

The story of 19forHuw – powered by the number 2 in the sky.

19forHuw was about people – so that’s the best way to tell the story – with a few comments along the way. I’m sorry it’s so long but I hope you find time to read it and that you think it’s worth it. In (approximate) order of appearance.....

Rob (Baz) and Michael (Mikey) Thatcher

The first person to mention would be Huw, but I’ve left him to the end of this story so I’m starting with Rob (Huw’s uncle) and Mikey (Huw’s cousin). These two veterans of a Huw cricket club ride in 2012 and a Huw Coast to Coast ride in 2011 did the whole 960 miles and 45,000 feet of climbing of 19forHuw – along with me. I would do anything for Huw and wanted to do something hard – but these 2 lads gave up their holiday time and free time to put themselves through a punishing 9 days for the whole trip. They are glad they did 19forHuw and that has reminded me how strongly Rob, Mikey and others feel about Huw too. Carys and I are lucky to have a family that includes these 2 lads who showed guts and determination - never more so than the moral sapping 30 mile ride out to Scunthorpe on day 5 into the wind – knowing we had to cycle all the way back (all be it with the wind). Both these two were very strong on the bikes and Mikey the best climber of all the cyclists involved. I’m proud of Baz and Mikey – and it was obvious that they earned the friendship and respect of others throughout the trip. They were my two rocks – like Baz has been at various times in my life. Thanks lads – I’ll never forget.



Tired but got there in the end - at Scunthorpe (ground number 11).

Day 1 comment

With thanks to my Mum for a nice pre-cycling curry on the previous night and a relaxing evening. When I woke up at Mum’s I just hoped we could all do the ride without injury or physical or mechanical failure. There were a few dramas but I

should have known we'd do it - for the big guy in the sky. On day 1 I loved cycling through Cardiff, past the football ground, where Huw fell in love with Cardiff City as a little boy 13 years ago, at the same place where I fell in love with them at the same age. Whoever said football is just a game?



The little boy – on the day he fell in love with Cardiff City in January 2001

Johnny Thatcher and Doug Wilson

Two more of Huw's cousins who I am proud of - and Huw would be. Doug had previously ridden 100 miles (as a 13 year old) for the Huw Trust, and both of them one of the Coast to Coast rides. But on 19th and 20th July they both rode the furthest they had in their lives as they powered through 108 miles on each of the first 2 days. The banter started early on during the first day as Johnny and Doug (along with one or two others) unwisely left their waterproofs in the support vehicle at the Severn Bridge, just before a 2 ½ hour torrential thunder storm! But along with the remaining 6 of us, they stuck at it as we covered the full distance by 8.00pm - a late finish on day 1 but an unforgettable day – rounded off by the hospitality of (Aunty) Carol Thatcher in Newbury.



Arriving in Newbury on day 1 – 12 hours of cycling, 2 ½ hours of torrential rain, 108 miles, 5,000 feet of climbing and 9 punctures!

Goodman Maddocks (Harry), Rob Purchase (Purch), and Mike Daley

Great company and great cycling on Saturday 19th from 3 of the senior members of the team. A great effort from the three West Wales lads to comfortably get through 108 miles in tough conditions. Mike was a great team player, who hadn't met some of the group before – but fell in smoothly with everyone. The other two (Harry and Purch) I have known since I was 18 – so always a pleasure to spend time with these guys and dig up old stories. Purch, Harry and Mike were committed throughout, with a long drive back at the end of the day – but nothing that a few beers and a curry wouldn't put right!



Some of the day 1 group fixing one of the many day 1 punctures.

Me – Nick Thatcher – aka Baz

A very proud Dad of Huw and Carys. Through 19forHuw giving what I could to Huw before a holiday with Carys. Spent loads of time dreaming about my beautiful son throughout the 9 days and also learnt more about myself, learnt more about cycling, loved the banter with superb people, had a great laugh, made some new friends, got to know existing friends better, got fitter, and raised money in Huw's name. What could be better?



The day 1 group at the Cardiff City stadium (ground number 1).

