

LOOKING BACK: A few notes on the early days of The 20-Ghost Club

Why The 20-Ghost Club'?

So the uncomprehending voice of the future may ask.

Already the answer seems almost incredible. Twenty years ago the 20h.p. and the Silver Ghost were the cheapest models to buy and to run and consequently were bought and were driven by those amateur enthusiasts whose desire to share their delight in their motor-cars brought the Club into being. Now old Rolls-Royces have become high fashion, capital investments, symbols of assured taste; then they were just old Rolls-Royces, faithful servitors to the few who appreciated their merits. 1950, the year that saw Pool petrol come off coupons, saw the Club's inaugural dinner at the Cafe Royal on the 14th February. At that time the post-war car famine was still intense and waiting lists were in terms of years; but you could still stop your car in Bond Street if you wished to shop, and as yet undreamt of was the paraphernalia of yellow streaks, yellow-banded wardens and ravenous meters. A new Silver Wraith cost £6,000 but realised much more when, after a year, it could be resold. But for the lovers of vintage machinery these were halcyon days. For the last time, the great cars of the 1920s were available in good numbers and could be bought cheaply. Unlike today, the older a car was, the cheaper it was. While a 1923 Silver Ghost saloon, "a good runner", could be bought for £50, a 1927 20hp tourer in good order was worth £325 or more. You could spend £900 on a 20/25 saloon of 1932, over £1,000 on a Phantom II Touring car and £2,000 on a 25/30. Edwardians could still be found—an average runner for £120—or at the end of the scale, a 1912 Barker Landaulet in *concoors* condition was sold for about £600, but naturally went to the U.S.A. Such were the times.

Months before the dinner at the Cafe Royal, various of the founder members had met informally and talked about their cars. Mr. A. J. Belsey reminds us that the Club was really born on 26th May 1949: 'The actual metamorphosis into an organised club followed a head-on collision between Peter Fawcett and myself in Hyde Park on Sunday morning. Fortunately we were both on foot at the time.'

Six of the founder members then met together and as they owned either 20hp or Silver Ghost type cars the name The 20-Ghost Club was born. Following the dinner, at which the doyen of Rolls-Royce collectors Stanley Sears was elected President, steady progress was made. In January 1951 the members list showed 38 names opposite 14 20hp, 7 Silver Ghosts and 1 Phantom II, while a year later there were 61 names squeezed on to the single sheet of foolscap opposite 12 Silver Ghosts, 18 6-cylinder 20s, 1 4-cylinder 20, 1 P I, 2 P II and 1 25.

A rally with driving tests was held at Sandhurst on 22nd July, 1951. The tests—acceleration, wiggle-woggle, parking—sound familiar, as do the names of the overall winners: 1. S. E. Sears (1914 40/50) 2. S. E. Sears (1923 20hp) 3. W. F. Watson (1911 40/50). However, in the top-gear acceleration Dr. Attlee's 20hp put up the best performance. In all nine 20hp and five 40/50's took part. In May 1952 there was a luncheon party at the Weston Manor Hotel which was well attended. Stanley Sears drove his 1905 4-cylinder 20 hp in chassis form with test-rig body—and was able to discuss it

with A. G. Elliott, (who joined R-R Ltd. in 1912, became Chief Engineer in 1937, and joint Managing Director with Lord Hives in 1945). At the Bentley Drivers Club Firle Hill Climb in September 1952 there were two classes set aside for The 20-Ghost Club and W. F. Watson's 25/30 proved the fastest overall.

With the year 1953 there came one notable piece of encouragement for all those who loved old cars with huge engines within their shining bonnets—the £12 10s. annual tax was extended to everyone. Previously you had either to persuade the authorities that your Silver Ghost had been rebuilt and should be re-registered, or pay on 49 hp at the rate of 25/- per hp. To celebrate this rare concession a rally was organised for January 10th, starting with lunch at Layton's Wine Bar on the corner of Duke Street adjoining Manchester Square and then proceeding to the Richmond Hill Hotel for tea. This was the first Club Rally the author witnessed: it was a misty rather dark day, but somehow with a sense of exhilaration in the air. Unlike later events, this one was shared with the Mercedes-Benz Club and les hommes à l'Hispano; any Isotta-Fraschinis that could come were invited. And an Isotta was indeed there, a pale blue tourer of 1925. 'In Duke Street, W.A.L Cook's Phantom III stood in front of a 38/250 hp S.S. Mercedes, while into Manchester Square there flashed the silver stork of a 12-cylinder drophead Hispano, followed by the roar of a white 37.2 hp 'type course' driven by the bearded Morin Scott.

