

Anerley Bicycle Club

History and camaraderie go hand in hand at this South London club

Smartly attired in their yellow and black club kit, the Anerley BC swarm 30-strong as they gather at their regular rendezvous in Purley, South London. The meeting point, flanked by Victorian terrace housing, sits in the shade of the Big Smoke's lofty office and apartment blocks that are visible on the horizon — serving as a reminder that we are deeply ensconced within the boundary of the M25.

Dividing into three groups — for the sake of easing road congestion rather than splitting ability — a short south-easterly amble sees grey turn slowly to green as thick, bushy hedgerows

and the shaggy silhouettes of towering elms gradually replace the bricks and mortar of the big city, and before long we are fully immersed in the Great British countryside.

Having left the traffic and the stresses of the city behind, I get the opportunity to find out a little more about the club, and first things first — this is a thoroughly pleasant bunch of people. Everyone is clearly in it for the love of riding, with bicycles ranging from the sleek carbon-fibre set-ups to robust hybrid heavyweights — you could turn up on a Raleigh Burner to an Anerley club run and no one would bat an eyelid. As long you have a fondness

for a good wholesome bumble through the countryside and an affinity for feasting heartily on halftime tea and cake, then this club will fit you like a glove.

Tom Vaz, club captain and today's ride leader, offers further insight into the modus operandi of many Anerley members. "I recently cycled to Rome from Purley, covering 1,500 miles in 25 days," says Vaz, who, like many in the club, just loves to go on tour. "I carried my own luggage including a Hennessy Hammock which allowed me to wild camp when I couldn't get accommodation. Roughly following the ancient Via Francigena, the route took me through Paris, Geneva, Turin and Siena before reaching Rome. Crossing the Alps on the San Bernadino Pass is the hardest thing I've ever done but the views and the £10,000 that I raised [for the South East Cancer Help Centre] made it all worthwhile!"

This is typical, and you could go from rider to rider listening to similar tales of endurance told

Club facts

Based: Purley
Members: 61
Formed: 1870
Meets: Outside Shurgard self-storage in Purley; Sunday 9am, Tuesday 10am, Thursday 10am.

with a contagious zeal and enthusiasm — indeed, if I didn't have two young children and a wife at home I'd probably be halfway to Hanoi by now. In fact... no, better not.

Just for the ride

However, Anerley haven't always been so committed in their pursuit of pleasure — they used to be more of a racing outfit, and 'used to' in this instance takes us back more than a century. Desmond Donohoe — long-time club member and as genial a chap as they come — took me through some of the club's rich history, which dates back to the 1870s: "Because of the close proximity to a famous Victorian cycling racing track in Crystal Palace, Anerley

History

The Anerley Bicycle Club is one of the oldest cycling clubs in the UK. In the 1870s a group of boys who attended Dulwich College acquired a selection of new and second-hand bicycles. They were fortunate that they came from affluent backgrounds — before mass production reduced prices, bikes and especially tricycles were not cheap. Outside of the major towns, roads were just rutted cart tracks, thick mud when it rained, loose gravel and dust when dry.

Anerley BC has a long and glorious history in both road and track racing, but for the young Dulwich schoolboys the adventure of cycling was to explore the uncharted

countryside. From these first forays into the unknown, the very important tradition of weekend club rides arose. The pioneers began these club runs every Saturday from the Robin Hood pub at the bottom of Anerley Hill where it crosses Croydon Road at Penge. Club members wore uniform, which included a cap with the Anerley shield badge. In its earliest days the club captain was accompanied by a bugler who sounded the captain's commands!

They ventured forth back then, on sandy, gravel, or chalk roads, the famous Brighton Road often being impassable past Purley. Nevertheless, these runs were immensely popular, with 85 members featuring on

an October 1891 run. On other occasions members pushed their bikes through the snow rather than miss a club run.

And thus the foundations of this incredible club were laid.