David (Stanley) Algar

Stan is another guy I've known since I was young so the banter continued as soon as we met him at Wembley. A fine effort from Stan (as a non-regular cyclist) to get through 50 plus miles on day 2 and I'm glad Stan made it to meet up with some of the charity staff and service users from BIRT (Brain Injury Rehabilitation Trust) at Milton Keynes Dons (ground number 3) – pictured overleaf.



Day 2 comment

Being at Wembley (ground number 2) was a poignant time because I had photographed Huw here 6 years previously.



Huw at the Bobby Moore statue in 2008

My heart was also with my wonderful brother Mark who tragically passed away at the age of 48 shortly after a family Cardiff City trip to Wembley in 2008.



The 19forHuw group at the same Bobby Moore statue in 2014.

Matt Hopkinson

It was a pleasure to meet Matt from my work on day 3 and despite turning up on a £150 bike, he set a superb pace, leading us into Nottingham bang on time. A rapid and late finish but we loved the evening of day 3 - hammering it to the ground - with a purpose. Matt is one of 3 people from work I met up with a month after the events of March 2011 – so it was fitting he was with us for part of 19forHuw. Thanks Matt for your pace, enthusiasm and great company – it gave us a real boost.



Lifting the European Cup for Huw at Nottingham Forest (ground number 5)

Day 3 comment

Going to Nottingham Forest was an evocative time - this is the last ground I took Huw to - a day that will stay with me for all my life. A day with a handsome, talented, and optimistic 15 year old in February 2011 - discussing Nottingham as a potential University location and loving his company - feeling proud of my tall, handsome and funny son. I felt just as proud on day 3 as we made it to Leicester City and Nottingham Forest.



A group of us at Leicester (ground number 4) on day 2.

The Road Captain (James Charlesworth)

James and his family were very fond of Huw and we loved having James with us on day 4 – particularly as he helped set a decent pace and bossed the road. Like Matt H before him and others after him, James was a considerate and very competent cyclist which really helped. Lots of good banter too and it was great to have Sue with us towards the end of the day as well. #biglump #don'targuewithJames



At Derby with the Road Captain – ground number 6.

The support crew

Throughout 19forHuw we were privileged to be perfectly supported every day. The 'tuckmobile' (as the support vehicles became known) was a very welcome sight after hours of cycling. There were no difficulties or any problems at all with this side of the trip which is a credit to the support crews who have all got involved in other activities to remember Huw in the past too:

- Tony, Fran and Larnie Wilson (Huw's Uncle, Aunt and cousin) – days 1 and 2
- Jenny and Carys Thatcher (Huw's Mum and sister) – days 3 and 4.
- Russ Briggs (friend and Dad of Huw's good friend Sam) – day 5.
- Steve (Yardie) Thatcher (Huw's Uncle) – days 6, 7 and 8. As an aside Steve cycled the 190 miles from Cardiff to Holmfirth in one day in July 2011 for the Huw Thatcher Trust – so he knows what kind of cyclist support is needed.
- Anne Woolhouse (friend and Mum of Huw's good friend Mattie) – day 9.

A special thank you to all the above – and pictured below are me and support crew member Carys in the seats at Bramall Lane (ground number 7) where we watched Sheffield United vs Cardiff City in 2009 with Huw. It was lovely to have Carys with us, but also a moment of reflection to have the photo with just 2 of us in the picture.



Moments of reflection with Carys at Sheffield United

The brothers Briggs (Russ and David Briggs)

Russ and Dave met us in the sweltering heat of Rotherham (ground number 8) and put in a fantastic 40 mile effort. It was notable because Russ only started cycling last year and during that time endured a bad injury – and because Dave was cycling on a particularly high geared road bike that made things tough for the final stretch that included a long hill.



Outside Rotherham United's ground (not sure why it's called the New York stadium).

Day 4 comment

A key time for me was arriving Barnsley (ground number 9) – memories include 3 trips there with Huw and our trip to Wembley in 2008 to see Cardiff vs Barnsley in the FA Cup semi final. It was a special day in 2008, as we travelled down the M1 alongside the Barnsley fans amid lots of good natured football banter. A day free of worry and concern.....a day of fun.....imagining a future as Cardiff City fans together come thick or thin.



