

SPARKPLUG

The newsletter of the Letchworth Garden City Classic & Vintage Car Club



MARCH 2025



Annual Quiz night on Feb monthly meeting

What a great night it was too. A terrific series of motor related written questions and a picture round as well, all set by David Mee, David and Robert Heaton and Stephen Arnold. The winning team—Nobby's Nuts—which comprised Kevin Sykes, Colin Griffin and John Scott graciously accepted the traditional award which was supplemented by David Mee's kind and thoughtful additional prizes to aid car maintenance—biscuits, tea and booze.



Colin Griffin and Kevin Sykes —two thirds of Team Nobby's Nuts.

Riley Special farewell

Andrew Croysdill

It is with a twinge of regret that my 1936 Riley 12/4 racing Special is now sold. Twenty one years of ownership and so the end of an era for me. A source of so much fun both on and off the track. I must have covered close to 60K miles, generally with only minor mechanical issues. It looks like it's going to Germany with plans for further development for racing - of which I approve as it is in only a modest state of tune. I truly hope it will appear at events here in the future. I kept it in only fast touring trim as I drove to events to compete and, with rare exceptions, drove home again. Both major failures at Goodwood: the preselector gearbox seized and then when a half shaft broke. The RAC were very accommodating.



Andrew's 1936 Riley Special now going on to pastures new. I'm sure everyone in the Club will miss this beautiful car (Ed)



B-17 memorial talk and walk around Halls Green and Weston Saturday, 25th January 2025

The Editor

Although not strictly a car related subject several LGCCVCC members were present for a talk, and guided walk, around Halls Green and Weston. The catalyst for this event was that on the morning of Saturday, 26 August 1944 two B-17 Flying Fortress aircraft were involved in a tragic accident when they collided about a mile West of Halls Green whilst flying to Brest, France at about 14,000' altitude. The resulting wreckage was spread over the area of Halls Green and Weston. Additionally, a bomb sadly went through the roof of a cottage close to what was The Anchor pub, now a private residence, killing a mother and her child.

Stuart, the organiser, gave a detailed and very moving talk, within a barn adjacent to Lolleywood Café, to about 70 people, one of whom remembered seeing the parachutes of some of the airmen, when he was 9 years old. A third unrelated B-17 on a test flight later in the war had come down, on Thursday, 12 April 1945. This aircraft, based at Bassingbourn, had flown low over Weston and had clipped a wing on the ground, being destroyed in the crash which followed. This was the last aircraft of 197 B-17s that failed to return to Bassingbourn, the US Eighth Air Force's highest heavy bomber loss at any USAAF station in the UK. Whilst we were standing in the subject field a young participant on the tour found a piece of melted aluminium, presumed to be from the stricken aircraft.

A future memorial to those killed in the air and on the ground is planned. This is expected to be sited on a small green near The Cricketers pub on the Weston to Graveley Road.

More information is on Facebook at **Weston, Herts, B17's Memorial**.



Five Jeeps were in attendance. The Jeep's owners helped those of the group who could not walk easily to visit some of the associated sites. Two parked up outside The Cricketers replicating a sight that could have been seen during the later part of the war.

A visit to the RAC Club

Nick Salmon

I was fortunate to be invited to lunch at the RAC Club recently.

In the foyer was the winner of their 'Restoration' award in 2024 - the 1927 Bentley 3 litre Boat Tail Speed Model. What a beautiful thing it is! All gorgeous, but it was the aerodynamic running boards that caught my eye.

The car was the subject of three years work at Julian Parker's workshops. Sadly, the owner, Christopher Jaques never got to see the finished article. He died in 2023.



Reflections on the VSCC Hertfordshire Tour.

Andrew Croysdill

The VSCC ran their Hertfordshire Tour again from an excellent base at Lolleywood Café back in the early summer of last year. Helen and I had entered our 1929 Riley Monaco.

A number of Letchworth GCV&CCC members provided critical support in the assembly, scrutineering and eventual release, at intervals of about one minute, of about twenty five Tourists. Another delightful run of some 70 miles round Eastern Hertfordshire and into Essex took us on a picturesque rural route, as determined by our own member John Scott and chosen to carry as little traffic as possible.

Richard, our Editor, had asked me to write something about the event for Sparkplug at that time and in this regard I've been rather lazy. With the benefit of several months hindsight, I have a few thoughts but which don't extend to a report.

