



AMERICAN INDUSTRY

The forgotten work at Ryde of John Harrington

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When Colonel Albert A. Pope - founder of '*The Pope MFG Co Boston USA*' - attended the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, he was greatly excited by the sight of a front-wheeler bicycle from Britain. The machine he saw had an unusual and slender steel skeleton with a front

wheel nearly as high as its rider. It could well have been the 'Arab' then being made by *John Harrington* at his '*Arab Bicycle Works*' in Ryde on the Isle of Wight. This claim is strengthened by '*Sturmeys Indispensable Bicyclists Handbook of 1879*' which not only carries an advertisement, shown below, for the *J. Harrington & Co - Arab Bicycle Works, Ryde*, but in its review and description enthusiastically states:

"--- a single maker turns out one machine, but to make up for quantity goes in for quality, and gives us a machine of very high class with several startling novelties."

The strongest evidence comes from Charles E. Pratt in his '*Sketch of American Bicycling and its Founder*' first published in '*Outing, October 1883*' www.aaflo.org who writes:

" --- The foundation of modern American bicycling dates from the spring of 1878, or, if its devotees like to make the most of beginnings, from the summer of 1877 when Colonel Pope and John Harrington made and rode the first American bicycle of the second or renascent period. --- In the summer of 1877 Mr John Harrington, known in America not only for his very agreeable cradle spring for bicycles, but also for his delightful steel-tube chimes, gave the finishing impulse to the conversion of Col. Albert A. Pope, who had had a bicycle made for him and learned to ride it on the back ways and quiet streets of Newton, near Boston. Colonel Pope also ordered machines from abroad, made his company - the Pope Manufacturing Company - an importing house for bicycles, visited the principal centres of bicycling in England, and in the spring of 1878 entered upon the manufacture in America of the best type of modern bicycle."

More support comes from the article on *Colonel Albert Pope* in which his visit to the Centennial Exposition is recorded:

"--- Although the artist Winslow Homer had introduced Americans to the bicycle in 1869, Pope found himself fascinated by this 'outlandish steel skeleton with its front wheel nearly as tall as the man' --- Sometime in 1877, Englishman John Harrington visited Albert Pope. Pope requested his assistance in developing an experimental model of the high-wheeler. Pope was so thrilled with Harrington's model that he immediately ordered eight Duplex Excelsiors from an English factory ---"

It may seem strange that these machines were not made by John Harrington himself but by *Bayliss, Thomas & Co Ltd* of Coventry. At that time the Arab Works may well not have had the capacity or perhaps the capital, moreover John Harrington already had many connections with Coventry and its emerging cycle industry. Later when Albert Pope himself commenced high-wheeler manufacture in the States he had to do so by acquiring the use of patents filed originally by a Frenchman, Pierre Lallement, who had moved to Connecticut.

THE
“ARAB”
 BICYCLE.
The Most Perfect and Elegant Machine yet constructed.

SPECIAL FEATURES.
 Patent Hollow Steel Fork.
 Patent Hub Brake.
 An absolutely Safe Tyre,
Mechanically Fixed & Cemented—Patented.
 The New Patent “Arab”
 Ball Bearing, &c., &c.

THE
 PATENT “ARAB” ALARMS,
 In three forms, to suit all Machines.
 15s., 7s. 6d. & 4s. 6d. Nickel Plated
 throughout.

*An Illustrated and neatly bound book, descriptive
 of the above, with Price List, &c.,*
 GRATIS & POST FREE.

J. HARRINGTON & CO.,
“ARAB” BICYCLE WORKS
 RYDE, I.W.
 London Depot:—
 23, SOUTHAMPTON BUILDINGS, CHANCERY LANE.

Little if anything now remains to remind us of this lost Ryde industry and the prominence John Harrington and the town had in the development of the modern cycle. Hill’s Directory of 1871 gives his address as 1 Cambridge Villas, Swanmore Road and his works as being in Union Road, Ryde. In the 1890’s the address on his many patent applications show that he is living at Claremount House on the Ryde School side of West Street. A Patent of August 1899 giving his address as Rock Fern House, Queen’s Road, Coventry suggests that by then he has moved his permanent residence to the mainland.

How much of the manufacture was undertaken at Ryde or on the mainland in the early years is not now known. In an article taking two-thirds of a page and published 2nd June 1880 ‘*Bicycle of the Year*’ by H. Hewitt Griffith of the London Athletic Club, Bicycle Touring Club, &c, writes:

“The Arab (John Harrington and Co) --- This machine was formerly made in the Isle of Wight, but its excellence becoming known in the London market, a considerable demand sprang up for it, to meet which, and to be in a position to more readily cater for the general public, the inventor moved up to the metropolis a short time since --.”

