievement. It also begs the question as to what heights these young Houghton riders could have risen to if only they had pulled their fingers out and had tried just a bit harder. With just put a bit more effort from the pair we could nowadays be heading out for club runs behind a former Tour winner; they may even have got the coffees in occasionally, maybe not; lets not stretch our imagination too far.

So there you have it readers of this rambling missive; there are proud and direct links between our famous and historic club and the most iconic of all the grand tours, Le Tour, the Tour de France.

The 1967 Tour de France GB squad, most of whom at some point rode and won or had podium places in our Houghton CC promoted Vaux GP; Chis the Houghton boy who headed our successful Vaux Houghton CC team and who rode that ill fated 1967 Tour; the history of the great one day classic in Weardale and Teesdale that linked the riders and the respective races of both the Vaux Grand Prix and the Tour de France; and all the other numbing statistics Tootler has vacuumed up to make this point, including the almost anonymous and definitely unmemorable appearance in the 1970 Houghton CC Vaux Grand Prix by the subsequently much acclaimed and feted Van Impe; the fact is that we have a direct link to Le Grand Boucle and without question we are a great and historic club. Houghton Cycling Club and it's members should be proud of this great connection; the Tootler himself is bursting with pride at this revelation but then its again himself who has penned this sleep inducing piece of rot.

Nevertheless, The Tootler will remind Christian Prudhomme, Le Tour race director, of the great relationship between our Houghton Cycling Club and his Tour should he bump into Prudhomme on the road during Tootlers pre tour preparations for this years Grand Depart to the hopefully memorable and historic 2014 Tour opening stages in North Yorkshire. Should the eloquent and stylish Prudhomme be unfortunate enough to acquaint himself with the Tootler in one of the Yorkshire Dales pubs where Tootler himself will be refreshing and rehydrating during his tour preparation power blocks, Old Tootler will trap him in the corner of the snug and unravel this boring and tedious story over and over until his ears bleed. When it gets to a point where Prudhomme wishes he was dead and will agree to anything just to get rid of Tootler, himself will invite Le Director to be guest speaker at our next club dinner on condition that he brings along Lucien Van Impe to throw in a few stories at the same time about how he remembers us with fondness. Maybe Le Director will also agree to come to our club Tour HQ campsite at Markington for a swally the night before the Grand Depart; maybe but probably not despite the offer of free beer and barbequed sausage sandwiches.

The excitement of the Tour de France, le Grand Boucle, will explode in Yorkshire this July. Lets hope it evokes many happy memories for years to come and perhaps inspires lots of youngsters to take up this great sport. See pictured right the epic battle between Anquetil and Poulidor on the Puy de Dome in the 1964



Tour, if that doesn't cause a stir in your bib shorts you need to join an embroidery class or take up cake decoration. Make mine a large one. Can't wait!!