At Barnsley 6 years later in 2014 – me and the 5 lads from day 4.

Mattie Woolhouse

Mattie joined us on day 5 – and completed 5 days of the challenge – giving up 5 days of his time and expenditure on accommodation – for his oldest friend. What can I say about Matt? Apart from cousins he is Huw's oldest friend. Mattie's first word was 'Huw' and they adored each other ever since they were babies. Young people are lucky if they can have friendships like Huw and Matt had, and they should last a lifetime. Despite the circumstances, I'm sure Huw will be with Matt all his life. Something that will stick with me was the friendship and consideration shown by Mattie to all of us during the ride – and especially him helping me out at difficult times. I hope Huw was watching on as his oldest friend, was looking out for his Dad.



A favourite photo of mine – Mattie and Huw in happy times as toddlers at Sands.

Josh and Jeremy Hoyle

Jeremy organised the Huw Trust Sports night back in March 2012. That was a great contribution to the Trust and since then he hasn't sat back - completing a personal goal – a full Ironman. Respect to Jeremy for that and it was amusing to hear about his nutritional arrangements back at the cricket club, after he had met us as Sheffield Wednesday's ground earlier that day. His son Josh is no slouch either! Josh played local derbies against Huw for many years and knew Huw as a tough but likeable opponent. Josh cycled day 5 with us and seemed to have as much energy after 110 miles as he did at the beginning!



At Bradford (ground number 10) with Josh on day 5.

Fletch (Flemming Christiansen)

Fletch didn't know us before the ride and we didn't know him – but sometimes you just hit it off with someone. We all admired Fletch's cycling ability (the best of the group on the flat, and reasonable hills – only to be out done by Mikey on extended hills). We also respected his road sense and cycling experience. We were grateful for his consideration – using his power to take the wind on many occasions. Maybe the thing we'll remember most is the camaraderie and his sense of humour – the combination of his dry humour and his Leeds / Wakefield accent was a winner every time. I won't forget the banter about the endless Malt Loaf snacks; the bacon sandwich tucked down his back pocket 'for later'; his comment if someone went past him on the bike 'Oh it's like that is it?' before he swept past them again; or his comment about the irate driver 'Well 'e **were** smiling you know – it's just that it were upside down'. It was perfect to have a BIRT employee with us. I'm proud of the Huw Thatcher Trust and proud that Fletch gave up 5 days of his time for 19forHuw.



With staff and service users at Daniel Yorath House – the first service supported by The Huw Thatcher Trust.

Day 5 comment

The day 5 group (minus Fletch who we met at Daniel Yorath House) setting off from Sands. This is a special place where young people and children (and plenty of adults) have fun and chill out – this included Huw in the past and is the place where many of us gathered in March 2011.



Starting day 5 in front of Huw's memorial bench and tubs at Sands.

Day 6 comment

There were no new cyclists on day 6 – it was the core team – me, Bas and Mikey – along with Fletch and Mattie who were completing their second day of 5. This was a tough day – we didn't get to Newcastle until 11.00pm and had cycled 126 miles. Then we had to get up the next day at 6.30 for another similarly testing day. Now you see why I say this trip took courage, guts and determination from all the cyclists. Pictured below we are at Sunderland (ground number 13) and with thanks to the stadium staff we were allowed in when we arrived at 8.00pm and were also met by local BIRT staff and service users for much appreciated refreshments, sandwiches and cakes. It was a brilliant stop – to see the charity we support and have a good laugh with a lovely group of people. It was a lovely and well informed touch from a local Sunderland fan to comment and hash tag on Twitter #you'llalwaysbeblue



Kev Girdlestone

Kev completed two days – meeting us first at Newcastle (ground number 14) as below. Kev has been a great friend and supporter of the Huw Trust over the years and rated the 107-mile trip across the Pennines to Garstang as in the top 20 days of his life; this statement made us laugh but he truly meant it! Despite the 8,000 feet of climbing, every time I saw Kev he was smiling. That enthusiasm rubbed off on all of us and as always with the Huw Trust (and as a friend), Kev was more than happy to give up his time and costs – travelling to Newcastle to join us and spending 2 days with us when he has a young family at home.