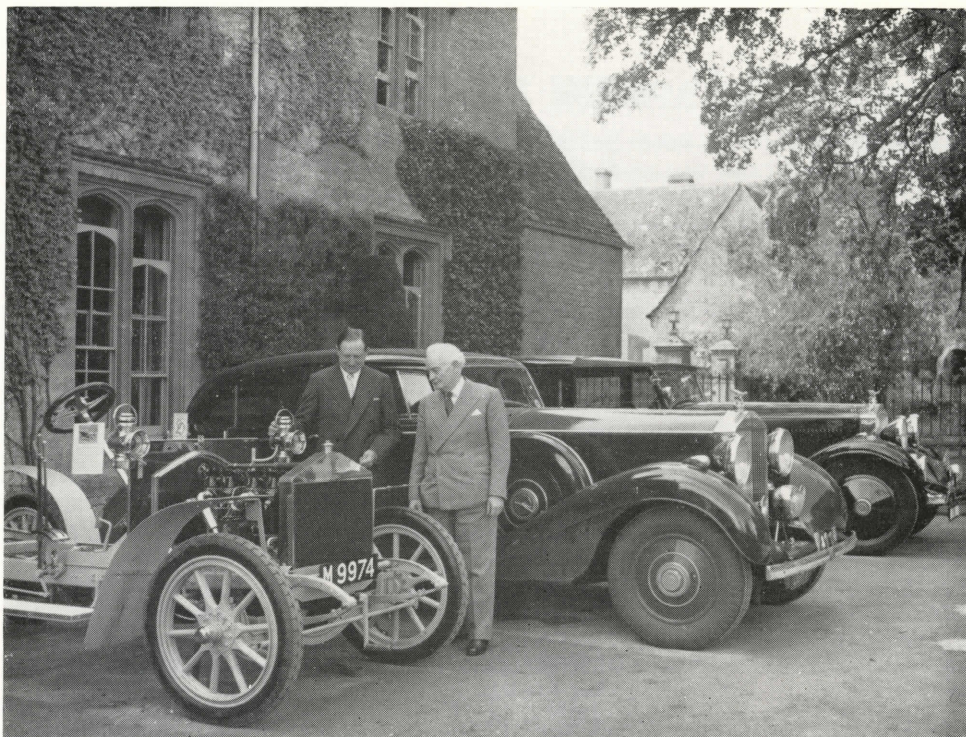
As dusk fell the forecourt at Richmond was filled with noble motor cars and talk continued late into the evening. The event gained a little discreet publicity: Autosport (Jan 16th 1953) gave a column and two photographs, while "Vintage Veerings" of Motor Sport (Feb 1953) examined the entrants with a critical eye. The latter was turned towards a "40/50 Rolls-Royce sporting tourer disguised as a mobile laboratory, its driving compartment so cluttered up with dials and flow-meters that forward visibility appeared to be entirely obscured—possibly, we reflected, the owner is so busy looking in that he gets no time to see where he is going. We noticed that certain of the controls were labelled 'Late' and 'slow'. " In fact the owner sat well above the line of his slightly modified windscreen (see photograph). This was, of course, Frank King who with Jack Frost formed the original Events Committee.

At the Annual General Meeting held in May 1953, Stanley Sears, Fred Watson and Adrian Belsey were re-elected to their respective offices of President, Secretary and Chairman and the committee now comprised Captain and Mrs. Castle, Mrs. Fawcett, Bill Cook, Jack Frost and Frank King (Hon Librarian), Eric Dudley was Press Liaison Officer. Membership was now over 80 with over 50 cars.

Plans were now being laid for a really large event—a Rally and Concours d'Elegance to be held in Kensington Gardens to mark the Coronation. This was to be the first major public event and a landmark in the story of the Club.

R.O.B.