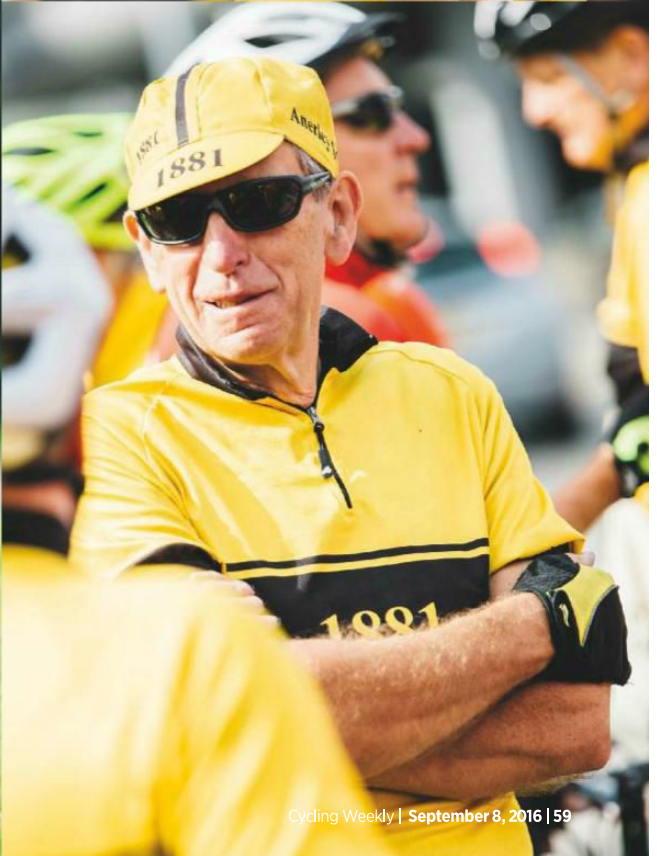
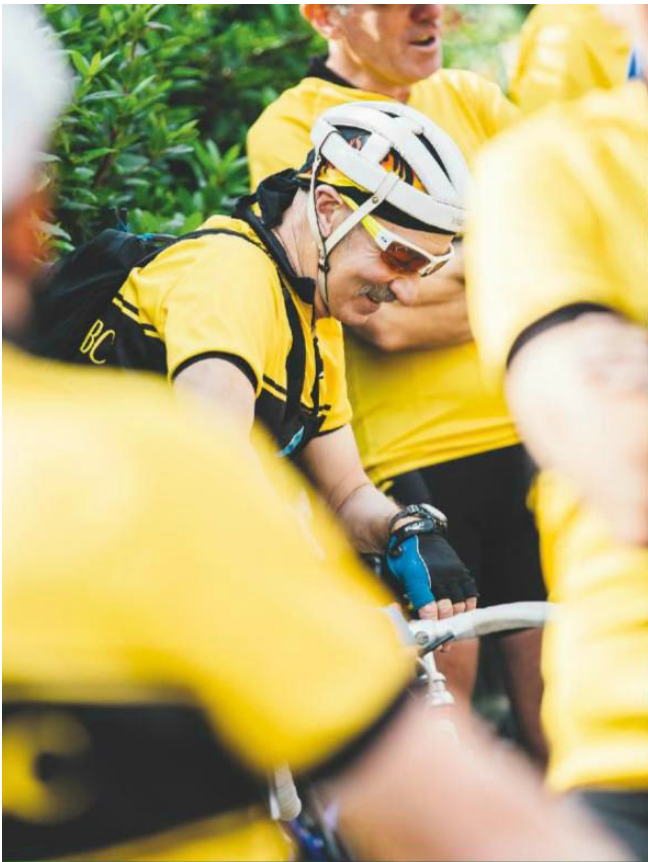
Achievements

Although Anerley's racing days are behind it, this doesn't stop the club from holding an annual awards ceremony during which a bevy of trophies and cups are handed out. Last year's awards were handed out as follows:

■ Maggie Parker for her competitive placing in the RideLondon.
 ■ Julia Barnes for being the fastest lady in the club's annual hill-climb.



- Tom Moody for most improved newcomer.
- Jeremy Hammond for the men's hill-climb.
- Brian Penny for the club's 10-mile time trial.
- Tom Vaz for his epic tour from London to Rome.
- Also CW's resident mechanic Kaye Patton cut her teeth at the club.



38
MILES

Anerley BC club run

Ride highlights

1 Five-mile climb out of the suburbs

Does what it says on the tin, and although this grind offers little let-up for the duration, the serenity of the Kentish countryside awaits your pleasure.

2 Shackland Road

The scent of lavender fills the air before its source is revealed. Rounding the last corner of a woodland-enclosed lane you are met with the sight of a quilt of purple fields.

