

## OUR 1950s MOTORING SCENE

# LORD MONTAGU'S VISIT TO THE CAPE

By *Derek Stuart-Findlay*

**I**N June 1959 the Crankhandle Club received an interesting letter from Lord Edward Montagu; he and his wife Lady Belinda were planning a tour of Southern Africa. They were arriving in Cape Town in October with veteran and vintage vehicles from his famous collection at Beaulieu. He suggested that these four cars, two motorcycles and a tricycle could form the core of an exhibition in the city.

In 1951, on turning 25, Edward had inherited the Beaulieu Estate in Hampshire, UK, which had been held in trust after his father had died in 1929. The maintenance of the estate and the family home, Palace House, had been well beyond his financial resources and he had opened the old part of the house and the gardens to the public. His father, Lord John Montagu, had been a pioneer motorist in Britain and one of his cars, a 1903 6 hp De Dion-Bouton was still on the estate. Edward had the car restored and placed it on display in the front hall of the house together with cars loaned by Daimler, the Rootes Group, Vauxhall and Lagonda. These vehicles were to form the core of a motor museum, the first in the UK since the Dangerfield collection at the Crystal Palace had



*Lord and Lady Montagu on their 1909 Humber at the docks*

been dispersed callously during World War I.

The veteran and vintage cars at Beaulieu proved to be extremely

popular and Montagu was soon inundated with offers of other historic vehicles. In 1956 he converted a large woodshed and built a new

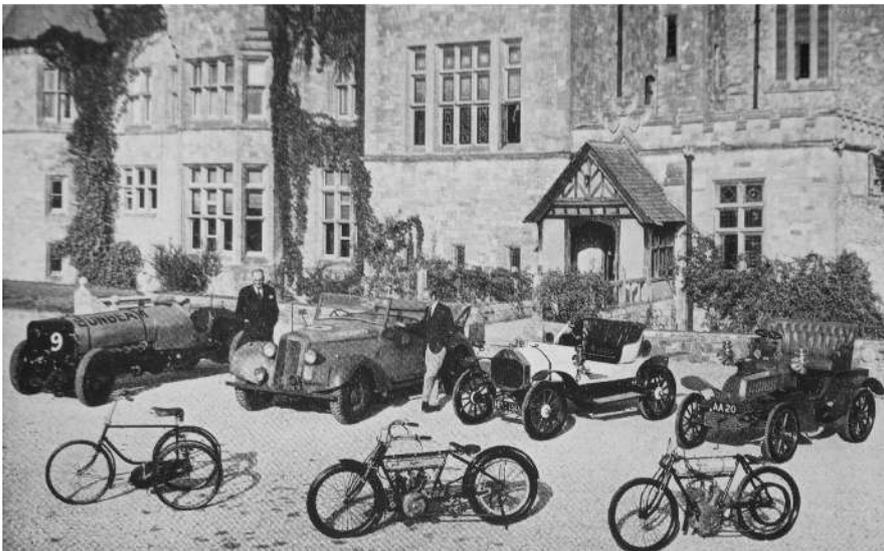
structure alongside it to house the growing collection. Within a few years this new space had again become far too small and in April 1959 a spacious modern building had been opened by Lord Brabazon of Tara. The stage had been set for the visit to the Cape, Edward had recently completed an illustrated publication

'The Motoring Montagus' and the tour was to be a

book promotion in Southern Africa.

The Crankhandle Club had been founded less than four years before and an exhibition of this kind was to be a first for Cape Town. The club had 65 members, they owned a similar number of historic vehicles but many of these were still in parts. There was an immediate concern that too few had been restored for a comprehensive show. Nevertheless, with Lord Montagu's visit as a major incentive, the club booked the old Drill Hall adjacent to the Grand Parade for the week of Sunday 25 to Saturday 31 October 1959. It was resolved that all vehicles on display would have to pass a stringent scrutineering process and this inspired a mad scramble to complete restoration projects.

Shell was selected as the main sponsor of the exhibition. It was agreed that the car show would be promoted as 'Motoring thro' the



*The Montagu vehicles at Beaulieu. Clockwise from left: 1920 Sunbeam, 1941 Humber staff car, 1909 Humber, 1903 De Dion Bouton, 1907 N.L.G. m/c, 1907 Norton m/c, 1907 Humber tricycle*



*The motorcycle exhibition in the Drill Hall: 1915 Indian, 1919 A.J.S., 1914 Douglas, 1907 N.L.G., 1907 Norton. Behind: 1926 Graham Talbot*



*Crankhandle Club members on duty: centre, Frank McClean, seated, Mrs Le Coq Moir*

Years' and the official programme would be a quality production designed by the advertising agents Lindsay Smithers. Professionals from Shell took photographs of each of the vehicles chosen and George Kinnes did detailed research for the captions. Although the cost of the brochure was to be covered by advertising, the exhibition had to be financed and the club was most grateful when its patron, Frank Connock, donated £100 to cover costs. To avoid entertainment tax it was decided that any surpluses would be distributed to charity, and the Lions organization was brought on board to administer cash collection. Shell agreed to flight advertisements of the show for ten days in advance of the official opening and during the exhibition.

