

Charles Kellow on Two Wheels Penny Farthing Bicycles to Motor Bikes

David Neely
History Consultant
The Sir Henry Royce Foundation, Australia

Charles Kellow was winning bicycle races in Australia at the same time as Charles Rolls (1877-1910) was competing in races at Cambridge University in the mid 1890s.

The Kellow name is known in Australian Rolls-Royce and Bentley motoring circles from the Melbourne firm of Kellow-Falkiner established in 1913. Before that he held the first Rolls-Royce agency in the country in 1906 and imported the first Rolls-Royce in February 1907. A brush with Rolls came when he had a flight in England in Charles Rolls's balloon in 1908, though it is likely they met earlier. However, it all started with Kellow's racing successes and business enterprises with two wheels, from penny farthings and bicycles to motorised bicycles and motor bikes. And that goes back to about 1890.



Above: Charles Kellow winner of the Austral Wheel Race in 1896 on his Red Bird machine. He covered the two miles in 4 minutes 29 seconds. [Melbourne Weekly Times 12 December 1896]

Below: Charles Rolls at Cambridge University in 1895.



*Legend and Rolls' Tandem
Camb. University 1895.*



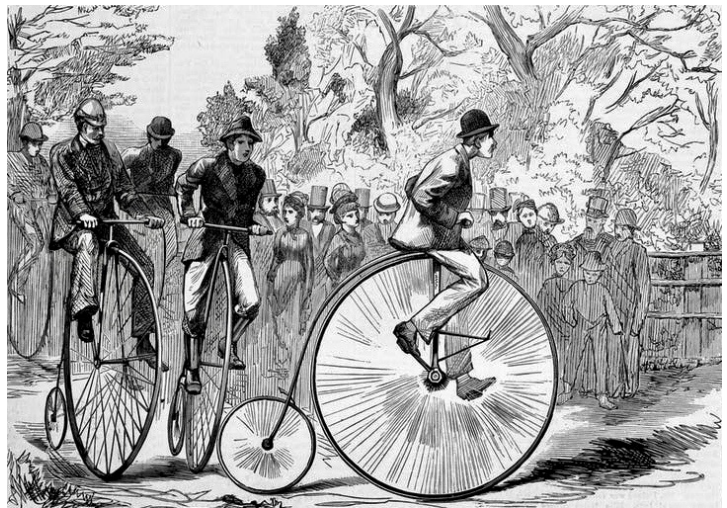
*Rolls, Steward, Henry, Farrand.
'The Cambridge Road.
1895.*

Kellow was named at birth Henry Brown Kellow, (1871-1943). He changed his first name to Charles by deed poll and was known as "C. B." or "Charlie". He was born at Castlemaine, Victoria, the youngest of 10 siblings. His father Joseph (1827-1910), was born in Bodmin, Cornwall, England. His mother was Elizabeth (née Patterson) (1828-1908), who was born in Alnwick, Northumberland, England and migrated to Melbourne in 1852. They were married in 1856 in Melbourne. The family were wealthy graziers at Sutton Grange north-east of Castlemaine and south-east of Bendigo, Victoria. A remaining link between the family and the district is Kellow Street in Sutton Grange. Kellow was educated at King's College, Fitzroy (not Clifton Hill as recorded in some sources). Aged 15, "H. Kellow" was awarded a special prize for "General Improvement" at his school speech night in December 1886. While the name of the college may suggest royal patronage it was a private enterprise established by Mr King in the 1870s.

Kellow married Flora McRae Coles (1876-1923) in 1898 and they had four girls. He married Lucy Maude Sommerville Hutchings (1876-1965) in 1926.

Kellow worked in the real estate firm of (Sir) James Patterson (1833-1895), his uncle on his mother's side. He then served an apprenticeship with Patterson, Laing and Bruce, textile, clothing and footwear importers and wholesalers, in their grand warehouse in Flinders Lane, Melbourne. Kellow would be immersed in the business world soon enough but his next venture was bicycle racing, all the rage in the 1890s. And he was very good.

