

## FH Grubb MJIE

Fred Grubb, born on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1867, became a very talented and successful racing cyclist. He held many records, including the fastest 100 ever ridden on an English road. In 1912 he held the RRA London to Brighton and back record at 5h 9m 41s, which stood for 14 years. In the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, Fred took two silver medals. Hailed as 'The Fastest Cyclist on Earth', Fred turned Pro in 1914. He raced on the Continent for a few months, but found Professional racing there too dirty, so returned to the UK.

During this time he was more than an outstanding racing cyclist, he was a qualified engineer who took a close interest in the construction of bicycles. In his quest to improve designs, he would later use his racing experience and engineering skills to produce his own bicycles and patent many innovations.

The Grubb Grease-Gun Lubrication System had patent pending at the end of 1927. In 1928 he patented the Grubb Resilient forks.

Fred's first cycle business: F.H. Grubb (est. 1914), of Brixton, London SW9 was partly financed by his clubmate Charley Davey. The first frames may have been built at Brixton, but W W1 (4 Aug 1914 - 11 Nov 1918) soon intervened, sentencing Fred to long working hours in a London munitions factory, until he managed to enlist in the navy.

After the war, Charlie Davey again helped finance Fred, this time to go into partnership with Ching Allin. In 1919 Allin & Grubb of 132 Whitehorse Road, Croydon was formed. Fred & Ching soon split after a serious fall-out, said to be over whether Fred or Charlie Davey be credited with the quick release dropout design. 'Allin & Grubb' kept trading, but soon became 'A H Allin' and then 'Allin & Davey'. During 1920 Grubb started his own business at 250 London Road, West Croydon and by 1925 had opened his Robsart Street shop in Brixton, opposite 'Ye Old White Horse' pub.

Grubb cycles were perceived as light, fast and of excellent build quality. With increasing demand, he opened his factory at Gould Rd, Twickenham, London in 1926/27. Bill Rann was the foreman and mechanical brains of the place, particularly remembered for the Rann Kiddie Trailer which came later. The popularity of Grubb cycles, with enthusiasts throughout the country, meant that by the late 1920's they were making cycles on a larger scale than any other "small" UK builder in history.

The 1930 Grubb catalogue states that 1929 has been a phenomenal year for Grubb Bicycles and Tandems, with output doubled on the previous year. The demand meant a complete reorganisation of the Grubb works, with big additions to machinery and staff.

In 1931 he produced a new Twickenham Model. The Grubb London was launched between 1931-1934. In 1932 the Grubb Twin light was first shown at the lightweight cycle show. 'Cycling' of November 1932 describes a small front wheel cycle, which Grubb said was for hill climbing, however it may not have gone into production.

FH Grubb became FH Grubb Ltd c 1932/3. In 1934 the new Yellow Streak was listed as was the Grubb Pullman tandem which was advertised as the Rolls Royce of tandems. In August 1934 'Cycling' carried a description of the new Grubb Kingston, the first UK built recumbent bicycle.

It is thought Fred had diversified unwisely into making the trendy new tubular metal furniture. In November 1934 FH Grubb Ltd was in voluntary liquidation. Early in 1935, the day after the Twickenham factory closed, Fred opened as 'FHG Ltd' from smaller premises at 147a Haydons Road, Wimbledon SW19 London, with c20 staff remaining from c50 at Twickenham. He quickly produced a temporary catalogue, fronted by the FHG logo. The famous FHG Ltd, Haydons Road headbadge followed.

May 1935 adverts mention "The new Wimbledon Works" at 147a Haydons Rd, with showrooms at 130 Haydons Rd, opposite the works and the 31 Robsart Street shop, all in London. Alice ('Mrs Grubb') ran the shop. Over 16,000 Grubbs had already been made.

Despite his financial difficulties, by 1936 many of Fred's staff had worked for him for 12 years. In March 1936 Bill Hurlow (aged 14) joined at Haydons Rd for a couple of years. Production levels were much lower than before, but Fred's 1936 catalogue shows an impressive range. Frames were available in Accles & Pollock chrome-molybdenum or Reynolds High Manganese tubing, though none yet used the new Reynolds 531. In 1936 Grubb was the sole UK agent for the superb Alcyon French bikes, which inspired the late 1936 Grubb Anglo-Continental, in Reynolds 531.

The 1939 Grubb catalogue mentions that over 18,000 Grubbs have been sold and that some of his staff were still there after 15 years. It shows a Grubb Pedalling Machine (cycle trainer), which he designed for convalescent invalids, active businessmen, elderly persons, hospitals, gymnasia etc. It could be fitted with a Smiths speedometer.

It is unlikely any Grubbs were made during WW2, but after the war he resumed production at Haydons Road, and was again trading as FH Grubb Ltd. Production levels stayed low, but the 1949 catalogue featured a beautiful range: The Perfection Exquisite (scroll style lug work) and the Perfection de Triomphe (long points on the headlugs and windows), also the d'Avignon, Sprint Omnium and Côte d'Azur (lugged or lugless). A fitting epitaph.

Fred died on 6 March 1949 aged 62, his family continued the business, Fred's son Frederick became MD, with W.V. Grubb, Ivor Cox and Bill Rann as new directors. Dick Swann was also involved. This period saw the adoption of the name 'Freddie Grubb' on some frames, while FH Grubb was applied to others. But the business could not survive. In May 1951 the contents of the factory and shop were auctioned and The Holdsworth Co brought the entire stock.

Holdsworth exclusively adopted the name 'Freddie Grubb' for their Grubb range. The first was made in 1951 by Bill Hurlow. Grubbs became a small lower end range, aimed at the enthusiast winter-bike market. There were three Grubb headbadges from the Holdsworth era, all identifiable by the text 'Anerley SE20'. In 1958 Holdsworth acquired the Claud Butler marque. Their Claud range was slotted between the Holdsworth and Freddie Grubb ranges, although there was considerable range overlap. The Freddie Grubb marque was discontinued after 1977, but some Grubb's built in the 1920's and 30's are still on the road. That's quality.

#### Grubb frame numbering

It appears that he started numbering his frames sequentially from 01 in 1920, by 1925 he had reached 1233, by 1926, 2724, by 1931, 12,141, by 1934 15,955 and by 1935, c16,000 had been made. Then in 1935 it seems he started a new sequential numbering system starting again at 01 which continued until Holdsworth took over in 1951. The liquidation catalogue of the Grubb stock list various odd frames from 2581 to 2867. This does not however confirm that the last frame he built was number 2867.

I should like to thank Norman Kilgariff for his assistance with the contents of these notes.

#### Catalogue details

A copy of the original 1936 catalogue was provided by Norman Kilgariff.