

GOK65 - My Life up till 2012



Outside my home in Southport - 2009

My life started on the 27th October 1925 when a very lucky salesman in Rootes Limited of New Bond Street, London was approached by a Mr Burness.

The news of the day was split between the publication of P G Wodehouse's second book 'Carry on Jeeves', John Logie Baird demonstrating his TV system, Malcolm Campbell breaking the World Land Speed Record and a suggestion that city traffic should be split with pedestrians above ground level, cars at road level and trains below. What a novel idea – it'll never catch on!

Mr Burness was not a large man, so the 20hp chassis was ideal for him, but some modifications were called-for that took some time to finalise. Also, as Rootes owned the coach-builder Thrupp & Maberly it was no surprise that it was they who were instructed to build the barrel-sided tourer body.

The changes that were specified were to the steering column, the gear-change lever and the hand brake lever. The hand controls in the centre of the steering wheel were too close to Mr Burness but the wheel rim was ideally positioned so it was agreed to reduce the length of the steering column 2½". In order that the wheel rim stayed at the same position, the wheel was 'dished' with the resultant effect of bringing the rim forward by 2½". Both the gear-change lever and hand brake lever were extended by 4" which left the tops of these much more readily to hand than standard.

The next problem was the specification of the body which took more time to agree – the undertaking being finally signed-off on the 26th March 1926. However it appears that Mr Burness only retained me for 12 months (though never registered me in his name!) and I went back to RR to be fully overhauled to 'as new' and a new guarantee was issued in July 1927 and Charles Alfred Vernon of Hampstead took me into his keeping.

This transfer caused me great consternation as I seemed to recall that this chap 'had a history' so to speak! On investigating his past, it appears that in 1913 he was a prominent Government official within the Ministry of Munitions and was involved, with Sir Joseph Jonas, an ex-Mayor of Sheffield, in a bit of espionage!

VERNON IS OFFICIAL ACCUSED WITH JONAS

Arraigned in London Police Court as Involved in Enemy Infor- mation Conspiracy.

LONDON, June 15. — Charles Alfred Vernon, who is said to have been employed in an important capacity in the Ministry of Munitions, was charged in Bow Street Police Court today with conspiring with Sir Joseph Jonas, ex-Lord Mayor of Sheffield, who was recently arrested on the charge of having communicated information useful to the enemy.

The case was adjourned until Wednesday next, when the two prisoners will be arraigned together.

Sir Joseph Jonas, a prominent steel manufacturer, was born and educated in Germany and became a British subject by naturalization in 1876. It was indicated at the time of his arrest that a War Office official might figure in the case, and yesterday the arrest of "a prominent official of the Government offices" in this connection was reported from London. It has been asserted in London reports of the case that the alleged offense was committed before the war began.

The net result being that he was fined £2,500 (aprox £100,000 by today's standards) for supplying 'the enemy' (though this was before the Great War had started) with information prejudicial to the interests of England. Obviously Vernon was a man of some substance as he retained my services until very early in World War II at which time I was transferred to London County Council to be used – if my memory serves me well – as emergency transport taking nurses to various bomb sites.

The war was kind to me and I emerged unscathed and was sold to J R Pressney of Lockheed (aka Automotive Products) of Leamington Spa early in 1945 and then in September to Jack Katz – a car salesman – who took me in and I resided with him for a couple of months before being sold to Richard E Clark, a well-heeled farmer in Congleton Cheshire in October 1945.

Three years 'working on the farm' was a pleasure as it would have been difficult getting petrol in the cities, but I was again to move south and Joan Ann Sellick made Richard Clark an offer he couldn't resist and I stayed in Blackheath until June 1950 when I think another car salesman by the name of Christopher Curwen took me under his wing and he passed me on to Lucette Cartwright who was a most interesting woman and highly rated sculptress. She gave me 'food and lodgings' until I was moved to Dorking in the service of John Ormiston Attlee – a very successful chartered accountant.