In 1881 advertisements for the **Arab Bicycle** stressed the patented, cradle spring, hub and tension spoke, the mechanically fixed tyre, ball bearings, new fork section and the alarum. They also gave around eight referees on each, two of whom lived on the Island

“If you are interested in this beautiful Machine, and want opinion as to its real merits, write to some of the following addresses:-“

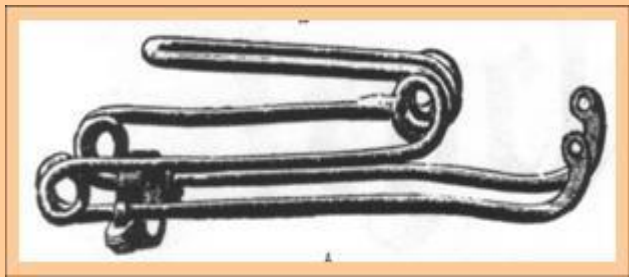
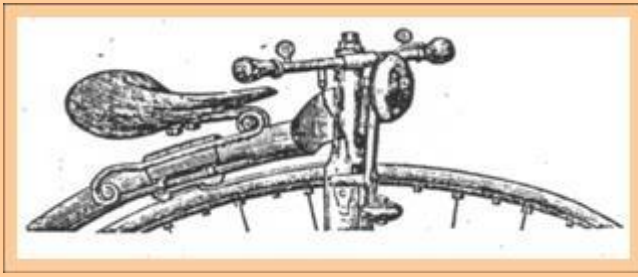
The list included:

*J. R. West, Esq., Corston House, Ryde, IW
 Maurice Dear, Esq., 6 High Street, Ventnor*

In 1879 the London Depôt was listed as at 23 Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane. By mid 1880 the address is John Harrington & Co, 18 & 20 Norman’s Building, St Luke’s near Aldersgate and Moorgate Street Stations where ‘*bicycle repairs are done by experienced workmen*’. Later advertisements announce they have moved to new showrooms at 398 Fulham Road, London and the emphasis is on the Harrington Patents, jointed seat pillars and Arab cradle springs with no mention of complete cycles. The cycling magazines of the day not only carry Harrington advertisements but also often articles. They were full of praise, not only for his inventions and improvements, but for the quality of the Harrington products.

Some early photographs still exist in private collections. One is of M. W. Wright, the famous English bicycle racer of the 1870’s with his Arab Original, which shows a rear wheel brake and the handlebars coming up to his shoulder level. The Petersfield Museum

is lucky enough to process an early Arab, which is on display and in excellent condition. The Arab photograph at the top of this essay is reproduced with their kind permission.



Over the years John Harrington added his name to several dozen patents. The bulk in the 1870' and 1880's are associated with velocipedes, bicycles, tricycles, brakes, alarms, and the 'Arab' cradle spring. The latter grew in importance and by 1885 he is manufacturing, under the Arab trademark, just springs and saddles, however, not in Ryde but in Coventry.

A drawing of one of his cradle springs is shown here and below the alarm(um), the saddle arrangement on an early cradle spring and the rim nipples for adjusting the spokes – a real problem with such large and slender wheels.

The alarm worked by a lever hitting the gong as the spokes went past it! The brake in early models, such as that in the Petersfield Museum, is just a band round the hub.

The firm's ingenuity and innovation is well illustrated using reports from trade exhibitions. The two below come from *Bicycling News* and *Sturmey's Indispensable Handbook* of 1882:

“--- Always a first-class machine, the Arab cycle is still further improved. It is enamelled with Harrington's famous rust preventer, fitted with the Arab patent head and ball-bearings, has an extra backbone, and is altogether very rigid. An ordinary lever front-wheel brake is now fitted in place of the old strap-brake on the hub. --- We may here mention, as an example of the world-famed Arab Cradle-Spring for bicycles and tricycles, that a very large percentage of machines in the Hall were fitted with these isolators of vibration ---”

“--- This firm exhibits four bicycles --- Arab methods of securing spokes in the rim by a nipple --- being held by a head in a flange in the hubs --- all are coated with Harrington's patent enamel and have the Arab cradle spring.”

The prices ranged from £11-11s for the cheaper with solid forks to £17-17s for the best. The one with ordinary spokes, hubs and rubbers sold for £13-10s.

One group of John Harrington patents appears at first sight to be out of place as they are for castors used on furniture, but can be explained by his earlier interest in roller-skates and bearings. Castors and castor bowls continued to be made in Ryde by 'Harrington Patents Limited' in a workshop, just demolished, situated between the old St James' Place and Garfield Road. A liquidation sale of stock and machinery on Friday 13th July 1900 ended the Harrington connection with Ryde completely.

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