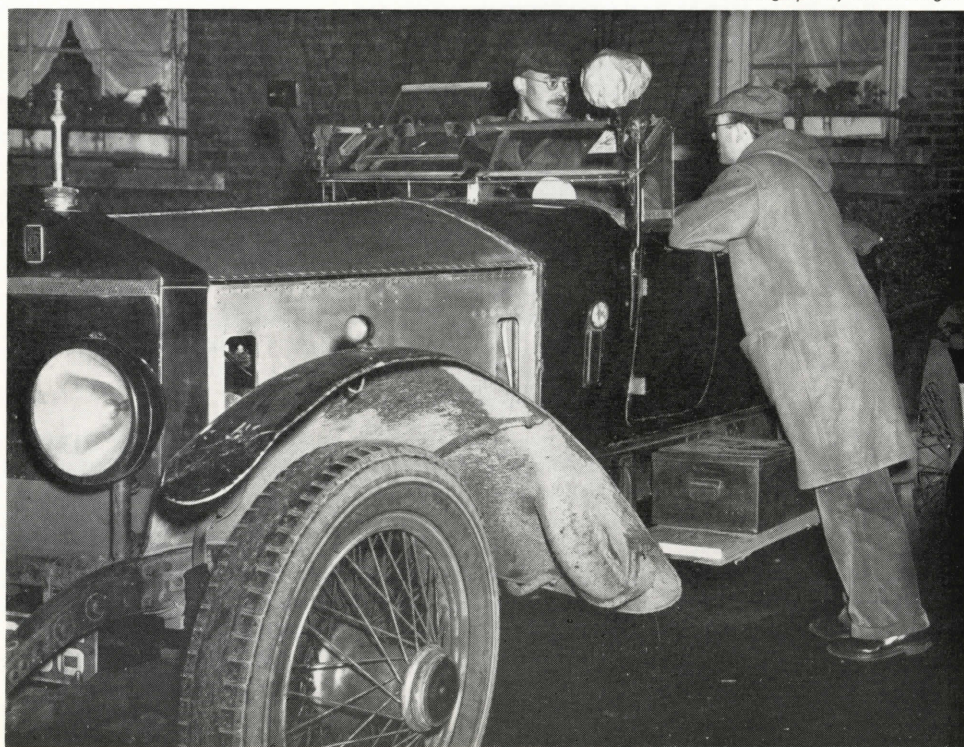
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A. G. Elliott and Stanley Sears with 1905 20 H.P. in course of restoration outside Weston Manor Hotel, May 11, 1952. In background 1930 P III and 1933 P II

As darkness fell. Founder members Frank King and Jack Frost, who together then comprised the Events Committee, with 1924 Silver Ghost 22 LM at Richmond—January 1953.

Photograph by N. Hardinge.



