



Area 57 (Enfield) Newsletter

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Our Christmas Dinner is all booked in for December 7th at The Galley Hall; 7.30 for 8.00 pm. There is probably just time book if you speak to Barbara straight away.



Obviously very little has happened since the last Newsletter, but I understand that the Museum weekend based in Swaffham went well with people mainly doing their own thing.



We discussed the possibility of inviting some other Areas to the Museum on a Sunday next year. Most people seemed to think it was a good idea. As people are probably more concerned with Christmas festivities coming up, rather than planning next year, we have decided to follow this up in the New Year. We are thinking about contacting Areas 16, 17, 33 and 44, plus the SS Register. By then we may have sorted out the most feasible date.



Don't forget that we will have two meetings in December; the 2nd as normal and Mince Pie Night on the 16th.



We are looking forward to the visit to the Morgan factory on 7th so a report should be in next month's Newsletter.



The History of my Cars - by Richard Freestone

Graham's car ownership got me going so hope I don't bore everybody to bits.

I passed my driving test in June 1963 whilst I was still at college. My Dad had a 1958 Vauxhall Velox, registration NCT 304, I used it for the test, but he would only let me borrow it if I was taking a girl out! I remember it well. It was pink and suffered from galloping body rot.

I started work a couple of months later and bought my first car for £35. It was a black sit up and beg Ford Prefect 1946. The registration number was XG 9492.

The following January the very noisy gearbox locked up solid and it had to be towed home with the clutch in. I then bought another complete scrap car for £7-10-0 and my Dad & I changed the gearboxes. On those cars you had to either remove the engine and the gearbox or drop the back axle. We chose to drop the axle which involved my Dad lying on his back in the snow, disconnecting everything on the donor car to get the gearbox out. Once that was done of course the same exercise had to be carried out to get the u/s gearbox out of my car. As Dad was well practiced he did that too but at least it was in the garage at home (Grantham in those days).

All in all it took about a week working 'til 11-00pm most nights. Then I sold the engine from the donor car for a fiver and the scrap yard gave me £2-10s-0d for the remains of the donor car—and collected it!

After about 8 months ownership, I tired of the bumpy ride, 2 wheel cornering and cruising speed of 45mph, so bought a 1953 Austin A70 Hereford for £45, registration number NEW 33. This was a real passion wagon with lovely big leather seats, bench in front with 4 on the tree (column change). I must say this car served me very well. I moved down to London for 6 months in October 1964, living in a civil service hostel in Hampstead. Posh address but posh it wasn't, sharing a room with four other blokes! Anyway I was the only guy there with a car so became very popular. I drove home and back every other weekend so put some miles on it.

Again I was lucky to have access to a scrap car. My uncle, a farmer had used a similar car for about 10 years from new and when it rotted away he left it in a barn on the farm. Over the next three years I swapped the gearbox and engine of the donor car into mine. These cars were terrible rot boxes the only saving grace was it still had a separate chassis and that remained strong. One weekend I painted the floor of the spare wheel well under the boot with some new fangled stuff called Kurust. Trouble is rust was all there was so I ended up with the floor breaking up like a biscuit. However was rather pleased with the job I made of pop riveting a sheet of aluminium in its place.

Eventually I tired of the weekly fight against body rot + the garage doing its MOT told me if I brought it back to them again they would have to fail it. By then I was 21 and had saved a few hundred quid and in a mad moment I traded the A70 in for a 1964 Ford Cortina Mk1 1200cc. This turned out to have been a Jersey Hire car and had rattly main bearings and was always breaking down. It cost me £350 and I got £20 for the old Austin. Unusually it had a bench seat and column change and with my then girlfriend I could drive with my left arm around her while she changed gear with her right (no smutty thoughts please)!

I sold this car privately after about 6 months. I had retained the old reg number from the A70, NEW 33 but let it go with the car. I got £250 for it but was glad to get rid of it.

I had been looking around for a while for a good Mk II Zephyr or Zodiac. I viewed and tested several—by then they were a minimum of 6 years old. Anyway patience paid off as I found a 1961 export model Zephyr which had been owned from new by an RAF wing commander stationed in Italy. It was an export model, white over ice blue with overdrive and was very smart indeed. There was no rot anywhere and it had 55,000 on the clock and the engine was as sweet as a nut. I paid £200 for it but it needed a new exhaust. I fitted one with a Servais straight through silencer. They were all the rage at the time. It sounded magic. Shortly after this and at the age of 22 I was posted to London—still in the Civil Service—Inland Revenue. Some of the mates I had met at the hostel were now living in a flat in Muswell Hill so I moved in down there.

The Zephyr, registration number 531 AGX was a beautiful car and a real bird puller. It had 3 on the tree this time with overdrive working on 2nd and 3rd. Unfortunately I couldn't stop people crashing into it. I had 5 accidents in 4 months, none of them my fault. None were serious but in the end it had a complete new front end and new suspension and a respray.

