



## **SCARCE Newsletter No 19 June 2013**

Since the last newsletter we seem to have entered the busy season, we have had the Wrigley/Bronteland Run; the Classic Car Show at Tatton Park; the Peaks and Dales Run; the annual Carriage House evening, and Mike Littlewood has been hillclimbing his Bentley at Harewood; attending a memorial service for the most famous of all Bentley exponents Tim Birkin, and has also found time to visit Pau; Monthlery and Rheims circuits in France. In spite of all that he still managed to be at the last monthly meet at the Three Crowns! Several members went out to watch the Flying Scotsman rally for pre 1940's cars as it passed through our area, and we also had a good turn-out of members at Harewood to cheer on Mike's Bentley.

We have plenty of events coming up and you will find dates in the attached calendar.

### **The Tim Birkin Memorial Weekend**

Report and pictures by Mike Littlewood

Benjafields racing club arranged for members to be allowed to have access to the churchyard at Blakeney church on the Norfolk coast where Henry (Tim) Birkin is buried. We stayed at the Morston Hall hotel for a grand dinner on the evening before travelling to the church. Guest of honour was Tims grandson James who also attended the laying of a wreath on his grave. Unfortunately I was unable to take part in the rest of the trip as it then travelled on to Brooklands and then on through Europe including the Swiss alps. (My better half had some input here!) One of the organisers (Franco) is Swiss and he organised most of the tour.



Tim Birkins modest headstone



From left to right :  
Franco (Swiss organiser) ,Adam Singer  
(English organiser), Tims great grandson,  
James (Tims grandson).





Franco donates his Birkin type scarf!

James saying he would love to join SCARCE!





## **17<sup>th</sup> Peaks and Dales Charity Run Sun 16<sup>th</sup> June**

We had two cars entered on this run organised by Hare and Hounds Classic Vehicle Club, Mike and Alistair Littlewood's Jaguar 420 and Deryck Pickup/Dave Bamber in the TR6. The start was at the memorial park in Marple where the organisers had laid on free brews and biscuits. The weather was initially extremely iffy, but by the time to start arrived it was possible to take the hood down and it then remained down all day.

We left Marple along the Mellor road and soon found ourselves on the main road past Hayfield to Chapel, which we bypassed along the Wash road and emerged onto Rushup Edge. Winnats was ignored and a short loop took us through Peak Forest from where we meandered through the lanes to Tideswell. The surroundings were by now getting quite picturesque, with the villages of Millers Dale; Taddington; Flagg and Monyash bringing us momentarily onto the A515 before turning off towards Hartington. From here it was through Warslow to the yellow roads West of the B5053 where several crews were scratching their heads searching for the Mermaid Inn. It turned out that the organiser's mileage was one mile out here, but staying on the road found the Mermaid a mile further on than expected. Perhaps there'd been a high tide! The road from here traverses a ridge with magnificent views to both sides.

A loop from here through Ipstones brought us to some beautiful lanes through Staffordshire's "Little Switzerland", the Churnet Valley, complete with its own steam railway. This area is really pretty and would be a good prospect for a future club outing. The route then skirted round Leek to head for Rudyard; Swythamley and Wincle before heading back to Buxton via Axe Edge.

The finish was at the Pavilion Gardens in Buxton where all the cars were lined up outside the Pavilion for the entertainment of the assembled throng.

All in all an excellent route and a good day's outing!



**Mike at:**



**Pau**



**Monthlery**



**and Rheims.**

**An assortment of photos from the Wrigleyland to Bronteland Run**







**And finally, the Carriage House**

John Warburton, whom those of you who did the recent Wrigleyland to Bronteland run will have seen pedalling Julia Dawson's beautiful 1951 Hillman Minx Cabriolet, has kindly sent us the following article he has written which is certainly of local interest. (Our Clubsec Martin Bradbury is over 50% certain that he is a descendant of the original murder victims. Presumably all necessary arrangements for their succession had been completed before their deaths! )

Many thanks to John for sending this in.

## **Bill's o' Jack's Speed Hillclimb - 1907**

Holmfirth Road, the A635 that runs eastwards over the Pennines from Greenfield to Holmfirth, is a very familiar local road and one always enjoyed by the keen driver. Starting from The Clarence pub in Greenfield, tightly placed in the fork of A635 as Manchester Road and A669, Chew Valley Road, the uphill gradient initially is about 1 in 12, soon easing a little after half a mile or so, to follow through a series of sweeping bends, ones that just ask to be taken at speed. Then out onto more open moorside, and straighter for a mile or so, where speed can be built up, whilst still climbing. There's a more marked right-hander at Upperwood House, the last dwelling this side of the watershed, after which easier curves and gentler slopes lead up to the horizon.

