The Conception and Early History of 'Schoolboy Scrambling'

In 1963 with my parents and myself interested in motor cycle scrambling, Brian Warwick, a family friend who was riding in scrambles, came to our house and told my parents that he knew where there was a BSA Bantam for sale.
His idea was for me to make a scrambles bike out of it so as I could learn to ride.
There was of course a few 'ums' and 'ahs', but mum being the motorcycle maniac twisted dads' arm into letting me have the machine.

Brian, Dad and I stripped, modified and rebuilt the bike so as it resembled something of a scrambler. Then with the help of another local scrambler, Fred Giles, I learnt to ride on a course which we laid out in some woods in the Woodcote area.
This carried on for about a year with them saying that I was improving.

At this time we were members of Reading Ace MCC and my dad thought that other parents may be interested in their boys learning to ride and after mentioning it at the weekly club nights, a couple of boys parents agreed they would like their sons to have a go, these two parents being Les Sykes and Reg Butler.

In August 1964 an approach was made to Reading Ace MCC to form a Junior Section and during the August Bank Holiday of 1964 the three of us met at field in the Woodcote area, a course was marked out and we had a good days sport.

During the interval at the 1965 March Hare Scramble, Barry Sykes, Graham Butler and myself did a demonstration ride around the start and finish straight to show what the club was doing for youngsters.

The demonstration generated interest, membership grew to around ten lads and monthly scrambles were held.

In October 1965 a Championship meeting was arranged and an invite was given to the Motor Cycle News to cover the meeting which they accepted.
Eddie Chandler, a local motorcycle dealer presented a cup for first place and Brian Warwick supplied the trophies for second and third place.
The result of that meeting was that Barry Sykes became the first Schoolboy Scramble Champion and Motor Cycle News gave the meeting a full page coverage with photos.

For some three months after, the local postman never went past our door without having to put a handful of mail through the letter box.

Unfortunately the ACU frowned upon the Reading Ace MCC having a Junior Section and informed the club that they could not organise events for under 16 year olds.

My parents were then advised that if they wished to continue with organising Schoolboy Scrambling, they had no alternative other than to resign their membership of Reading Ace MCC.

in view of the success they had seen in starting these 'scrambles' for youngsters, my parents made the decision to resign from Reading Ace MCC in December 1965 on amicable terms and formed 'Reading Schoolboy Scramble Club'.

During the winter months of 1965/66 the number of scramble meetings being run obviously dropped, but the spare time generated was spent answering mail and by spring 1966 when meetings started again, the club membership had passed the 100 mark with riders coming from all over the country.

A Mr Ken Jepson from the Birmingham area, attended the first scramble in 1966 and offered to run a meeting in his area and so in May 1966 the first meeting organised by the Midland Schoolboy Scramble club, later known as the YMSA, was run near Droitwich.
Members of Reading Club in the 'Birmingham area' were transferred to what was now their 'local' club and they formed the core of the entry, with some of the other Reading members attending to support this new club.

Later in the year a Mr Roy Grainger offered to start a club in the Corsham area, so those riders living 'local' to that area were transferred to his club and his first meeting was held in August 1966 with Reading club lads attending in support.

All three clubs used the same set of rules, organised their own championship and meetings were held so as they did not clash enabling everyone to ride at each clubs meetings and continued in this way until October 1967 when the Ringwood Schoolboy Scramble Club was formed by a Mr Dave Poole.

Once again all the 'southern' clubs members were re-organised so as to form his club membership and riders from Corsham and Reading attended their meetings in support.

At this point there were a core of some 40 riders at each clubs meeting.

During the winter of 1967, the Reading Club also put on a couple of Trials, which had not been done before, with tuition at the first of them by Peter Stirland, a well known and respected local rider.

Whilst my father had exchanged letters with the ACU during 1966 regarding recognition of 'Schoolboy Scrambling' for under 16 year olds, it was not until February 1968 that he received a letter stating that they were considering recognition of these 'sporting events' but specified a minimum age of 12 years old.
This was a stumbling block as there were members under 12 that were racing.

After further communications, in May 1968 the ACU confirmed its insurers would accept a lower age limit of 8 years old.
Obviously this was very good news and over the next few months further letters were exchanged with a discussion meeting set for December 1968 which three of the four clubs attended.
Shortly after this meeting was held at the ACU, there was a change of committee at the non-attending fourth club and they were then keen to be included in future discussions and recognition by the ACU.

The ACU said they would consider its options and in February 1969, a verbal agreement was given, a committee was formed and the four clubs became the Schoolboy Motor Cycle Association (SMCA).

In June 1969 the four clubs came together for the first time in an Inter-Group Scramble at Cold Ash near Newbury.
This meeting proved so successful that Ringwood Club also held one the same year which again was a great success.

The next club to be formed was Horsham Schoolboy Scramble Club in August 1969, and again riders who lived 'local' to the area were reallocated from their previous clubs to Horsham

The Schoolboy Motor Cycle Association (SMCA) proved to be a short lived organisation after two clubs did not attend the SMCA National Schoolboy Championship held in October 1969 and in view of the situation that had developed, in November 1969 four clubs withdrew from the CSMA and formed the British Schoolboy Motorcycle Association (BSMA).

As time passed more clubs were formed and after several abortive attempts to get the various clubs in agreement with one another, a meeting was held to discuss all of the clubs formally becoming affiliated to the ACU under a new title of Federation of Junior Motorcyclists (FJMC)

By April 1971 an agreement had been drawn up by the ACU which included a name change to that of Junior Motorcycle Federation (JMF).
Unfortunately as had happened before, not all clubs signed up to this, so the position was that there were clubs operating under the JMF, BSMA or as independent organisations

In June 1973 the ACU called another meeting of clubs and in October 1973 they proposed a 'Youth Motorcycle Sport' title to encompass all of the existing organisations and independent clubs.
Correspondence on the subject continued until November 1974, but unfortunately once again not all clubs were in agreement and some continued to be members of the BSMA or remain independent.

My parents then retired from running the Reading Schoolboy Scramble Club and the documented history which I have referred to compile this detailed history of the origins and first eleven years of the sport obviously stops at a that point.

<u>Ralph Venables</u>
I cannot complete this article on the conception and first eleven years history of Schoolboy Scrambling without stating that, had it not been for the continual interest and support given to my parents by Ralph Venables especially during the very early years of the sport, my parents and I firmly believe that Schoolboy Scrambling would not have developed as it did and therefore Britain may not have had the three Moto Cross World Champions that came from the ranks of schoolboy scrambling, namely: Graham Noyce, Neil Hudson and David Thorpe.
'RIP Ralph'.

<u>And Finally</u>
There are four Facebook pages that I contribute to that may be of interest to you: -
'Reading Schoolboy Scramble Club - The start of schoolboy scrambling'.
I actually run this page which contains all scramble results and reports, newspaper articles and other relevant articles that refer to the history of the sport contained in this article.
Horsham Schoolboy Scramble Club
RSSC Ringwood Schoolboy Scramble Club - The early years
Corsham SSC

I trust you have found this article of interest, and should you require any further information then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Keith Davis - Founder member of Reading Schoolboy Scramble Club (No 5)