Shortly after moving back to London I left HM Inspector of Taxes and got a job in the tax department in a firm of accountants earning the enviable sum of £1400 a year. This was in 1968. It was almost twice as much as I was getting in the Revenue. I was able to live life to the full and save up quite a bit of cash over the next couple of years. In mid 1970 although the Zephyr was still going very well the engine was getting a bit tired at 95,000 miles. The body was still good even around the door sills but I fancied a change. I advertised and sold it for £200, same as I'd paid for it nearly three years earlier—Inflation was the cause of course. I still remember it fondly as one of the best cars I ever owned.

I fancied getting a Rover, in particular a 3 litre but it had to be a Coupe as I thought the saloon looked a bit old mannish. Also it had to be manual—don't know why—unless it was because auto boxes meant less mpg. Anyway I found one eventually. It was light grey with a charcoal top, 1964, registration number XVL 310. I bought this car from a dealer, Cavendish Motors in Kilburn for £535. It was not a good move!

It turned out that although it was only 6 years old it had galloping body rot just about everywhere, front and back wings bottoms of the doors and sills. All very skillfully hidden by filler. Mechanically it was OK apart from a cam knock and a snatchy clutch.

I only kept it for 6 months and in that time had it resprayed by a friend for £50 (those were the days). It was only a blow over to make it look good before I traded it in. It wasn't all bad news. In June of 1970 three of my mates from Scotland—from the Hostel days-- & I drove it down to Lloret de Mar in Spain for a 2 week camping holiday and it performed very well. However compared to the old Zephyr it was a very disappointing car.

I needed to get rid of it before the paint started bubbling up again so in a bit of a hurry I traded it against a 1966 Rover 2000, with the personalised plate, 3 RTO. It was white with red leather. I got £400 for the 3 litre and paid £550 for the 2000. When I passed by the garage again a few days later my old 3 litre had pride of place on the forecourt with a big sign saying "Car of the Week"! I wonder how the poor soul who bought it got on?

Anyway the 2000 was a nice sporty car but I had problems straight away. It started to smoke a bit after a week or so and had piston slap, so it went back under guarantee and had new pistons and rings. I recall it had about 50,000 on the clock but must actually have been a lot more. After that and sorting out a rattly exhaust it was a very good car and the girls liked it. It certainly impressed Annie when I turned up at her door in it on our first date. However after about 18 months it was starting to rot away, on both front and rear wings. They were like little pin holes which would stain brown after rain but you could polish the marks out.

I should insert here that since 1969 we had been sharing various flats in Muswell Hill with a few Kiwi girls & guys. These folk would stay with us through November to May then bugger off to Europe for the summer ending up at the Munich Beer Fest. Two of the guys had this old 1953 Morris Cowley half ton van painted black, registration number HFK 42. It had a 1460cc side valve engine with 4 on the tree. It was known as "The Rolls" It used to stay outside and not move all winter then they would fire it up again in May and off to Europe again.

It came time for them to move on. One went to Germany and the other went back to Kiwi. "What about The Rolls" I said. Oh you can have it was the reply. One day I got it going and gave it a bit of a service. The rest of the flat mates painted it psychedelic with several notable remarks on it like "Foreign Office!" on the back doors with a big F and a big O and all the rest written very small. When I went home to Grantham in it for the first time my mother painted the back doors. Later my mates painted "Don't laugh Missus-your daughter's in the back!". Mother painted the back doors again. Later we painted "F HOOK OFFice equipment". By now mum was getting used to painting the back doors.

We were all into Irish folk music at the time and the nearside panel on the van was painted "The Craik is back". On the other side "The Rolls". We had a great time in the Crack van as it was known by all. It took 4 of us to the Munich beer fest in 1971. We arrived at the campsite in Thalkirken, meeting up with our other Kiwi mates, to accolades and applause at arriving in such a cool motor.

I also recall one hot Sunday night in the summer driving back from Grantham with Annie, the amp meter started showing a discharge. We stopped on the Eaton Socon Bypass in a lay by and on lifting the bonnet found a broken fan belt. The torch and tools were in the Rover. A police patrol car turned up and the copper stood there holding the torch whilst Annie got a new pair of tights out of the suitcase and I wrapped them round the fan and dynamo pulleys. Halfway through the Police got a shout but kindly left us the torch saying leave it in the hedge behind the litter bin and we'll collect it later!

I lost count of the number of times I was stopped by the police and asked "what colour does it state in the log book?" You didn't drink and drive when you were in the Crack van!

In a weak moment I lent the van to a Scottish friend whose car had packed up but he used it to carry junk around for a couple of months and thrashed the already tired engine to death. I advertised it for sale and got £50 for it.

By this time I was a bit disgusted with Rovers for their body rot and was really struggling to think of what to get next. I will never know what persuaded me to get an old Bentley but I do remember reading a Motorsport magazine and seeing several models dating from 1946 to 1954 at what seemed to me to be very cheap prices.