Looking Back

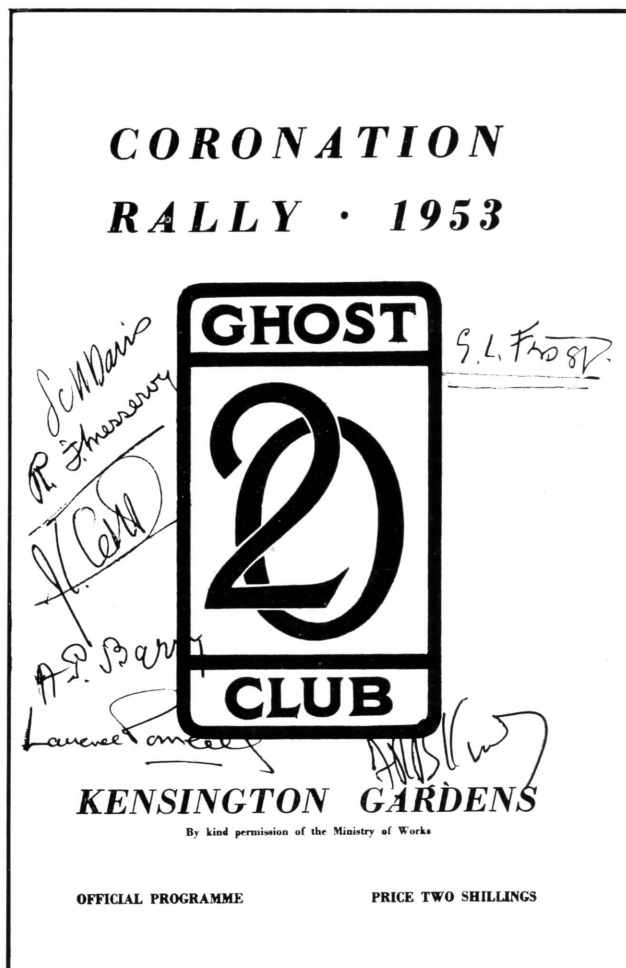
PART II

KENSINGTON GARDENS 1953-54

It is now an historical fact that Sunday, July 19th, 1953, was a fine day. For some time previously there had been a little discreet publicity in suitable magazines and some members had been slipping entry forms into suitable Rolls-Royces seen parked in London and at that time there were quite a few. The entry forms said, bravely, "20-Ghost Club CORONATION RALLY KENSINGTON GARDENS. It is intended to show a complete history of the Rolls-Royce car from 1905-1953". And there is no doubt that the hopes of the organisers, in particular George Frost, clerk of the course, John Castle, chief marshal, and Frank King, assistant course marshal, were realised in full. And because it was a sunny day it was a glorious spectacle, that attracted lots of spectators, sparked off new friendships, kindled enthusiasm and showed what the Club could really do.

At the Hyde Park end were the special exhibits: two 2-cylinder cars, the Sears 1905 20 h.p. having its first season out with body-work finished and varnish glistening, and Silver Ghost herself. In class I (Silver Ghost closed) there were five entries: beside the limousines of Stanley Sears and Fred Watson (which were placed first and second) were Adrian Garrett's 1907 car (now in Australia), Mrs. Rosewell's 1913 landaulet (now owned by John Burchell) and Dr. Keidan's 1914 coupé. Class II was for open Silver Ghost and Phantom I's and there were ten entries. Fred Watson's 1913 Alpine Trial car was having its first season out with the rear half of the body finished but had to be content with third place, the Sears Alpine and R. C. J. Hardy's tourer (now in the U.S.A.) coming first and second. John Bolster and Lord Bruce brought their 1911 tourers, Dr. Williamson his 1914 (now in Milan) and Dr. Taylor his London to Edinburgh (now owned by the Neales). S. B. Sellick's 1922 Hooper tourer was the car now owned by Bill Banks. The class for closed Phantom I's was dominated by Sear's coupé de ville just refinished with basketwork replacing plain black, and its petit point was much admired. But others present included an elegant Hooper sedanca (Jeremy Bacon) and a fine Weymann saloon (Edward Mills), while Douglas Fitzpatrick brought his unique, supercharged special (later consumed by fire).

There were nine P II's on view and the author's heart was quickly lost to the grey Barker Continental drophead of 1930 entered by J. W. Neale. The judges' eyes were also clearly caught and it took first place in its class. The Phantom III was then a relatively very valuable model and the entries were predictably well presented, but surprisingly the winner of the class was Raymond Way's sedanca despite such competitors as Stanley Sears and Bill Cook.



In class VI, 20 h.p. closed, condition was rather more varied, but some very attractive small coupés were present, of which G. P. Easten's 1928 was in outstanding condition and won the class. Saloons proper included Hugh Keller's evergreen 1929 James Young Weymann and an H. J. Mulliner Weymann of the same year brought by Tony Hartridge. The latter captivated your susceptible author, but he was not able to gain possession of it for another five years. All the small horsepower open cars were grouped together, the class being won by Michael Vivian whose 20/25 was making a worthy debut next in line to Richard Barton's 1927 Windover coupé and the peacock-blue Hooper tourer brought by the author. Amongst the 20/25 and 25/30 h.p. closed, Fergusson Wood's 1930 limousine appeared unique in possessing a blue radiator badge. The green Gurney Nutting sedanca coupé brought by Ian Warwick seemed outstanding, as did Nickless' brown 1934 Freestone and Webb, but the class was taken by Shelvoke's 1938 limousine. Mrs. Saunt's brand-new Hooper limousine led the post-war class.

The cars sparkled in the afternoon sunlight and the programmes were quickly sold out. Tea was taken at the Kensington Palace Hotel, where the prizes were presented, including a pair of crystal decanters originally won in the 1913 Alpine Trial and donated by Rolls-Royce Ltd., and everyone retired home feeling that the hours of polishing had been worth while. The membership was certainly boosted by the event, but more than that, it seemed that the Club had expressed itself in a very definite style and provided itself a model for the future.

A year later we were at Kensington Gardens once more to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Rolls-Royce Ltd. Again a fine entry; again an excellent programme embellished with delightful drawings by Jack Frost. But this time a continuous downpour of rain from leaden skies; a few spectators crouched under umbrellas; and a large pile of unsold programmes. (They are still available from the Hon. Librarian at the original price—2/-). The judges paddled around the cars and as each bonnet was raised so a shower of water fell upon the polished metal within. While many entries were the same as the year before, new entrants included M. R. Neale (1910 Pullman limousine by Fuller of Bath), John Hampton (1925 S. G. Barker tourer), and John Dymock-Maunsell (Phantom I). It was something of a relief to retire indoors for tea and the prize-giving.