Around halfway up this stretch of road, just beyond where the coniferous woodland on the right comes to an end, is a gateway in the stone wall edging the road – a track can be seen leading gently downwards from there, almost parallel with the road. A few hundred yards along here once stood the Moorcock Inn, familiarly known as 'Bill's o' Jack's', a public house and smallholding which, after the night of Monday 2 April 1832 gained a notoriety which it never lost. For on that night, the landlord and his gamekeeper son were attacked in their home, and left for dead. The following morning, the alarm was raised when a caller found a scene showing extensive evidence of a violent struggle. The landlord, William Bradbury, was found downstairs and his son Tom in a bedroom, both with serious head and other injuries. Both were dying men; the son was unconscious up to his demise, but his father uttered one word which could not be understood – then, shortly afterwards, he too died. Poachers, itinerant Irish navvies and gypsies in the area all came under suspicion, but there was far from sufficient evidence to charge anyone with the murders. The inn was demolished in 1937, but some of the foundations of the buildings and the cellar can still be seen at the site.

75 years after these brutal murders, a completely contrasting day of motor sport took place up Holmfirth Road and past the old Moorcock Inn. The occasion was the Manchester Automobile Club's speed hillclimb held on 28 September 1907, a Saturday afternoon marked by 'perfect weather'. The MAC had run two previous events of this kind elsewhere and would continue to do so in coming years. Even in those days, speed events on public roads were illegal, as the national limit was bound to be exceeded, but many took place by courtesy of co-operative local men of influence who favoured motoring and could persuade the police to turn a blind eye to the activity. As was customary, the Bill's o' Jack's venue was revealed to those drivers who had expressed interest in entering only immediately beforehand, preparations having taken place in secrecy. Even afterwards, some the weekly motoring magazines coyly refused to divulge the precise location, and only the first three places were published for each class, and certainly not the times taken over the distance.

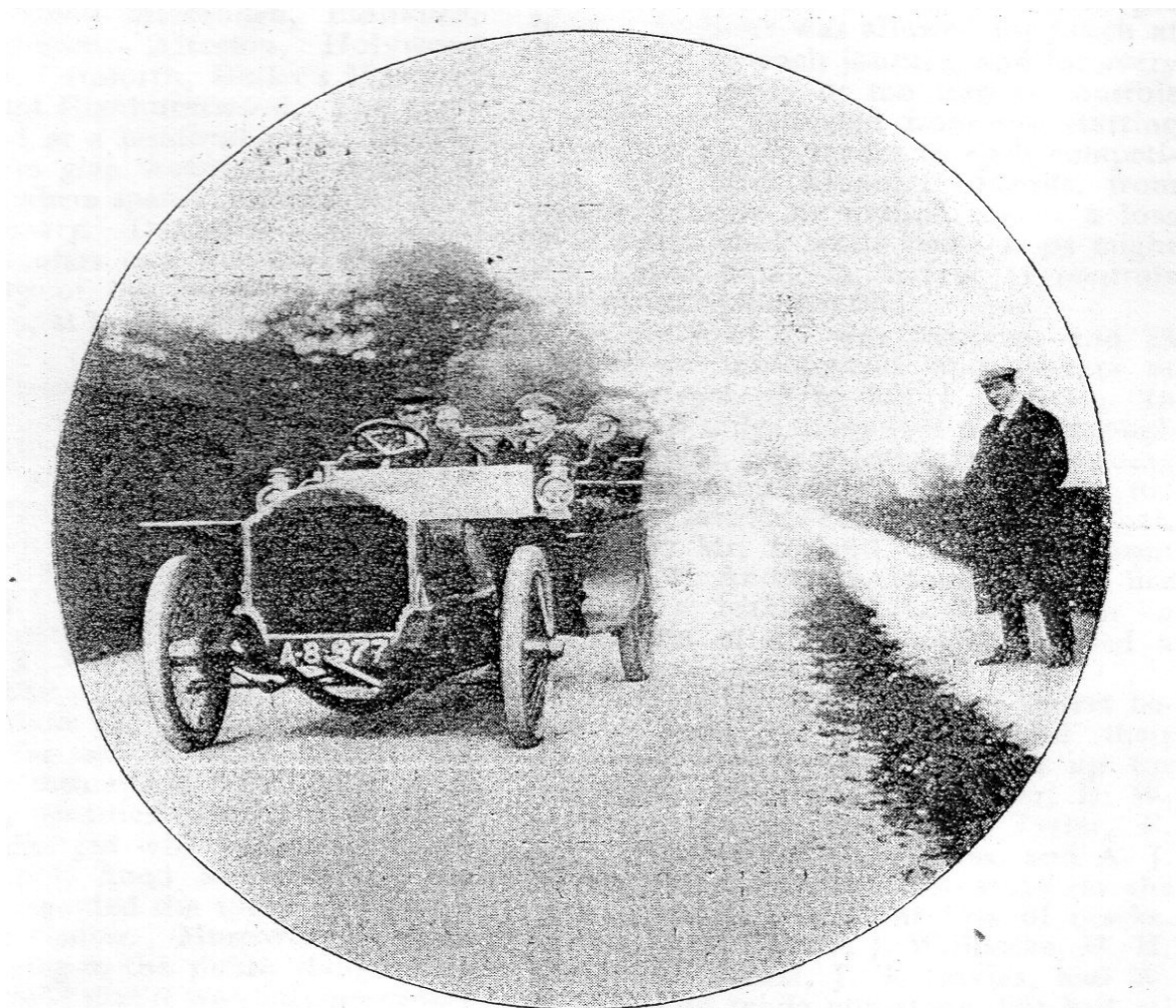
There were 30 entries spread across 5 classes. These classes were divided by cost price of chassis (bodies frequently coming as a separate purchase in those days) – a simple and quite reasonable system. One account quotes the distance over which the cars were timed as 'two and three quarter miles': assuming the start was at The Clarence, and the facilities of a sizeable hostelry would be certainly be expected, then this would bring the finish close to the milestone at OS grid ref 110/035061, say, just under a mile beyond Upperwood House. A complex formula was used to provide handicapping intended to deliver a close result, and the overall fastest time in each class also formed a part of the results. It was normal for passengers to be carried, as the weight of each car was a factor in the formula calculation.

