



The Three Stooges. Ah Be Jesus!

I think we're in the 30s. It's the clothes they're wearing, the type of bike, the boots, their trousers and hats. The middle one has got ankle boots that go half-way up the leg in what they call knicker-bocker trousers. I reckon they're messengers because they've all got similar bikes, although there's only a little bag on the back of two of them. The

flat caps are going in the right direction.

They're at a football match. But you've got that pylon in the background and you don't have a pylon in the middle of a football pitch? But you do have it around the outside 'cos they're not right up against the pitch. And that's not a pylon, it's a telegraph pole 'cos it's only got one strand of wire running through.

The other fellas have both got trousers on. I would hope so! The cloth collar looks a bit starched. Could be tweed or that sort of material. It's a bit coarse, hard-wearing. I don't think it would be cotton. The one on the left has got a great big collar and it looks starched. My grandad used to have starched collars but they weren't as big as that. That looks like a Peter Pan collar 'cos it's big and comes all around. It's detachable. The shirt used to be worn for a couple of days because it was covered by a waistcoat or a jacket, but you'd put new collars and cuffs on. My grandad used to come in from work and have a new collar. He hadn't even got in the front door and he'd say: "Have you done me' collars, girl?" I'd wash and starch them. He'd have his dinner and then put a new collar on and go down the pub and that was him until closing time. Don't forget that people didn't shower every day as we do now. And it was in London. When he came out of the docks due to ill health, he became a runner and he would take documents from one area to another. He worked for Butlers Wharf. He was their Head Runner. Then he went to work at St. Olive's Hospital, where Michael Cain was born, which was just around from our building. He was the gateman and wore shirt, collar and tie. I never saw him without a tie, unless he was ill and in his pyjamas.

The first chap has got a school cap on, with ribbing going into a middle button. What we would call a baseball cap nowadays. They're stood on the bikes to look at a football game. I was thinking they might be in Ireland and watching a game of Gaelic football. The middle one's got binoculars in his mitt. I thought it was a hip flask, but the opening's too big. He's got a cigarette that he's puffing on in the other hand.

The middle one looks like a military cap or he could be a postman. There used to be messenger boys who would go around with telegrams and that sort of thing and they used to wear that sort of hat, but they tended to be a bit tidier than this lot.

They could be three friends watching a baseball game. I don't know whether they're English or American. The bikes are English because one of them says 'Raleigh'. It could be in Denver or somewhere like that. If it was in Ireland, it'd be in County Mayo or County Clare. The one in

the middle is a copper. You had the Troubles in Ireland and I'm wondering if they're doing a bit of spying. No, they're watching a game of some sort because one's got binoculars. It could be hurling. They're just sneaking a look at the game. They wouldn't need binoculars to watch a game of football. How many people go to a football match and take a pair of binoculars with them?! They could be the Black and Tans. They're looking at something they shouldn't, that's why the wall's there. The Black and Tans were Protestant so it could be a Catholic marching band on the other side of the fence. Or it could be the Orange Marchers. I think they're looking at numbers of troops, how many tanks, or it could be an airfield because of that telegraph pole that's got the two thingies coming out of the very top of it. My dad used to work for the Electricity Board and they're a lot thicker because they've got a lot more cables going over them. The watchtower needs to be able to contact this one or that one.

The bikes are similar. They're well looked after because there are no dents or anything like that on them. The one on the end has got a pump on it but the other two don't. One of them might have had a puncture. They've all got bells on, but only one of them has got a light on. They share it. The bikes back then were still well-built. They were quite heavy. They're not made out of that new carbon stuff like Bradley Wiggins had! They were the only means of transport that people in them days had.

They could be postmen. I think the one on the left is schoolboy because he's having to lift his heels up a bit and that's why he's got a starched collar. Short in the legs. My father's from southern Ireland and he's got small legs! They're watching Irish football. It'd be hurling if it's that sort of period. My family's from southern Ireland and the layout of the fencing is very reminiscent of there. It's corrugated iron, most likely with asbestos in. The corrugated sheet is protected at the top so people can't get over. It could be horse racing. It's a security fence to stop people getting over, or to stop people watching for free. Why has he got the binoculars? Could it not be a camera? Too early for a camera. Do you think so? They're to get a better view. They might be betting on the match. They could use the binoculars to see what the odds are inside the pitch.

What is that on the right-hand bike? They look like boules. They look like they're made of cheap, tinny steel. It's got a carrier there so he could put stuff on. It reminds me of hot dog rolls wrapped in tin foil. If they're Raleigh bikes, I should imagine they'd have Brooke saddles. They're made of leather and very comfortable. One of my relations used to make Brookes saddles. I've got a Brookes saddle, well, I've got two cos I've got two bikes. But you've only got one bum, haven't you, or have you got one for special occasions?

The first lad, with the Peter Pan collar, has got his trousers tucked into the bottom of his socks and so has the second one because they've got no chain guards whereas the third one has. They look after their own bikes; they were all handy in them days. They had to be. They couldn't afford to go off to the bike shop to get their punctures fixed. They could be working men or they could be on a jolly from the local private school. They're all working men. But look at their shoes, they're all clean and shiny? They were in them days. But if they were working men, they'd be a bit more scruffed, there'd be a bit more wear-and-tear.

It's a weekend. Sunday probably. And there wouldn't be sport on a Sunday whereas espionage is done every day of the week. The one on the right-hand side is called Patrick, Paddy. Michael! Michael could be either of the other two. The one in the middle is called Gahoolie. Because if they fell off their pushbikes they'd land on their gahoolies!

They've all been friends since childhood. Good friends. They fall out sometimes, but friends do. They're in their late teens. I think the middle one is an older geezer. It's the fact that he's wearing knicker-bockers and he looks a bit plumper. I think it's father, son and friend. They must have a couple of quid though if there's three bikes there. Well, they've saved money by not paying to get into the football! They might be working and on their lunch break so they wouldn't waste their money getting in 'cos they can't watch the whole match.

They'd be saying: "Have you seen that one? What's he doing?", "Move it! Move it!", 'Look at the ref, always the bloody ref!', "Jesus Christ O'Reilly!" They'll just be chatting about what's going on. We'd hear the roar of the crowd because they've just scored a goal. I think we're hearing a steam train go past in the background. 9 times out of 10 these pitches were built near a train track because it was cheaper land. At Herne Bay, you've got the train track and then the football ground. But wouldn't their clothes get a bit dirty with the soot? They're black! It was dirty in them days. But if they're out working, they have to look clean and tidy.

It's a rural setting. Especially if it's when the Troubles started. That fence is to protect whoever's in there. It could be a train yard. But they normally do trainspotting on the platform and buy a penny ticket. Mind you, he does have the binoculars to see the numbers.

I wouldn't climb up there with them! No chance! Oh yeah, I'd like to. One looks like he's got his foot on the handlebars. The other ones are on the saddles so they look sturdy enough to hold them. The middle bike's in the process of falling over. Yeah, but that's not my bike!

They're going to go home for the tea. They're going to have sausage, mash and gravy. They're all going to cheer, if it is a game of shinty or whatever, they're bound to be excited. They've done this before. They know where to stand to get a good view. It's something that's quite regular. The photographer is going to say "You're knicked!" because he's a copper and he's going to use the photo for evidence.