Steve Molloy

One of the best things of 10forHuw was having different cyclists with us – and it was great so have another fine cyclist with us on day 7. So good was Steve that Kev named him 'the tarmac muncher' – I'm not sure if Steve was aware of that complement but he will be if he reads this! Like everybody Steve was accommodating and patient – and also helped with the navigation (courtesy of his bike-mounted sat-nav) – Bas, our regular navigator was very grateful for a break from these duties! At the end of Steve said 'thank you for letting me be part of this'. I'm glad it meant something to Steve but having taken the trouble to travel to Newcastle and pay various accommodation costs, and provide a donation - the thanks should be mine. Here's a picture of the scenery from that day – England's last great wilderness – the Northern Pennines. Breathtaking.



Day 7 comment

The day started in hilarious fashion with Yardie (pictured) pulling out of St James' Park, holding up the local traffic, with the stands of that massive stadium towering over us. Then he stopped and wound down his window and shouted out 'We're Cardiff City and we'll drive where we want'. Kev and me nearly wet ourselves laughing - that's the kind of spirit that gets you off to a good start on days like this.



Day 7 also saw an emotional and impressive train of all 7 of us on a charge – covering the last 23 miles in just over an hour. I had it in me to push myself to my cycling limit at some point in the trip and I put down the hammer at Kirby Lonsdale – I was proud to lead these fine cyclists on the charge to Garstang – at a punishing pace for mile after mile. To their credit they all stuck with it (not because they did well to keep up with me as such – they were all better on the bike than me normally) – but this was not normal and the pace was relentless – I was powered by Huw and by the emotion of my beautiful son who spurred me to the limit that night. Kev was standing up, fist pumping and cheering as we arrived at Garstang ahead of schedule adrenalin flowing, and for me - my body and heart full of emotion and pride #thepoweroflove, #thepowerofHuw, #hammeringitdowntheA6forHuw.

The football clubs

A massive thank you to the people who took the trouble to make us welcome and set up a nice reception at Leicester City, Nottingham Forest, Derby County, Sheffield United, Rotherham United, Middlesbrough, Sunderland, and Stockport. All these clubs, along with Blackpool and Preston provided signed memorabilia or free tickets - for this we are very grateful. Pictured overleaf is the group at Middlesbrough (ground number 12) where Huw and I had visited in 2008. Boro even put an article on their website here: <http://www.mfc.co.uk/page/news/latest/0,,1~4033498,00.html> – thank you Yvonne.



Churmy (Chris Churm)

Churmy is relatively new to cycling but took the plunge to join us at Wigan for a 43 mile ride – his longest ever spin. But wait a minute - the next thing I knew, he'd done nearly 2 full days and covered 64 and 87 miles in each day respectively. Not only that but he's raised over £300 in sponsorship. What Churmy did captured the spirit of 19forHuw. Not only that but he arranged with his pal to get fresh hot pies for us all at the Pie capital of England.....Wigan. This led to predictable chat about 'who ate all the pies' but the truth was that was a wonderful gesture – one of many made throughout the trip that also captured the spirit of what we were doing. So thanks to Churmy for that effort and to Dave for the pies. And also thanks Churmy for taking the trouble to advise me of the brand and style of the decorative paving I argued with near Sheffield hahaha. Actually, like Chris's aches the following day, I'm glad of the temporary ache in my knee as a reminder of what we all achieved together. Here is Churmy with us at Wigan (ground number 17) – after we'd scoffed the pies.



Day 8 comment

Day 8 was less hard than the previous 3 which meant we finished at 7.15pm, ending with the climb from Greenfield to the top of Saddleworth Moor. I felt privileged to finish that climb with Bas and Churmy – 2 like minded and more than capable cyclists. Here is picture of the group at Preston North End (ground number 16).