My next move was to Welshpool, purchased this time by Edward Bevis Watson-Smyth. Wow, what a wonderful estate he had; his wife Mary was of true British blood being a member of the Plowden family and with whom I was to have a meeting many years later.

E B Watson-Smyth's father had been to Cheltenham College with L F S Sington and in 1956 I was driven from Welshpool to see the young Sington family in a caravan that had been parked on a searchlight site where Reggie, the son of L F S Sington, had been briefly stationed in WWII and I recall giving Reggie's three boys (all sub-teenagers) a ride through the beautiful Clun Forest. At this meeting 'Reggie' asked 'Bev' for the first offer of refusal should he ever want to part with me.

Rolling forward to late 1959, I was indeed transferred to Reg Sington and consequently moved to the Wirral, but first I had to have my upholstery replaced as by now it was in a pretty poor state (being an open tourer, the weather wreaks havoc with leather). Unfortunately money was again a bit short so I was re-upholstered in vinyl in Fishers Garage in Woolton, Liverpool – not what I wanted but it was better than nothing. Incidentally, it would appear that by this time my speedo indicated 19,977 miles so I had travelled either 219,977 miles, which averages 6,600 miles per year, or 119,977 miles which averages out at 3,650 miles. As the engine had been changed in 1947 and the chassis showed little wear, I suspect that either figure could be accurate.

For a short while I had the company of a 1933 20/25 Vanden Plas Tourer, but space was a problem and the 20/25 had to go into storage in Bebington until Andrew left boarding school. He then rescued the 20/25 and gave it a new lease of life before it moved to Mr Gott, a builder in Welshpool. I understand she's now in chassis format only in the USA. The registration number was BG 1656 and had been the Birkenhead Mayoral car.

Reggie needed some spare parts and he heard of a 20hp chassis in a scrap yard in Ashton-under-Lyne with the remains of a Humber body on it. A visit was arranged, the grand sum of £25 exchanged hands which seemed fair and the chassis was towed to the Wirral to be broken up. A couple of weeks later the owner of the scrap yard sent Reggie the Log Book, which was kind of him, and it showed the number as UK-2. Reggie therefore transferred this number to me and I have been UK-2 ever since.

From here-on-in everything that happened to me and every long journey was noted in two Log Books that still exist and are up-to-date today, and it's interesting to see that I frequently took Andrew to his boarding school in Ruthin, North Wales, notwithstanding the fact that my Autovac was a little troublesome with serious back-firing and on one occasion failing to proceed one Sunday on the A5 that resulted in a detention (Andrew's – not mine!).

The snows of the Clwyd hills are still imprinted on my memory as is the drive in 1964 to attend the 60th Anniversary at Goodwood which commemorated the 1904 meeting of Henry Royce and Charles Rolls, followed by a sumptuous dinner at The Southampton Guildhall. Andrew had a cine-camera with him and he took some movies of this wonderful occasion which he still has, only to be bettered by him in 2000 when, along with Harry Broster, they organised the highly successful Guinness World Record attempt for the longest procession of Rolls-Royce Motor Cars in Chester – but I move too quickly here.

I can't say I was particularly easy to run at this time - records show that I was sometimes returning as little as 9mpg – but I was being attended-to by a chap who shall remain nameless as he was supposed to be an RR trained engineer but I can assure you he was anything but! It was some years before I was to be brought back to original condition and be maintained correctly. (I now return between 18 and 19mpg and frequently start 'on the switch' rather than the starter).