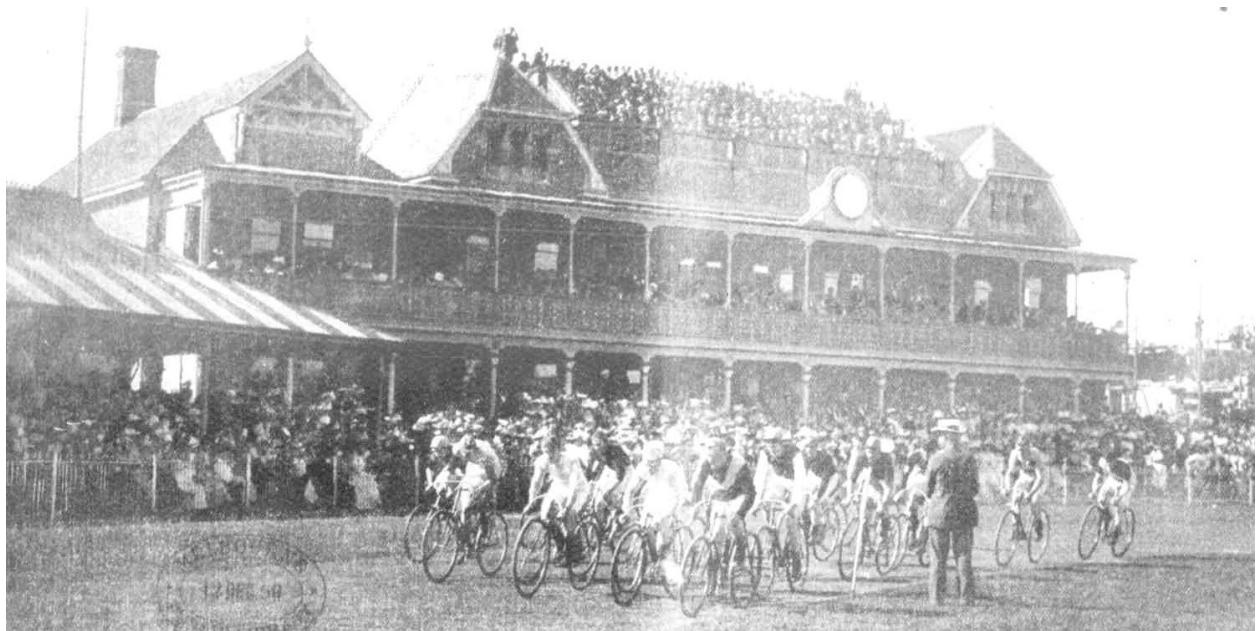
Kellow started riding competitively around 1890. His mount was a high wheel penny farthing in the days before the safety bicycle familiar today. He was placed third in the 1891 Austral Wheel Race run over two miles (3.2 kms). It was won by Arthur Turner off a handicap of 240 yds (200 m). Placed second was Kellow's future business partner, W. Howard Lewis. The Austral Wheel Race is the oldest track bicycle handicap race in the world still existing. It started in 1886. It gained a reputation as the Melbourne Cup of cycling. Incidentally, Kellow won the actual Melbourne Cup in 1933 with his racehorse *Heroic*. After the 1891 racing season Kellow went on a trip to England, the first of some 15 overseas trips.



Above: The Melbourne Bicycle Club opening meet on 3 October 1878 showing the start of the St Kilda to Mordialloc penny farthing bicycle run. [State Library of Victoria]

Mid-way through his cycling career Kellow went to the West Australian goldfields. The search for gold was a boyhood ambition from the tales he heard from old miners. He was issued with a miner's right at Coolgardie in 1894. His claim called the Wealth of Nations was 40 miles (65 kms) from Coolgardie. Kellow was popular and his mates challenged all-comers to race him on a bike. In 1895 an English syndicate offered to buy the lease and Kellow returned to Melbourne with £1,500, about \$300,000 today, from the sale. Before he left, however, there was a custom for anyone selling out to shout the pub and marathon drinking sessions were not unusual. An Afghan camel driver arrived and Kellow invited him to join them in a drink. He declined explaining it was against his religious beliefs but his camel was very thirsty. Kellow called on the publican to give the camel his fill. Reports of the amount the camel drank vary from 17 to 22 gallons (83 litres) of water. Nevertheless, when the publican gave him the bill Kellow paid up and chuckled as he discovered water was more expensive than beer. Water had to be carted 40 miles.

Back in Melbourne Kellow was about to achieve the pinnacle of bicycle racing. He won the Austral Wheel Race in 1896 in world record time, almost off scratch with a handicap of only 15 yards (14 m). His main rival was R (Bobby) H Walne, who was on a handicap of 20 yards. Bicycle design had by now evolved to the safety bike. Kellow's success in the Austral in front of a crowd of 25,000 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground yielded him £300 when the cost of a bicycle was £20. There were a number of licensed bookmakers associated with bicycle racing and some judicious wagers added to Kellow's winnings. Betting no doubt accounted for some of the popularity of cycling. The spectacle perhaps provided some distraction from the harsh economic times in the 1890s.