The BIRT staff and service users

We were met by BIRT staff and service users at Milton Keynes, Daniel Yorath House (near Leeds), Selby, Sunderland, Blackpool, and Wigan. Every time I met a service user I admired their spirit and fortitude – and also felt grateful that I was able to be cycling out in the fresh air. Every time I met a BIRT member of staff I admired their dedication, and noted that they were lucky to work for an organisation like BIRT. Thank you for the encouragement, drinks and snacks to all the BIRT services, including those at Swindon who I apologise for missing due to the thunderstorms and punctures. Also a big thank you to Helen, Emma and Chris at the BIRT Head Office for helping us in advance of the event – especially for arranging the 'Eat Natural' and 'Soreen' snacks that fuelled us through those long days! Here's the group of us at Blackpool (ground number 15) with some local BIRT staff and service users.



And now to tell you about the BIRT cakes at Wigan.....with heartfelt thanks to Alison who made 48 perfect and delicious cakes. Seeing Huw's name, the blue and white icing, and the Cardiff City bluebirds for Huw brought a lump to my throat – and I wasn't the only one who felt like that. Incredibly thoughtful and also of high quality. They have all now been eaten and some of them were enjoyed by the cyclists at the end of the ride on Sunday – a perfect way to end the event.



Al Heeley, Rob Crabtree, Paul Sleeney, John Mclean.

This group of 4 joined us for the last day – making light work of the 87 miles and 6,000 feet of elevation. My connection with these 4 guys is through local band Age of Paranoia (who have supported the Huw Trust immensely), and local cricket, football and hockey clubs – that are such an important part of the fantastic Holmfirth community. It was a pleasure to cycle with these guys on the last day, although I was so shattered by this stage, that I spent a fair bit of the time looking at their backs!



The final day group at the top of Saddleworth before we met the cricket club cyclists

The Upperthong Cricket Club cyclists and support drivers

A further group of 13 cyclists joined us at Hillsborough on the last day – meaning there were 24 of us cycling the last leg. The cricket club where Huw played as a junior and youth player, continues to be so supportive of Huw’s family and the Huw Trust – it is always a place where I feel comfortable and welcome. Thank you to Joy Oakley, Jackie Dickinson, and Russ Briggs for organising things at the cricket club and to both support crews for the cricket club cyclists. Here is a picture of the whole group at Sheffield Wednesday’s ground, Hillsborough (the final ground - number 19).



People who sponsored us

Thank you to everyone who sponsored us. There were some incredibly generous donations, but I value every hard earned penny that is given to the Huw Thatcher Trust so I won't mention any sponsors individually. What I do want to say is that so far 19forHuw has raised well over £3,000 with at least a further £400 to come. The money is gratefully received by BIRT and will be used wisely by them (in agreement with me). Thank you so much to everyone who sponsored us – it helped spur us on and goes to a great cause. We worked hard for the sponsorship though as evidenced by our arrival at our bed and breakfast in Selby on day 5 at 9.00pm - pictured here in the last of the daylight.



Day 9 comment

It was fitting that Stockport County (ground number 18 and the lowest of all the clubs in the football divisions) was one of the friendliest. We were given impromptu access to the ground and allowed to sit in the seats where Huw had sat 12 years ago to watch Cardiff draw 2-2 with Stockport in League 1 (pictured below). I am grateful for the support from the football and sporting community for 19forHuw .



19forHuw was hard, but I wanted it to be hard to demonstrate what we were prepared to do for Huw, to make it worthwhile as a physical challenge, and to justify sponsorship. It was fitting to start the last day in Holmfirth and finish it at the cricket club where Huw had so many happy times. With heartfelt thanks and respect to everyone involved.



Huw Thatcher

I love this 2008 quote from Bobby Robson:

What is a (football) club in any case? Not the buildings or the directors or the people who are paid to represent it. It's not the television contracts, marketing departments or executive boxes. It's the noise, the passion, the feeling of belonging, the pride in your city. It's a small boy clambering up the stadium steps for the first time, gripping his father's hand, gawping at the hallowed stretch of turf beneath him and, without being able to do a thing about it, falling in love.

In January 2001 Huw was that small boy – gripping my hand at Cardiff for an FA cup match vs Crewe. I leave you with the young guy pictured overleaf nearly 10 years later – a perfect son, brother, cousin, nephew, grandson, and friend. The boy who was everything his parents dreamt of and inspired the fantastic event that was: 19forHuw.