I took a day off work and went looking round several London dealers intending to spend no more than £500. I test drove several but none were in very good condition. Either they had corroded bodies or badly worn interiors. The last place I visited was the Clarendon Carriage Company (later became Coys) and was immediately attracted to a 1949 James Young Mk VI with 94,000 miles on the clock. It was in much better condition all round but it was £895. Anyway I decided to go for it and my offer of £850 was accepted. It was Shell Grey over Tudor Grey and registration number KYM 375. It had four "suicide" doors.

I sold the Rover privately to a poor unsuspecting guy in Grantham. Made sure I gave the pin holes a good polish first so no rust spots were showing. I retained the registration number 3 RTO and transferred it to the Bentley—don't know why as KYM 375 was a nice number and probably worth more. The Rover became FTL 444D.

The Mk VI was a great car. Very reliable and it cost me very little money over the 7+ years I owned it which was a good job as we got married in 1974 and at one time after the boys were born I had £10 a week to live on after all outgoings.

When I bought it in April 1972 Annie & I had been going out for about 4 months. We had a great time in the Bentley in August that year driving it from Grantham down to Cornwall with our mates Martin & Marion and drawing up like royalty at guest houses and hotels.

After owning it for about a year it had become apparent that it had been resprayed several times in its life and the cellulose paint had become hard and brittle and was breaking up in places. I decided to have it repainted and took advice from friends in the Bentley Drivers Club which I had joined just after buying the car. I was advised to strip the paint back to bare metal. I did this in the summer of 1973 over a period of 2 weeks working every evening and weekends, outside the Flat in Hillfield Road, Muswell Hill.

The car had been Shell (light) over Tudor (dark) Grey but I had it redone in Garnet (dark maroon) over Shell Grey. It did look a beauty when it was done. We used it as our wedding car as did many of our friends over the years.

I became a very active member of the Bentley Drivers Club and served on the Eastern Region committee for 9 years.

In 1979 with about 140,000 miles on the clock the engine was decidedly tired and using more oil than normal. Piston slap when starting from cold made it sound like a diesel!

A couple of years ago I spotted that it had been sold at auction in 2005 for a low £12,000 and comments "older restoration now needs doing again". I have never seen the car since I swapped it in November 1979.

I was persuaded by friends to change it for a pre war "Derby" Bentley. I looked hard and long for the right car at an affordable cost. I still had very little cash to spare and Derby's generally cost more than Mk VI's. In the end I did a straight swap for a 1938 4.25 Thrupp & Maberly saloon. The Mk VI would have been valued at the time around £5,500. The Derby needed work on the body and headlining (and a great deal more as it turned out)! It was not running and I had to transport it home. It was black over maroon with a side mounted spare, registration number, EOG 555.

I had it started in a few hours and the engine seemed quite sweet. It passed the MOT with no problems but when I started driving it and the engine got hot the oil pressure dropped away alarmingly. Should be 25lbs at 50 mph on hot engine but was only 15 and at tick over zero.

I drained the oil and found a good handful of white metal in the oil strainer (filter).

Engine rebuild followed over the winter of 1980. Cost forced me to do most of it myself except for the machining. Even after this over the next couple of years there were several other things wrong with the car and I just could not afford to have them put right. So it was a case of bodge it up and get rid quick! I sold it to a Dutch guy living in Bedfordshire for £6,000.

A couple of years ago it was in a Coy's auction in London. I didn't go but friends saw the car and said it looked very tired indeed and in far worse condition than when I sold it in March 1983 + it had numerous bills for yet another engine rebuild. However despite this it fetched £35,000.

Like the Mk VI, I have never seen it again.

I was "Bentleyless" for a couple of months, looking around for a good Mk VI or R-type. There was nothing much on the market. In the end I persuaded my mate Richard Webb to sell me his 1953 R-type Mulliner Lightweight. It was a car with great potential, needing a respray, and fitted with the higher ratio back axle and gearbox of a Continental. It was Shell Grey with lovely maroon leather. I bought it for £5500, registration number, NXV 797 in May 1983. Prior to Richard Webb the car had only one owner from new, a Mr Childs who lived off the Ridgeway in Enfield. When I had it resprayed in Regal Red over Shell Grey I arranged to meet him and took him out for a ride in it. He was pleased to see the car again but told me that when it was only 3 years old he was in a very serious accident, fatal for the driver of the other car, and went back to Mulliner for a rebuild which involved a complete new chassis. Not sure I wanted to hear that but....

This was a great car with effortless cruising at 85 mph returning 17mpg. It was a big car with a huge boot capable of carrying 6 people in comfort with a suitcase each.

In 1985 I was lucky enough to benefit from a small inheritance—not enough to move house - but sufficient for me to realise my dream of owning a Vintage Bentley.

To be continued..... (if I've not bored you silly with this).