The event for me was notable for two features, the minor of which related to motoring history and to my personal education! I'll come to this later.

The other relates to the awareness shown by fellow drivers taking part in the event. I thought these observations might be considered useful for any similar events in which we all may be taking part.

This particular anecdote relates to an extended period where I caught up and found myself at the back of a convoy of four slower cars; all chums who were driving in support of one of their number at the front who had minor mechanical issues that were slowing him down to about 25 mph max.

This snake continued for some two or three miles until eventually I found a modern Mercedes coming up behind and so, at a suitable opportunity, I pulled over to let it pass me and hoped that those fellow participants in front of me would be similarly aware and do the same thing. In fact this didn't happen and I was somewhat embarrassed that for another four or so miles this car found itself near the tail end of our convoy. Fortunately he showed no signs of ill humour or behaviour and eventually, at a suitable junction he could turn off and carry on his way unimpeded.

My main point is that I think, to avoid criticisms of these events, we need to be properly aware of modern traffic that is commonly faster than we choose to be and to be prepared to move over to let that pass. In my experience this is usually greeted with a friendly wave of thanks or similar gesture; commonly, as is the way now, with a couple of flashes with hazard warning lights. Similarly, convoys are to be avoided!

The historical element of the day relates to the participation on the Tour of one of my boyhood heroes who, on the day, was driving his fine Vintage Sunbeam Tourer accompanied by his wife. It was Paul Easter who older members may remember winning the Monte Carlo Rally twice for the BMC Team as co-driver to Timo Makinen in their Mini Cooper S.

Firstly in 1965 then infamously in 1966 when the French officials were somewhat embarrassed by their colossal lead achieved in the heavy snow conditions on their route down from Stockholm. The organisers found a convenient apparent 'infringement' of regulations related to the Mini's then-novel Quartz halogen headlight bulbs. Those of us 'of a certain age' will remember the national outrage arising from Makinen's and Easter's exclusion together with second, third and fourth placed Minis and fifth placed Lotus Cortina to the benefit of the Citroens.

As it happened, it became a major publicity bonus for BMC and it was with much gratification for all that Rauno Aaltonen's Mini succeeded in winning yet again in '67. Several of us at Lolleywood were pleased to shake Paul's hand in memory of his successes in 'The Monte' and many other rallies which had been considered a really big deal back then.

The trivial personal note that I report here was that I was able to introduce myself, knowing that Paul and I had both attended the same school in Potters Bar, albeit some ten years apart. His genuine delight in this meeting was compounded by my introduction of two further 'Old Boys' of that school who had participated that same day.

Attached is a photo of us four, at the end of the day, with myself wearing my old school tie, brought along having previously spotted his name on the entry list!



L to R: Tony Turner - photographer of the meeting, myself, Paul Easter and Alan Brown.

Paul was even more delighted to discover that Tony is the son of the eminent former Sports Editor of Motor Magazine for many years. Philip Turner was a very highly regarded journalist, nationally and internationally, by many racing drivers and teams and Paul remembered him fondly. Paul was keen to meet up with me subsequently for further reminiscences which we did in the late summer.

Those of us who 'take' The Automobile magazine were pleased to have an engaging four page feature devoted to Paul Easter and his many motoring exploits in a recent issue of that excellent magazine.

The GNR - Graveley (with thanks to Club members Rod Russell and Simon Ansell)

The Editor

A quiet village straddling the Great North Road. Graveley used to be much busier as all the traffic on the Stevenage Bypass, the A1(M) was routed through the High Street when the motorway terminated at Corey's Mill roundabout. This necessitated the building of a foot-bridge over the road to allow pedestrians to cross; now long dismantled. Two large pubs, old coaching inns (The Waggon and Horses and The George and Dragon) sit next to each other on the High Street on the West side of the road. Whilst the A1(M) was being built Rod would go and talk to the mainly Irish navvies building the road, getting lifts up to Baldock and back on road rollers and graders. These were the days when glass bottles could be taken back to the shop for the return of a deposit – quite lucrative for Rod with lots of thirsty navvies working away. A steadier income was gained by Rod when working at Graveley Motors. Graveley Motors started with petrol and paraffin pumps and a servicing ramp. The ramp could be hired by DIY mechanics at the weekends. Later, in 1969 an enclosed garage building was erected and in 1972 it became a Citroen dealer. The company had a body shop just up the road at Jacks Hill. The garage was latterly a car sales enterprise. The site is now occupied by houses.