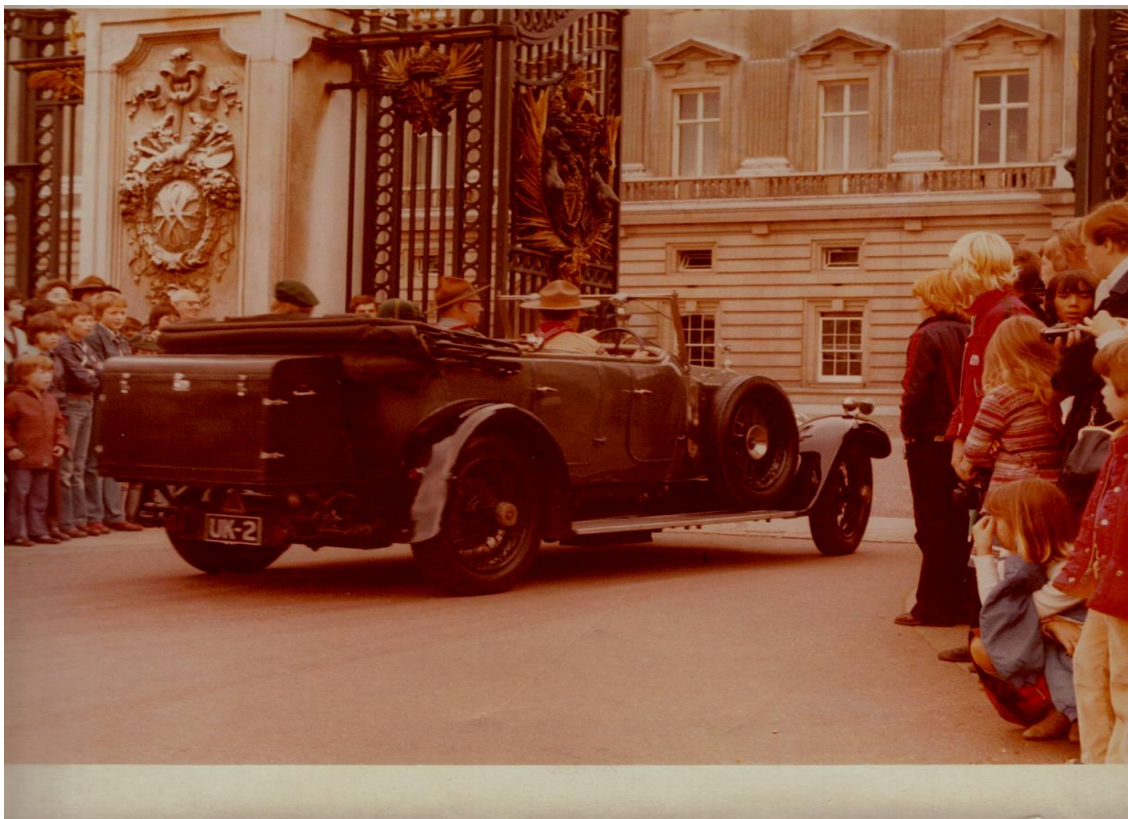
Every year I would attend the VSCC meetings at Oulton Park in Cheshire and take part in the procession around the track; on one occasion I had the pleasure of driving every race winner round.



Oulton Park in the late 1960's

Family weddings were always very special – and the first I attended was Reggie's eldest son Jonathan's. That was in the mid 1960's. Andrew was to get married in 1970 followed shortly after by Stephen. So that was the three boys sorted! I also attended all their children's weddings, first Amanda, then Jamie, followed by Derek, Clair and Zoe.

Reggie was by this time involved with the Baden Powell Scouts and had the honour of taking me to Buckingham Palace. That was a great thrill and brought back many memories of my earlier life in London. The 'good old days'? You must be joking!



Entering Buckingham Palace

By July 1989 I was again in need of some TLC, so this time I was to spend 18 months in the hands of a real professional, Tony Smith of Inkberrow, Worcestershire. Tony returned me to my former glory – a real beauty and in perfect order – including engine rebuild and a full rewire.

I returned to the Wirral in June 1991 and on the 6th July I moved to Southport where Andrew lives. He had polished me since 1960 so it was a natural move as he had also worked on the 20/25 and knew more about me than anyone else in the family.

Membership of the RREC soon followed as did many longer journeys not just in the UK, but also abroad – where I cannot recall visiting previously.