The Club wisely decided that two important Concours in a row was enough and no such event was planned for 1955. But there was no doubt that the Kensington Gardens events made a point and were indeed a landmark in the history of the Club.

R.O.B.

(to be continued)

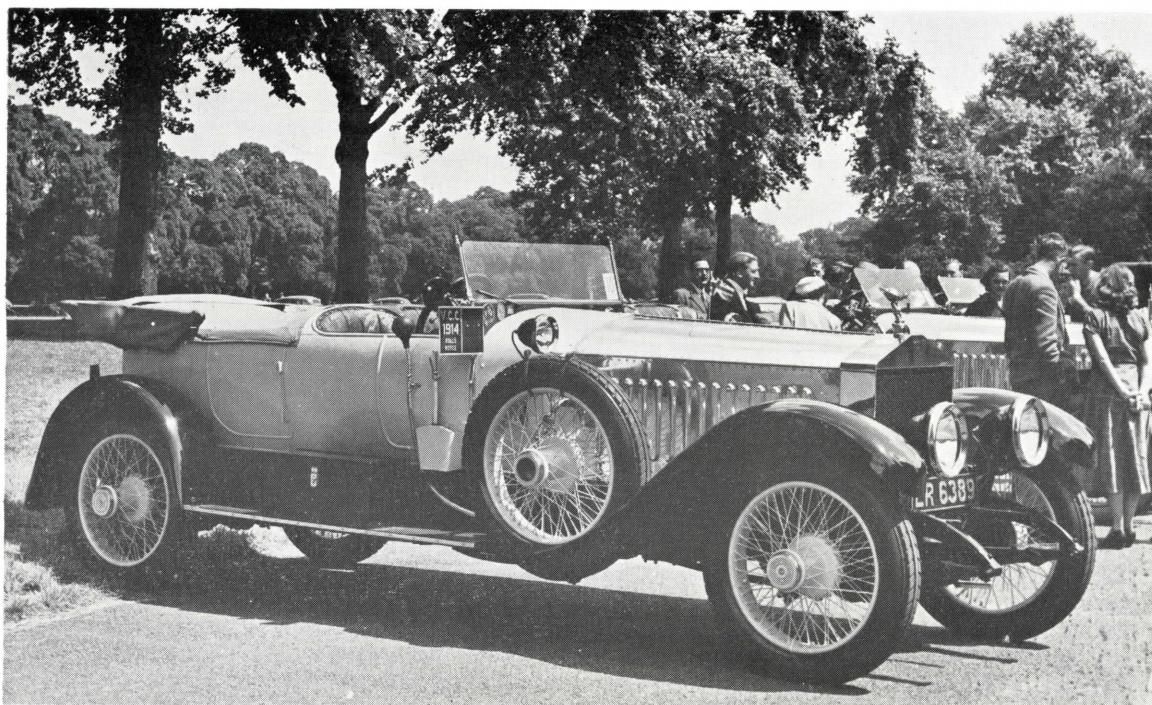
Reproduced (exactly) from THE TIMES of February 20th, 1950:

PRESERVING THE EARLY ROLLS-ROYCE

FROM OUR MOTORING CORRESPONDENT

The high regard in which the earlier Rolls-Royce cars are held by many motorists resulted in the formation of the Twenty Ghost Club at a dinner in London on Saturday. The club has been formed with the object of preserving the remaining specimens of these cars, especially the Silver Ghost and the Twenty. It is proposed that its members should forgather twice a year, at a dinner in the winter and a rally in the summer. Membership of the club will be by invitation.

Mr. Edgar Sears, who is probably the greatest living authority on the earlier Rolls-Royce cars—he has more than a dozen in his collection at Bolney—was elected president. Mr. Adrian Delsey, who has been primarily responsible for organizing the club, is the chairman.



Kensington Gardens—dry. R. C. J. Hardy's 1914 tourer (body by Bridgewater Motor Co.)

Photograph by courtesy of M. H. Vivian.



Kensington Gardens—wet. Judges Kent Karslake and Lawrence Pomeroy with Lord Bruce and his 1911 tourer (body by Robertson of Glasgow).