This evocative c1920s picture shows a car, parked on the North bound side of the High Street leading to Jack's Hill. The mainly wooden pub on the left has gone but the wall further on remains. What a lot of knitting was involved in the telephone system of the day.

At the risk of being maudlin it is of merit to remember that not only cars travelled the Great North Road. To quote from Laurie Lee's book 'As I Walked Out One Midsummers Day' he noticed 'professional tramps all trudging northwards in a sombre procession. These people went on their way like somnambulists, walking alone and seldom speaking to each other. There seemed to be more of them inland than on the coast- maybe the police had seen to that. They were like a broken army walking away from war, cheeks sunken, eyes dead with fatigue. Some carried bags of tools, or shabby cardboard suitcases; some wore ghosts of city suits; some, when they stopped to rest, carefully removed their shoes and polished them vaguely with a handful of grass. Among them were carpenters, clerks, engineers from the Midlands, many who had been on the road for months, walking up and down the country in a maze of jobless refusals, the treadmill of the mid-thirties.'

The information board by the Graveley village pond states that the Deperdussin monoplane aircraft that crashed on Friday, 6 September 1912, for which there is a memorial stone on the Great Wymondley to Willian Road, where the temporary RFC landing ground was, actually came down in a field behind the George and Dragon public house. The engine broke up, severing the wing's bracing wires. Following this and a similar accident The Royal Flying Corp banned monoplanes, electing to then only fly biplanes. An airworthy fully restored 1910 single seater Deperdussin Monoplane can be seen in the Shuttleworth Collection at Old Warden. The weather conditions have to be very calm for this aircraft to fly.

Additionally, the board states that the Stevenage to Biggleswade Turnpike Trust was established in 1720 to plan and maintain the Great North Road in this region and two toll gates were set up in Graveley. Money collected from the tolls was used to maintain the road but locals were provided with free passes.

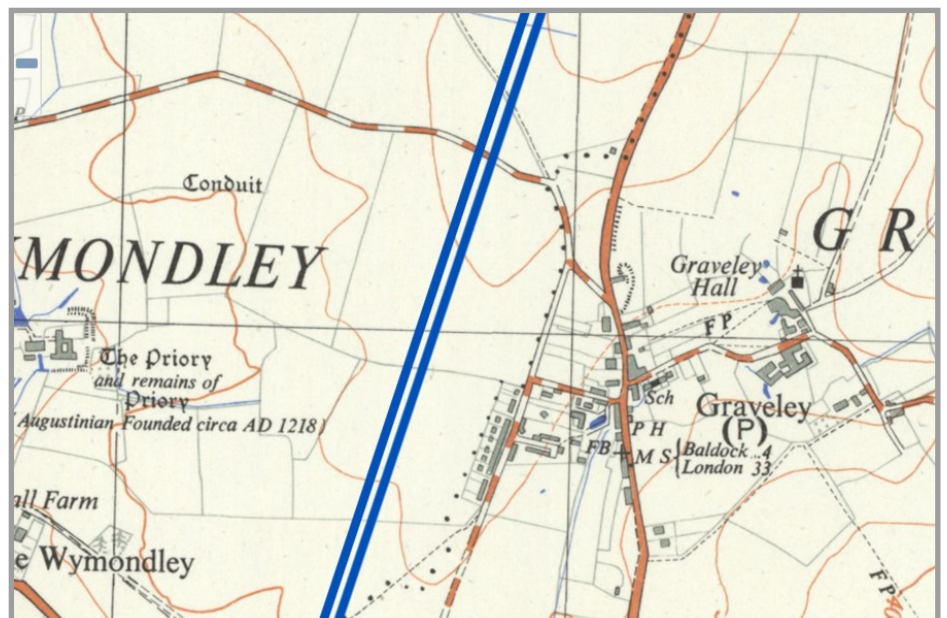
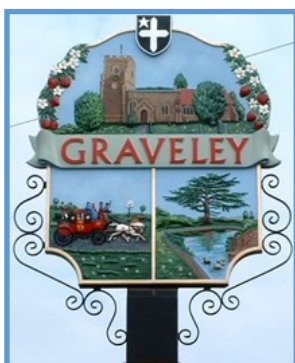


Service Manager Rod standing 5th from right in this photograph of the Graveley Motors staff.



