

Why Borwell?

When I started cycling in the early 80's bike shops didn't look like supermarkets, and if you wanted to be a 'proper' cyclist you would go to your LBS. Your Local Bike Shop.

I grew up in Norwich and through the people I met in the local clubs I learnt that if you aspired to race there was only one bike shop to go to. And that shop was John Borwell Cycles.



John started his bike shop in 1979 and in a very short time he established Borwell's as *the* bike shop in Norwich. It was a small shop and his only employee, Jason Palmer, was also one of the local fast men. Together, John and Jason established a business that wasn't just a bike shop; it was a social club. You didn't need a reason to visit as just being there was reason enough.

I don't remember my first visit, but I do remember spending many Saturday afternoons idling away the time, enveloped by the smell of inner tubes, gazing at a wall of blue Campag boxes and drinking tea from an oily mug. If I was lucky, Andy Pegg or Guy Stevens or another one of the local legends would turn up. If I was *really* lucky, Mike Burrows would come by and I remember listening in rapt silence as he spoke with authority about bicycle designs that seemed impossible at the time.

On one occasion I mentioned that I was short of money, so John offered me work for the following Saturday.

Finally(!) I'd made it into the cramped workshop and was in awe of the specialist tools and the heavy work stand. I spent a perfect day carrying out minor repairs and, at the end of my shift, immediately spent all my earnings on my own bike and watched as John afforded my basic machine the same care and attention as he would a 753 thoroughbred.

As I was the 'new boy' I was dispatched to the local bakery to collect cakes to go with the afternoon tea. John asked for a Chelsea Bun and then Jason piped up, "I'll have a Trafalgar Square". Something in his voice told me that such a cake might not exist, but nonetheless I duly went to the shop where my order was met with a blank stare. Jason had to settle for an Eccles Cake.

John made my first pair of hand-built wheels – MA2 rims on large flange Record hubs. "These will see you to a 23 minute 10" he said as he handed them over to me. 18 months later I proved him right. Borwell's was also the place where I bought my first piece of Super Record. A 1983 rear derailleur. A piece of Italian jewelery on my otherwise plain machine.

I moved away from Norwich in the mid 80's but I always made a beeline for Borwell's whenever I was back in the city. It was during this time that John sold the shop to Jason who continued running the shop with his brother Iain. Despite the change of owner, the name remained the same and this again was the case when Jason left Borwell's to join the fire-service. Eventually Iain became the sole owner and to this day the shop is still there, just up the road from its original location.

And it is still called Borwell Cycles.