Above: A heat of the Austral passing the Members Pavilion at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The popularity of the sport is shown by the spectators crowding the pavilion roof. [Melbourne Weekly Times 12 December 1896]

Indeed, the popularity of cycling in the 1890s was absolutely immense. To get a sense of this, the population of Melbourne rose from 280,000 to 445,000 in the 1890s. Say it was 390,000 in 1896, so 6.4% watched the Austral Wheel Race. That is the equivalent to 256,000 in Melbourne's population today. The Melbourne Cricket Ground has a capacity of 100,000 so the size of the 1896 Austral crowd would nowadays fill the MCG two and half times over.

Kellow was interviewed after the Austral and for cycling enthusiasts this is how he described his tactics. "If I could only catch the field I'd have a big chance, and only Walne to beat. But I couldn't get there alone, so Walne and I arranged to take lap about till we caught them, and then go on our own. Walne took me along at a terrific pace. By jove, that was a fast lap! And then I took my turn, and before we had finished the lap we were with them. Then I had to watch for position. It's not so easy to ride fast, but it's a great deal harder to keep position. Once I was nearly over. My word, didn't I heave a sigh of relief when I found that little beauty there – see it.

Look at it over there, that grand little Red Bird (the brand of Kellow's bike) – was right up straight and taking me along safely. I was afraid of Walne, and when Clinton rushed out in the last lap I put in all I knew. I never went so fast in my life, and I got up to him and held him safe. Then when the last corner came, I held my machine as steady as I could, and looked up towards Melbourne. Do you know what I saw?" "What?" "Three hundred golden sovs. (sovereigns as in money) strewn across the line. That line wasn't white at all. It was yellow. Across it I flew, and I wasn't happy at all." He was of course very happy and this strange turn of phrase was a speech characteristic of Kellow, who sometimes spoke in the negative. Kellow had been in partnership with Lewis for a year and their firm and the Red Bird bicycles they sold received a tremendous boost from the publicity after Kellow's Austral win. Lewis couldn't resist, in good-humour, reminding the press he beat Kellow in the 1891 Austral!



Above: "After the Austral" shows Kellow, the hero of the hour, holding his straw hat. [Melbourne Weekly Times 12 December 1896]



Oh yes!

There were other Wheels in the Race, but only

ONE RED BIRD.

C. B. KELLOW hadn't won a race for 12 months until he mounted a Red Bird; after that he couldn't lose.

On Road or Track our Crimson Wheel daily proves its superiority.

• •

10 wins out of 12 starts!

That's Charlie's record since he crossed our Crimson Wheel.

During the last 3 weeks C. B. KELLOW, the Austral Winner, has scooped in nearly

£500!

You can't help winning on a Red Bird.

THE TWO WINNERS—CHARLIE KELLOW ON HIS RED BIRD.

The Australian Cyclist. December 10, 1896.

Run your Hands through your Hair, and think of this:

At the **FIRST TRY!!**

The **RED BIRD** won the **Austral. . .**

Does that show you nothing? Well, have a go at this:

C. B. Kellow Won in a walk.

Record Money	£300
Entry	127 Competitors
Time	4 min. 29 sec.
Crowd	25,000 People

Facts, not Fancy!

One Month's Riding by Kellow on a Red Bird with Dunlop Tires—

November 9—Gaulthorn, N.S.W.—1st Half-mile; 1st One Mile	£45
21—St. Kilda—1st Wheel Race	50
December 5 } 1st Austral Wheel Race	300
1st M.B.C. Plate	40
Grand Total,	£415

Red Birds.
Trents.
Repairs.
Sundries.

Lewis & Kellow,
154 Swanston Street,
MELBOURNE.

Lewis was an outstanding exponent of the penny farthing machine but failed to make the transition to the safety bike. He retired from racing in 1892 after suffering a broken collarbone. William Howard Horatio Lewis (1868-1939) ran a Melbourne bicycle manufacturing, importing and repair business from about 1890. His first partnership was with Ernest Beauchamp. However, in 1893 Beauchamp set up business on his own in South Yarra and later in Prahran as The Beauchamp Cycle Manufacturing Co.

Lewis went into partnership with Kellow in 1895 as Lewis & Kellow, Nimrod Cycle Agency, at 358 & 360 Elizabeth Street and in 1896 as Lewis & Kellow at 154 Swanston Street. The partnership was dissolved in March 1898 and Kellow took over the management of the firm. Lewis went on to play a prominent part in the motor industry.

Above left and right: Kellow was a master at exploiting successes in advertising. These advertisements for Red Bird bicycles appeared on 10 December 1896.

Below: An advertisement from The Australian Cyclist 3 October 1895.