Pictures kindly supplied by Rod. The left hand picture shows the garage and a Post Office behind it, both long gone. The centre picture shows the pump island, and The Waggon and Horses on the opposite side of the road. The right hand picture shows the garage building and another petrol pump and a lot of Citroen cars.

Our Vice Chairman spent some of his youth in Graveley as his Great Great Aunt Edith Pomfrey ran the village Post Office, (for 50 years). The sign for the PO can be seen in the left hand picture, above the Graveley Motor Co. sign. Simon used to swim in the pond where he says his Cousin once got bitten by an eel. (Amazing to think that that eel had swum all the way from the Saragossa Sea to carry out the act).



Graveley on a map dated 1937 to 1961, with the A1(M) now scything by it.

Roadgoing Moggie

The Editor

Whilst walking around the back streets of Spitalfields just before Christmas I was taken by this innocuous but charming 1956 Morris Minor Tourer. It did look a bit sorry for itself with some panels perforated. According to the DVLA it was first registered in March 1956 and it has an 803cc engine. Still gracing the cobbles of the East End and giving pleasure to its owner in 2024.



Allan McNab via an email-

"I was pleased to see in Nick Salmon's photos from Chateau Impney the MG M type PJ7970.

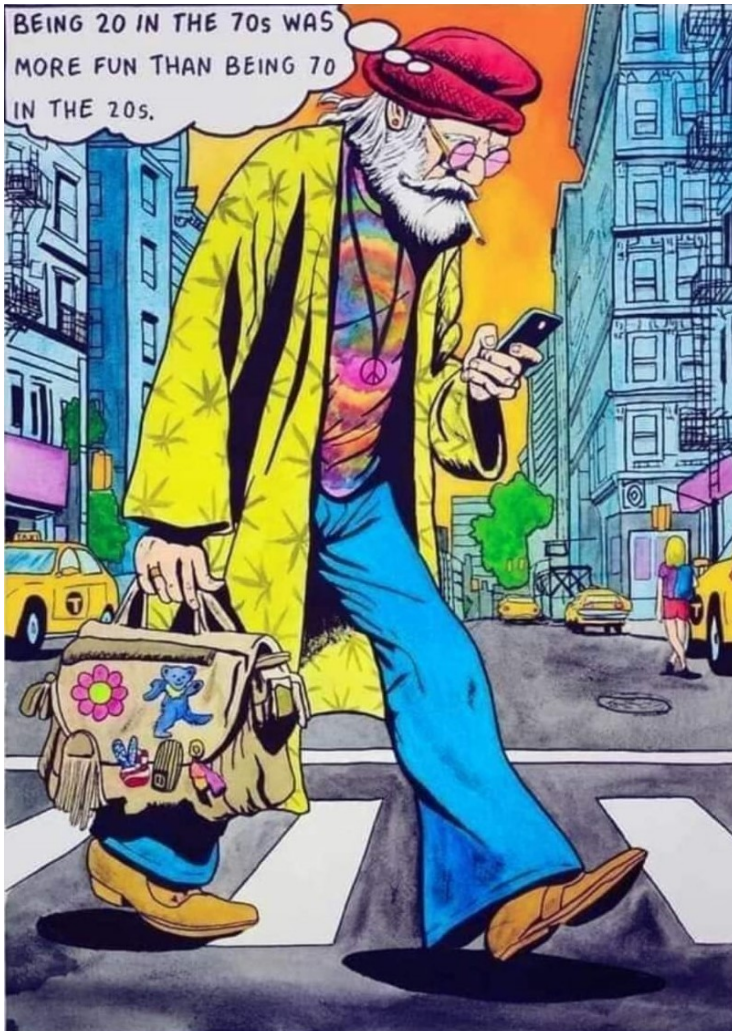
I rescued this car (on right in attached 1960s photo) from Bushey in 1964 for £5, never laid a spanner on it, and sold it to Sports & Vintage Motors in 1969, who sold it on to the Rushton family who have used it extensively ever since.

This was one of the eight M types I rescued of which about six were restored and survive, including OV1054, the one I most used, which still belongs to the chap to whom I sold it in 1969."



The 1933 MG M type reg PJ7970 seen hill climbing by Nick recently, and on the right on Allan's drive in the days of black and white photos.

Cartoon spotted by Andy Beavan



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