Photograph by R. O. Barnard

Looking Back : 1954 - 1960

PART III

The Kensington Gardens Concours was not by any means the only event held in 1954. In May there was a very successful rally to London Airport, where the early cars present included Sears' TT 20, M 46 and the 1913 "Alpine"; there was a good range of all the pre-1939 models, with 20 h.p. predominating, and probably the most unusual car present was Squadron-Leader Wallis' 1924 40/50 rebuilt entirely to the owner's ideas. Members found much of interest in the controls of the airliners and the rally was successfully repeated and was again well attended, in September 1956. Then there was a cavalcade organised from Knutsford to Manchester to mark the 50 years of the Company where the TT 20 and M 46 showed the Club Badge.

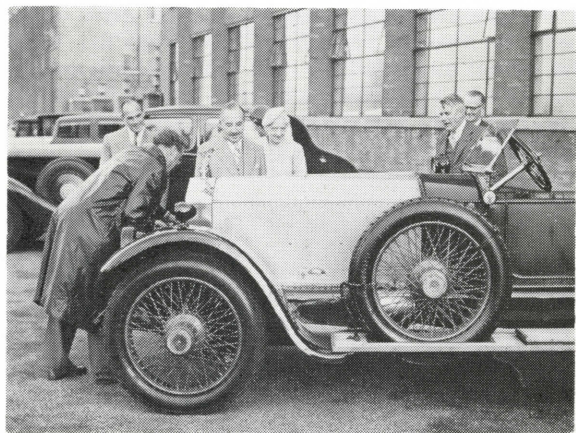
The usual winter season party and annual dinner opened the 1955 season. The first of a series of dinners held at the East Arms, Hurley, was arranged for the 17th May by the Events Committee which now included Michael Vivian, who kindly offered me a place in his tourer, which I happily accepted, hoping to savour the delights of a warm spring evening: in fact, protected by hood and side-curtains I watched torrential rain and high winds be succeeded by snow showers. The inclement weather made the dinner the more delicious!

For the Esso House driving tests on June 26th, however, there was a really hot day and the happy air of the participants was caught on cinema film by Stanley Sears, who, incidentally, was placed first in the age/distance competition and won the potato-in-bucket test.

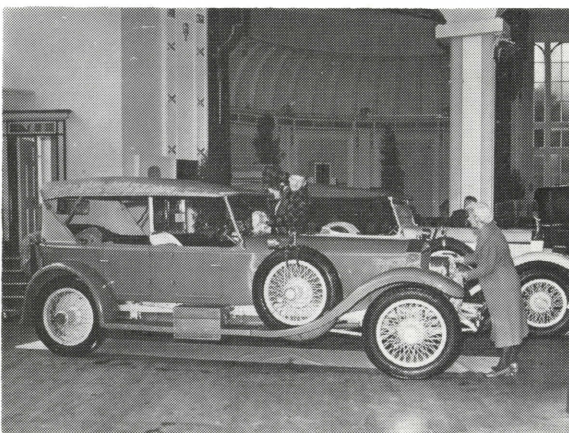
A visit to the factory at Crewe was arranged for September 30th and on that day a fine range of cars, starting with the Neales' 1910 double-enclosed limousine, was lined up for the Company's photographer to record. One happy picture shows Eric Dudley pulling up the starting handle of his 1915 40/50 watched by a knowledgeable group including 'Doc' Smith and Roney Messervy. It was, incidentally, in the following spring that Messervy (Msy) presented the Club with the trophy that bears his name—a silver salver. Members were shown around the works and found as much to fascinate them there as their hosts found in the cars that were on display.

By present day standards the circular for December 1955 contains some plums to make the readers' mouths water: a choice of Silver Ghost chassis—£50 for a 1913 or £45 10s for a 1921 "with a good mascot"; a 1922 Mulliner tourer at £275; a 20 h.p. Hooper coupé at £400. The membership now stood at around the 200 mark with 121 cars: 36 20 h.p. (6 cyl.), one 20 h.p. (4 cyl.), 37 20/25, 3 25/30, 2 Wraith, 21 Silver Ghost, 5 P I, 9 P II and 8 P III; the subscription remained at 10/-. The principal summer meeting in 1956 was at Old Warden Park, where members gathered to inspect the historic early aeroplanes and motor-cars preserved by the Shuttleworth Trust—a collection that has slowly gone from strength to strength in the subsequent years.