October 3rd, 1895. The Australian Cyclist. 9

ZIMMERMAN THE WORLD'S CHAMPION

Is now riding a **NIMROD-ZIMMY** weighing only 19 lbs. Hitherto he has never ridden a machine lighter than 24 lbs, thus showing that the

NIMROD

Is the lightest and most trustworthy machine in the World.

P.S.—If you are in a dilemma as to which machine to ride, follow the Champion.

Good Trustworthy Country Agents wanted. Repairs Promptly and Well. Inspection Invited.

LEWIS & KELLOW, Nimrod Cycle Agency, 358 & 360 Elizabeth Street,
Next Latrobe Street, MELBOURNE.


16. *The Australian Cyclist.* January 2nd, 1896.

Lewis

AND

Kellow,

CYCLE AGENTS.



358 & 360

Elizabeth Street,

NEXT LATROBE STREET. MELBOURNE.

REPAIRS
PROMPTLY and WELL.
 By Experienced Workmen.

New AND
Second-hand Machines.

CASH OR TERMS.

Above: An advertisement from *The Australian Cyclist* 2 January 1896.

When Lewis left the bicycle business he joined Harley Tarrant (1860-1949) in the Tarrant Motor and Engineering Company in 1899. They were joined in 1903 by William Stuart Ross, a Scotsman who came to Australia after working at the British Argyll car factory. They built one of the earliest Australian-made, petrol driven cars.

In May 1898 Kellow was selling Royal Enfield bicycles still from 154 Swanston Street trading as C. B. Kellow. The 25 August 1898 issue of *Australian Cyclist* reported, "Kellow's repair department, situated in Royal Lane, off Collins Street, is always kept busy. This house has a reputation for doing work quickly and in the best possible style."

26 *The Australian Cyclist* May 19, 1898.

On a Royal Enfield



WON THE 25 MILES VICTORY ROAD RACE.



ALBERT DIXON, winner of the Victory Club 25 Mile Road Race, on his 22 lb. Royal Enfield, fitted with Dunlop Tires.

There were 170 nominations for the Victory 25 miles Road Race, which included such cranks as Roddy, Corbett, Hunt, Forbes, &c. Dixon rode a 92lb geared Royal Enfield, weighing only 22lbs. The roads were very bad, giving the machine the severest test possible. Dixon did not train for this race, and was unspaced. For quickness, durability, comfort and value, Royal Enfields cannot be excelled.

C. B. KELLOW,

154 SWANSTON STREET, MELBOURNE.

Send for a nicely-illustrated Catalogue. Sent everywhere post free.

Right: An advertisement from *The Australian Cyclist* 19 May 1898.

Lily Langtry as the Pompadour.
C.B.K.

Lily Langtry
rides a
Royal Enfield -
Made like a Gun -
C.B.K.

A
Royal
Mount
The
Royal
Enfield

Agent for Royal Enfield Cycles,
fitted with Dunlop Tires,

C. B. KELLOW.

154 SWANSTON STREET, MELBOURNE.

"Lily Langtry rides a Royal Enfield" was Kellow's slogan in this unusual advertisement from *The Australian Cyclist* 25 August 1898. Langtry, an English socialite and actress, was the poster-girl for Pears' soap in 1882. Kellow included his initials. Was this a parody of the Pears promotion and a double entendre alluding to her famous affairs with royalty – "A Royal Mount The Royal Enfield"?

Pears' Soap



"For years I have used your soap, and no other."

Lily Langtry

In January 1900 Kellow advertised his own Kellow Cycles as C. B. Kellow, Manufacturer. By September 1900 Kellow was also selling Empire Cycles and now claimed his business was established in 1889, a claim that would continue to be made into the 1920s. The establishment date is curious unless Kellow was relying on the beginning of Lewis's business, which as mentioned started about 1890. However, 1889 for Kellow's business is a bit of a stretch. Perhaps it was a marketing ploy.

KELLOW CYCLES.
One Best Grade, £20.
 Do not fail to inspect Special 1900 Pattern Racers and Road Racers. In construction and design they stand alone. — Art catalogue post free.
FREE WHEEL DEVICE FULLY ILLUSTRATED.

EMPIRE CYCLES.
"UNEQUALLED VALUE."
 Built from Genuine B.S.A. Latest Pattern Parts, to order, **£12 10s. cash**; Terms, **£15 10s.** Deposit, **£3**; and balance at **22s. 6d.** monthly.
C. B. KELLOW, Manufacturer, 154 Swanston St., Melbourne.
Catalogue Post Free. Established 1889.

Above: "Established 1889" in this advertisement from The Australian Cyclist 6 September 1900.