In June 1992 I attended a very influential meeting of 20hp cars at Weston-on-the-Green near Oxford. It was at this meeting that the President of the RREC, Lt Col Barrass, agreed to a '20hp Register'. Keith Jay was appointed the first Registrar (though at that time the position hadn't been given a name) and Andrew was the first Editor of 'The 20hp Newsletter'. Now all RR and Bentley marques are represented by Registers – prior to which the older marques were feeling 'left out in the cold' with the preponderance of Shadows and their derivatives.

My first trip abroad to the Italian lakes was organised by Brian Wiggins in 1994. That was just incredible as we 'trained' to Bologna and then drove to Riva on Lake Garda and then had an incredible drive to Como. The train trip back was the one in which a number of cars were destroyed by fire; no names again except that the 1926 3-litre Bentley that had just completed a 5-year restoration by Tony Lambert was the next car to go had the fire not been extinguished at Chantilly just north of Paris and I was next behind the Bentley – a lucky escape!. Regrettably it is for this reason that SNCF now refuse to carry vintage cars. Sorry!

1995 was the first year of the Keith Jay Brittany trips. Keith put his heart and soul into organising these and they are remembered with great affection by many – particularly those 6 cars that followed me into a farm yard in which a French farmer was minding his business and found 7 Rolls-Royce motor cars enter his farmyard, do a brisk U-turn and proceed out again. The map-reading was somewhat at fault here I recall!

1997 took me to Arnedo in the Rioja region of Spain on a trip organised by Ted Kelly. An amazing experience and one that Ken Trent will never forget; I overtook him in his open 20hp whilst going downhill at 70mph. He then spent thousands getting an overdrive fitted only to find that I was in neutral at the time (and didn't have an overdrive anyway)! The hill was some 13 miles long and we really flew – and nearly flew!

The year 2000 saw me at the successful Guinness World Record attempt in Chester where 420 Rolls-Royce Motor Cars drove in an uninterrupted single-file procession for more than 2 miles on a public road. I was in my prime (as Miss Jean Brodie would say).

The Northern Section of the RREC was asked by Lady Cholmondeley to be the first cars to drive down their new main driveway. Her son David Cholmondeley the 7th Marquess and Lord Great Chamberlain had the pleasure of driving me as the lead car around the estate with Lady Cholmondeley in the back, so David was the second member of his family to sit on my seats. His family and the Plowdens (which was Mary Watson-Smyth's maiden name) are connected in some way.

2006 was my 80th birthday, and as a special present I was take Andrew on a trip of a lifetime - to Jerusalem. He was 60 years old so it made perfect sense! I drove him through France, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Austria, Lichtenstein, Hungary, Serbia, Macedonia, Greece and finally Turkey where we were flown by '747' to Israel and then drove to the Sea of Gallilee, the Dead Sea, the Negev (aka Arabian Desert) so beloved of Lawrence of Arabia, and on to Jerusalem. I was pretty tired by then so I went home in a container – thank goodness! Over 3,900 in just 13 days driving!



Lawrence of Arabia's Desert

Just a few weeks ago I had the pleasure of driving to Giverny in France to see Monet's Garden and attend a meeting of stationary engines(!) and a gaggle of Austin Chummies. The roads in France are a pleasure to be on which is not how one feels in the UK - just too much traffic.



A pretty bed-partner at Giverny, France

My speedo tells me I have travelled either 210,000 or 310,000 miles – of which over 90,000 miles were since I joined the Sington family.

Technical Information

For those who want to know some of my technical details, perhaps the following will be of interest:

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| Engine : | 6 cylinders with 6 x overhead inlet and 6 x overhead exhaust valves. |
| Capacity | 3,127cc |
| HP | Whilst generally referred-to as a 20hp – I am officially 21.6hp. (Or as Sir Henry would have said – ‘sufficient’) |
| Brakes | 4-wheel cable brakes including servo-assisted. |
| Tyres | 500/525 x 21" + 2 spares |
| Seating | 4 Seats |
| Springs | Specified for touring with 4 adults and their luggage. |
| Speed | I can cruise all day at 50mph (2,500rpm) which was my cruising speed in 1926. |
| Top speed | In 1926 it was 60mph (3,000rpm) – top speed today is still 60mph! |