1957 was notable for the first American participation in a 20-Ghost Club event—the start of a felicitous relationship culminating in the recent and highly successful tour described in the last Record. The occasion was the Silver Ghost Jubilee Rally (12th-14th September) when Webster Woodmansee and Frank Hand brought their open Brewster-bodied cars to join the 20 British entries



Eric Dudley pulling up, watched by Roney Messervy
Crewe, 1955



Buxton 1957: The Woodmansees prepare their Springfield
Silver Ghost for the Concours

ranging from 1907 (R.R. Ltd., J. P. Smith, and Adrian Garrett) to 1925 (John Hampton). Many are the stories, or legends, remembered from this event, but one fact is indisputable: for much of the time it was wet. On the Thursday afternoon the cars assembled at the R-R sports ground at Derby and then drove to Buxton. The next day there was a concours after which the cars drove to the top of the "Cat and Fiddle" to be photographed and on Saturday proceeded to Crewe for driving tests. Such were the celebrations which had been planned to mark the 50th anniversary of Silver Ghost's famous trial.

Our transatlantic guests duly arrived but had, perhaps, been rather misled by the grandiloquent name of the hotel on which the festivities were centred, to expect air-conditioning and a warmed swimming-pool fringed with palm trees; they found an unmodified example of Victorian splendour whose ceilings provided iced water without request and whose windows did not so much keep out the autumnal gale as to channel it to a high-pitched whistle! But without question they enjoyed it all hugely. By a masterstroke the organisers arranged for the concours to be held inside the Pavilion which at once provided a dry, elegant and appropriate setting. And from the legendary past of pre-1914 motoring there came a surviving and legendary figure—James Radley.

It was, of course, entirely appropriate to take the Ghosts up the "Cat and Fiddle" to produce a counterpart to the famous picture of Silver Ghost with three companion 40/50s taken there in 1907; it was entirely appropriate for such an occasion that Mr. Radley should drive Silver Ghost. The road is a fairly narrow and somewhat steep one, affording impressive views for the passengers to admire. However it seems unlikely that on the return trip Mr. Radley's passengers appreciated the views to the full for, leaving the rest behind, he flung Silver Ghost through the wet corners in a way that showed that the fire behind the Alpine successes of 45 years earlier was still alight and, indeed, could burn strongly.

Another matter for nostalgia was the talk given in March 1958 by Osmund Rivers of Hooper and Co. for it was not long afterwards that the famous name disappeared from St. James' Street. Mr. Rivers' pictures stimulated some of us to start polishing for the Concours held in June at Longleat. A memorable summer event held in delightful conditions—all praise to the Events Committee which now comprised John Anderson, John Hampton and Bill Matthews.

The sight of rows of Rolls-Royces lined up before that magnificent Elizabethan house was indeed a memorable one. On that day it somehow seemed exactly right that we should all be in Wiltshire for that particular event. Prize winners included Harry Fergusson-Wood (with Jack Barclay's 1910 car), Fred Watson (1911), Bill Cook (P III), C. G. Duce (P II) and Hugh Keller (20 h.p.). Later that summer Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Meachen gave a garden party for us at their most elegant house, Linden Hill. The afternoon scene—croquet played on the lawns below the terrace with cars such as the "London to Edinburgh" and the "Lonsdale" in the drive conveyed just the effect of the Charles Sykes drawings in the old catalogues.

The 20-Ghost Club was by now beginning to attract a little attention. Longleat was recounted at length in the evening newspapers; pictures of the Silver Jubilee rally appeared in the national dailies, and a Mr. Fred Majdalany devoted four columns of the Daily Mail to the Club, ending with "any history of Britain's Twentieth Century folklore will be incomplete without a chapter on the 20-Ghost Club—this memorial extraordinary to Royce, the man who came closest to giving machinery a soul." Such words would seem a fitting ending to these historical notes for in 1959 there came John Anderson's short-lived, but much appreciated, "Newsletter", and the Club's activities were recorded as they took place. The attendance at the dinner exceeded 100 for the first time and in April a pleasant social gathering at Hurlingham saw 33 cars assemble including, for the first time, Stanley Sears' Wraith and Fred Watson's P II. The concours was held at Stanford Park at the invitation of Lord Braye—again it was a warm summer day in the best tradition.

Thus at the end of its first decade of activity, the Club could be well satisfied with the way in which its objectives had been realised and could look back upon some notable and successful events.