Below: An advertisement from The Australian Cyclist 4 January 1900. "All over Australia", except Tasmania?

KELLOW CYCLES

ALL OVER AUSTRALIA

ONE GRADE ONLY
THE BEST

£20. Cash or Terms.

C. B. KELLOW,
 Manufacturer, 154 Swanston St., Melbourne.

His next business line was in motorised bicycles and motorcycles.

In 1903 C. B. Kellow was the sole agent for Beeston-Humber Cycles and Motors and the Werner Motocyclette, which was a motorized bicycle and in turn developed into a motor cycle we would recognise today. In October 1903 Kellow raced on a 2¾ hp chain-drive Humber.



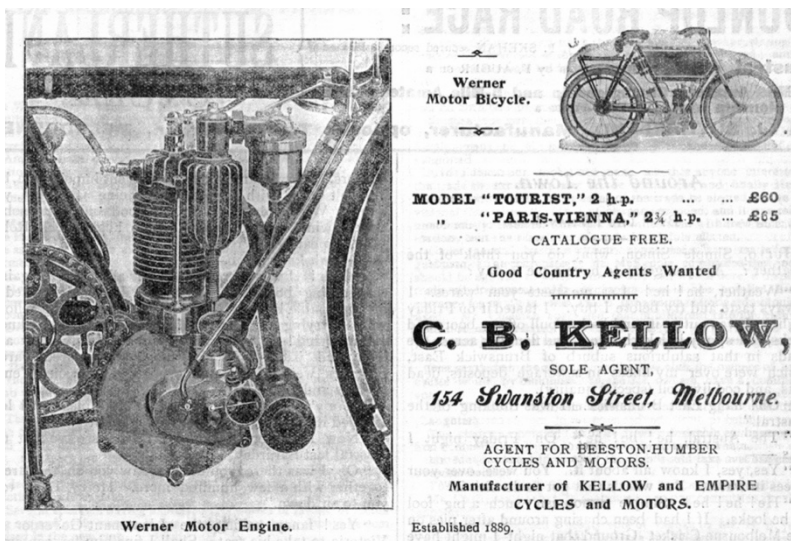
C. B. KELLOW,
SOLE AGENT FOR
**BEESTON-HUMBER
CYCLES AND MOTORS**
AND
**THE WERNER
MOTOCYCLETTE.**

STOCK OF ALL MODELS.
INSPECTION INVITED.
ART CATALOGUE POST FREE.

.....MANUFACTURER OF.....
KELLOW and EMPIRE CYCLES and MOTORS.

Showrooms, 154 Swanston Street.
ESTD. 1889. *Factory, 355 Lonsdale Street.*

The 17 December 1903 issue of *The Australian Cyclist and Motor-Car World* reported that Humber, Werner and Kellow motor bicycles could “be inspected at the Kellow factory, 355 Lonsdale Street.” It also reported, “The motor garage recently opened at the Kellow Cycle Works, 355 Lonsdale Street, is now in full swing.... In this department bicycles and cars can be stored and repaired.”



Werner Motor Engine.

Werner Motor Bicycle.

MODEL "TOURIST," 2 h.p.	... £60
" " "PARIS-VIENNA," 2½ h.p.	... £65

CATALOGUE FREE.

Good Country Agents Wanted

C. B. KELLOW,
SOLE AGENT,
154 Swanston Street, Melbourne.

AGENT FOR BEESTON-HUMBER
CYCLES AND MOTORS.
Manufacturer of KELLOW and EMPIRE
CYCLES and MOTORS.
Established 1889.

Top: An advertisement from The Australian Cyclist and Motor-Car World 24 September 1903.

Above right: An advertisement for a Werner motor bicycle 17 December 1903.

In 1901 Kellow imported his first cars, though they seem to be more for his own use and publicity. Charlie Kellow was now poised for motoring through the length and breadth of the Edwardian era. And what a drive!

Acknowledgement: Assistance from Tom Clarke, who pointed out quite correctly that the bicycle though popularly called a penny farthing, its actual name is Ordinary. An English newspaper report from 1929 claimed the term “penny-farthing” applied to the old high bicycle was of recent usage, “When the early form of safety appeared, one was called the ‘ordinary’ bicycle and the other the ‘safety’ bicycle. As the newer form, with pneumatic tyres, became more popular, the safety became a ‘bicycle’, and the other the ‘good old ordinary’, or ‘G.O.O’. – but never the ‘penny farthing’”. I have chosen the now popular penny farthing. David Neely, Sydney, January 2025.



*Right: Portrait of C B Kellow from 1912.
[Punch 5 September 1912]*