Whilst most of the drivers who took part were local men, this event did attract some prominent entrants from further afield. Hollingdrakes are still remembered as a large firm of motor dealers in Stockport – back in the 1900s, they were agents for the La Buire car, an expensive and high performance make of its day, from Lyons in France. The firm entered two La Buires, a 4-cylinder and a 6-cylinder, which came first and second on handicap in the class for cars with a chassis price exceeding £550 – a huge sum in those days. The fastest time of all was recorded by the same 60hp Napier that had taken the 24 hours record at the then-recently-opened Brooklands circuit at Weybridge in Surrey. Other makes appearing in the results included some still familiar – Rover, Singer, Talbot and Vulcan, whereas makes such as Cottureau, Empress (a De Dion-engined light car made in Paris for the UK market), the Pendleton-made Horbick car, a product of textile machinery makers Messrs Horsfall & Bickham, Argyll and Alldays are now known only to the true motoring history anoraks.

The reports include an intriguing mention that the famous wrestler and weight-lifter, George Hackenschmidt, 'The Russian Lion' (1879 – 1968) was a passenger in H Hollingdrake's 4-cylinder La Buire. He was perhaps the most famous sporting personality in the world at the time, and the years 1900-1910 are still seen as the 'golden age' of wrestling. Between 1889 and 1908, Hackenschmidt won over 3000 wrestling bouts.

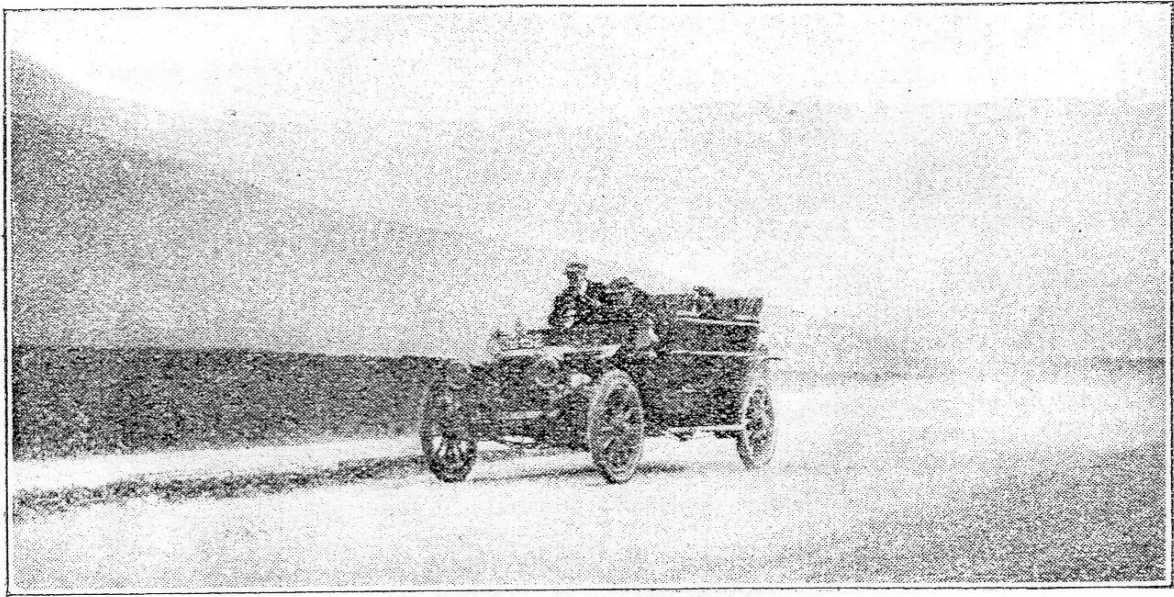
The Holmfirth Road past Bill's o' Jack's never again was used for a motor sport competition of this kind. Even if restricted to cars of say 100 and more years old, the chances today of obtaining official permission to re-run a speed event on this same road are just about as good as those of solving the long-standing mystery of the Bill's o' Jack's murders!