The success of such an amateur organisation must always reflect the enthusiasm and ability of those who devote to it their time and energy. Throughout this decade the Club's President was Stanley Sears, and Fred Watson the Hon. Secretary and Treasurer. Adrian Belsey was the first Chairman and Frank King the original Librarian. Prominent among those on the Committee, or who served the Club in other ways, were the late John Castle, Beryl Castle, Jack Frost, Bill Cook, John Anderson, John Hampton, Bill Matthews and Michael Vivian; at the end of 1959 the Events Committee was re-organised by its new Chairman, John Dymock-Maunsell and Ian Hallows took over the "Newsletter" which re-emerged as the "Record".

The tradition continues.

R.O.B.



Silver Gh

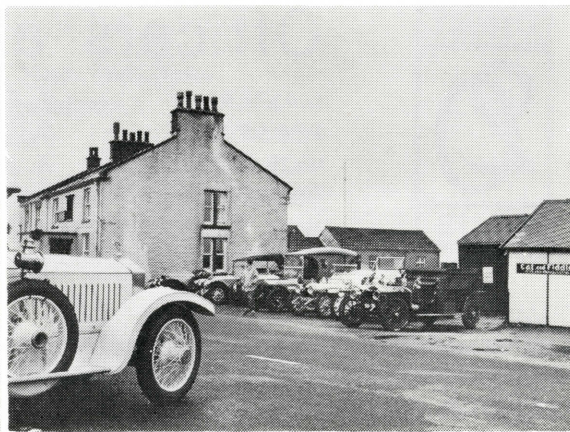


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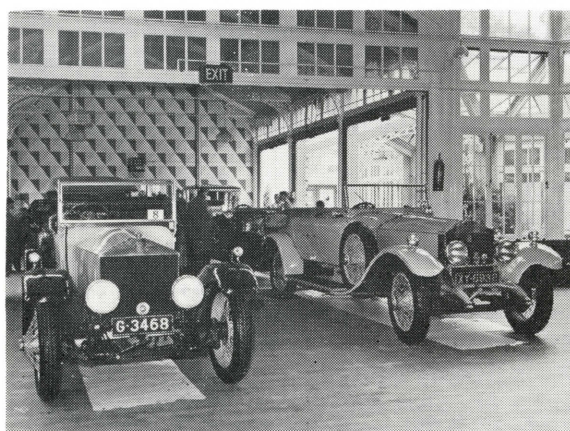




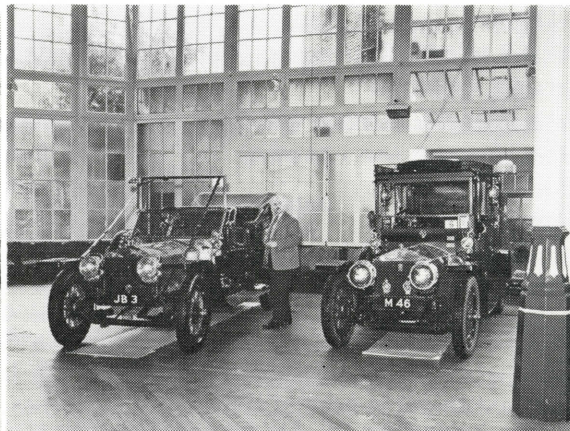
Silver Ghosts assemble at Derby sports ground at the start of the 1957 rally



Silver Ghosts at the Cat & Fiddle Jubilee Rally 1957



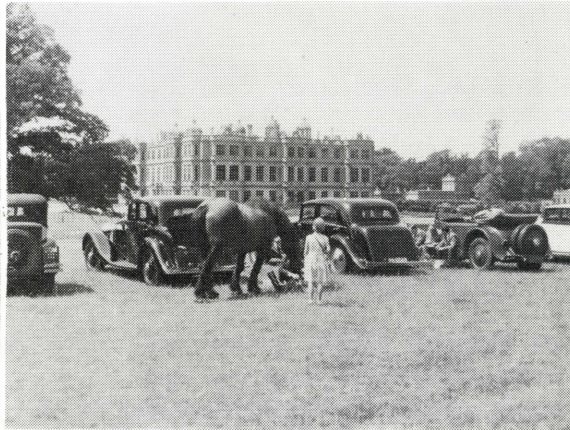
Elegance in the Pavilion: Lord Bruce's 1911 Silver Ghost and John Hampton's 1925



Harry Fergusson-Wood with JB 3 and Fred Watson's 1911



Silver Ghost on the "Cat and Fiddle"; Radley at the wheel 1957



Longleat 1958. No lions in those days. Only a passing horse came to join the picnic (Robin Barnard)