3 Lullingstone Country Park

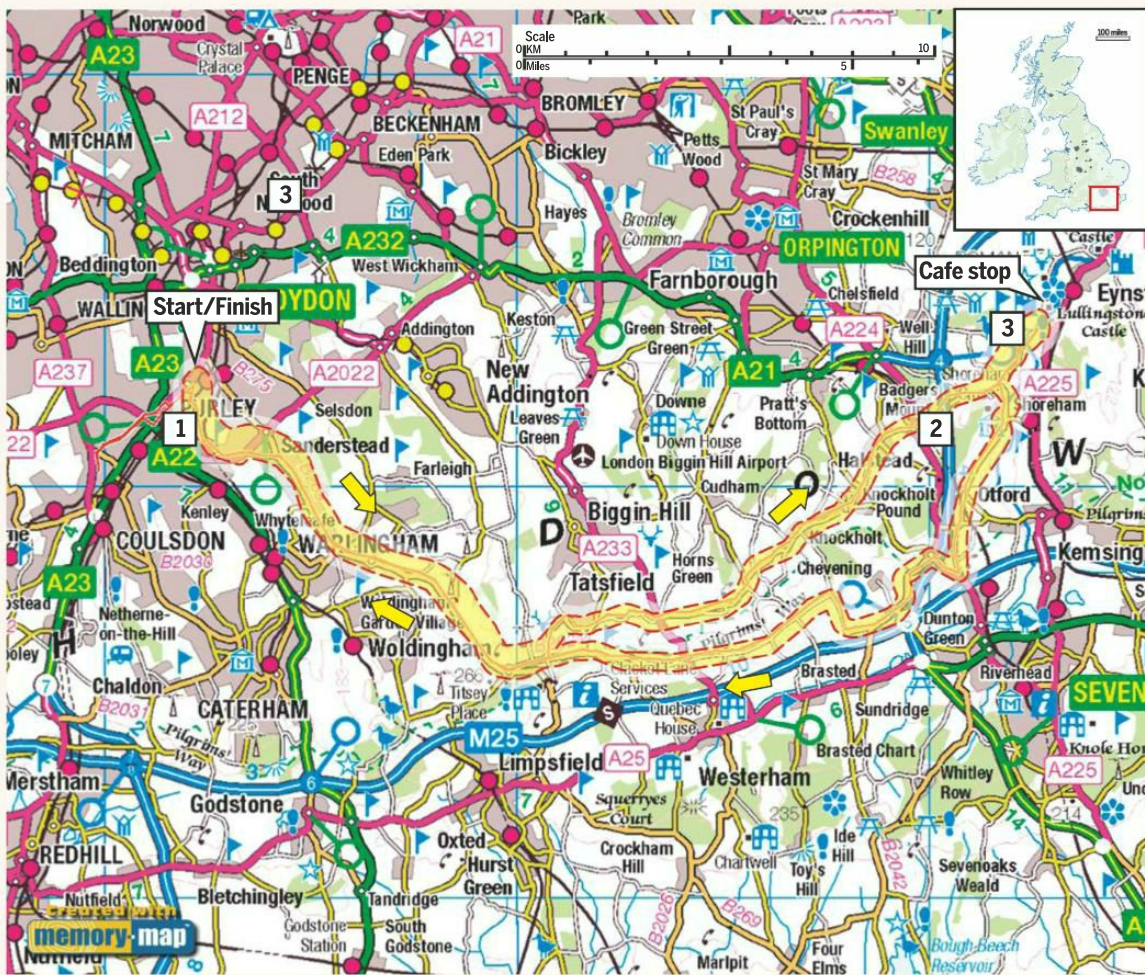
The easternmost point of the ride, Lullingstone, gives you the chance to smell the flowers. A former medieval deer park, there are meadows and plentiful species of plants and wildlife present.

Favourite cafe

Lullingstone Country Park cafe

With full meals, a wide selection of pastries and cakes available and a few thousand acres of country park outside the front door, this is an ideal way to divide your ride. There is ample seating to rest those weary limbs, or the option to take a brief stroll through the park or even up to the Roman villa towards the north of the park.

Lullingstone Country Park,
Castle Road, Eynsford,
Kent, DA4 0JF.
www.visitkent.co.uk/attractions/lullingstone-country-park/



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The Anerley chaingang, including club stalwarts John and Mieka Turnbull (fourth and third from right)



"Tea or coffee? Tea or coffee?"



Anerley ladies let the good times roll

organised many races there and its members became successful racers."

The fact that their racing heyday ended when World War One started may give you a slight idea of this club's impressive innings.

Having ducked under the M25 and across to Lullingstone Country Park

via a network of twisting, narrow and car-free byways, Stuart Grove, the club webmaster, is at hand, and he sums up present-day Anerley to a T: "Joining the Anerley is like gaining another family. The friendliness and camaraderie are what make it. Some do touring, some do sportives, some do time trials,

some do all three. Some just want to ride to get to a cafe or a pub. We are lucky to have Kent, Surrey and Sussex on our doorstep with some of the most beautiful and challenging countryside in the UK."

Grove concludes: "If you want a friend — join the Anerley!"

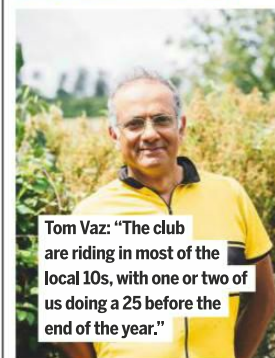
Meet the club



Mark Hancock: "I cycle twice a week covering 100 miles. The club rides are moderate paced so I don't need to be ultra-fit!"



Stuart Grove: "As the club webmaster I post on the website to attract new riders looking for a step up from commuting."



Tom Vaz: "The club are riding in most of the local 10s, with one or two of us doing a 25 before the end of the year."



Julia Barnes: "The club is welcoming to female riders and is attractive as it is not as fast as some other clubs."

Contact: anerleybc.org | Twitter: @AnerleyBC