*John Warburton*



The 60-h.p. Napier which made the fastest time at the Manchester Motor Club's Hill Climb.





*Mr. W. Stone's Clement, winner of Class D in the Manchester Motor Club's hill-climb. Mr. Stone's car also made fastest time in its class.*

## On Head Gaskets and Torque Settings.

A week or two ago Gerry Marsden and myself set off to watch our esteemed Mr. Littlewood propelling his Bentley up Harewood Hill Climb. However, we had only done a couple of miles in Gerry's 1937 MG VA and were ascending Huddersfield Road out of Newhey when without any warning whatsoever we experienced a catastrophic loss of engine power and were forced to stop in the middle of the twiddly bits just after the Ogden turn-off. This was not an ideal place to be stopped and a quick inspection was sufficient to convince us that the engine had suffered a major internal malfunction. Only two cylinders were contributing to propulsion effort and this was insufficient to set off forwards on the steep gradient. Not wishing to attempt a three point turn in the road because of the blind bends we were compelled to reverse all the way back down to the last junction in order to turn round. An interesting exercise in itself.

A swift cleaning of Nos 1 and 2 plugs which were saturated with water suggested head gasket failure, and enabled us to limp back to Gerry's home and change to another MG for the trip to Harewood.

On the Monday the head was removed and our suspicions confirmed, the head gasket had suffered a catastrophic failure between No.1 and No.2 cylinders. It was also apparent that it had been passing between No.2 and No.3 as well. The question now arose – Why? The cylinder head was checked for flatness on a surface plate, and the cylinder block checked with a straight edge and both were pronounced satisfactory.

One thing we had noticed was that the cylinder head nuts did not need much effort applied to undo them. Had they been tight enough in the first place?

When the MG was manufactured in 1937 there was no such thing as torque settings, the head was tightened at the factory using Fred's calibrated forearm. ( I am sure I have read somewhere that torque settings were brought in during the Second World War by Rolls-Royce to ensure consistent quality of their Merlin engines, wherever in the world they were assembled. Can anyone confirm this? ). However a torque setting of 45lbs/ft has



been calculated retrospectively, but this is based more on not exceeding the strengths of the studs and threads and block casting rather than any clamping force required by the gasket.

By modern standards 45lbs/ft is low, but had they even been tightened to this in the first place? We therefore borrowed a torque wrench from a friend who has to have it calibrated annually for his business. On checking our wrench against his we discovered that our wrench was over reading by about 10%. This would mean that setting our wrench to 45lbs/ft would only have been applying 40lbs/ft, so the nuts may not have been sufficiently tight in the first place.

The above illustrates the importance of having your torque wrench checked periodically. Gerry also has some thoughts on the suitability of modern asbestos-free head gaskets for older engines which are appended below.

## Deryck

July's "Automobile" magazine has an article about "Fiennes Restoration" who are pre-war car restoration specialists. The proprietor Will Fiennes, read physics at Oxford, going on to a PhD in mechanical engineering at Imperial college (I think we can agree he's a "guru"! ). His speciality is tribology but he has stripped and rebuilt dozens of old engines and makes this interesting comment on the banning of asbestos in gaskets "At first there were problems with head gaskets and compound fillers, but this we overcame more or less by torquing them down more often, for example at 50-mile then 500 mile intervals until 2000 miles had been covered. But this was never satisfactory and we have now developed a reinforced gasket".

The gasket on my 1937 MG VA tourer failed quite dramatically (see pic.) in May, some 5000 miles after the engine rebuild. On disassembly we noticed that the head nuts did not feel very tight. The head and block have been checked and are both flat so it is reasonable to assume that mine failed due to this material defect. I've now fitted an "old stock" Payen copper asbestos unit. We shall watch with interest.