Lord and Lady Montagu duly arrived in Cape Town on the *Pendennis Castle* on Thursday 22 October, and that afternoon their cars formed a convoy that generated excellent publicity as it advanced up Adderley Street. They were heading towards Orpen Motors where the cars were to be stored. Orpens were the Rootes Group agents in the city and had a considerable interest in the cars in the parade. Edward drove his 1903 De Dion-Bouton, followed by Belinda in her 1909 Humber which had been presented to her as a wedding gift. Behind them was their 1941 Humber Super Snipe known as 'Old Faithful', Field Marshall Montgomery's staff car during World War II. This in turn was towing their incredible 1920 Sunbeam sprint car. Equipped with

a 350 hp 12-cylinder 18 322 cc Manitou aero engine, it had broken the World Land Speed Record three times, the first British car to set the record. This had first been achieved by Kenelm Lee Guinness (of KLG sparkplug fame) in 1922 and twice more by Captain (later Sir) Malcolm Campbell in 1924 and 1925. In his second attempt in the Sunbeam, Campbell had raised the record to over 150 mph at Pendine Sands in Wales. The car had been found semi-derelict in Lancashire and had been restored during 1958.

During their visit the Montagus stayed at the Clifton Hotel and on the Friday evening were entertained by the Crankhandle Club at a

cocktail party at the Constantia Nek restaurant. Over the weekend club members focused intensively on finishing off their vehicles. By the Tuesday afternoon the hall had been decorated and everything was in place, ready for the official opening at 6pm by the Mayor of Cape Town, Joyce Newton-Thompson. The opening to the public took place an hour later.

In addition to the seven vehicles imported by the Montagus, the Crankhandle Club had selected another 20 belonging to its members. These included Harry Sheldrick's 1904 De Dion Bouton, Angus Kinnes' 1909 E.M.F., George Kinnes' 1912 Humber,

Boytjie Marais' 1912 Arrol-Johnston, Bob Johnston's 1921 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, Bridget Kinnes' 1924 Renault, Frank Thompson's 1926 Graham Talbot racing car, Mrs Le Coq Moir's 1927 Lancia Lambda, Count Labia's 1928 Isotta-Fraschini, Tophet Hart's 1929 Austin Seven and Jack Love's 1930 Austin Seven Ulster and 1931 Swallow.

The other eight cars were American; Jan Stekhoven's 1913 Studebaker, Holmes Motors 1914 Ford Model T, Des Baumann's 1923 Willys-Overland, Ernst van der Horst's 1926 Model T, Barrie Hart's 1926 Chrysler, Terry Wilson's 1927 Chevrolet, Frank



*Co-opted staff admiring Harry Sheldrick's 1904 De Dion Bouton*

Hoole's 1928 Ford Model A and Eric Blood's 1930 Chevrolet. The restoration of at least seven of the cars had been completed with only days to spare.

Two chassis were on display, both were in the process of being restored by Angus Kinnes, his 1926 Morris Cowley and UCT's 1901 Benz. Two of the five motorcycles on display also belonged to Angus, a 1914 Douglas and a 1915 Indian, they were mounted next to a 1919 AJS owned by John Skaife. The other two had been brought out by Lord Montagu. One of them was a 1907 Norton, the machine on which Rem Fowler had won the first (1907) Isle of Man T.T. race in the twin-cylinder class. The other was an extremely rare special. It was a 1907 N.L.G. built by the North London Garage, and equipped with a 986 cc 2-cylinder Peugeot engine. On Easter Monday 1908 W.E. Cook had won the first official motorcycle race to be held at the Brooklands Track on this machine, and during the following year he had covered the Flying Kilometre at a record 75.92 mph. The tricycle was also interesting, it was a 1907



*Bob Johnston's 1921 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost*

Humber that King Edward VII had used to pedal around his palace gardens.

The entrance fee for adults was 2/6d and for children 1/-, opening times were 11 am to 10 pm and the crowds poured into the Drill Hall. A stand had been set up for Lord Montagu and he had his hands full signing his new book. The Crankhandle Club members worked extremely hard for long hours and by the time the exhibition closed on

the Saturday evening its members were exhausted.

The chairman of the club, Frank McClean, commented after the show that although the Montagu exhibits had been a terrific asset, he believed that the standard of vehicle presented by the members of the Crankhandle Club had been a real eye-opener to all visitors. Wide coverage had been given by the South African Broadcasting Corporation, 8 000 visitors had paid

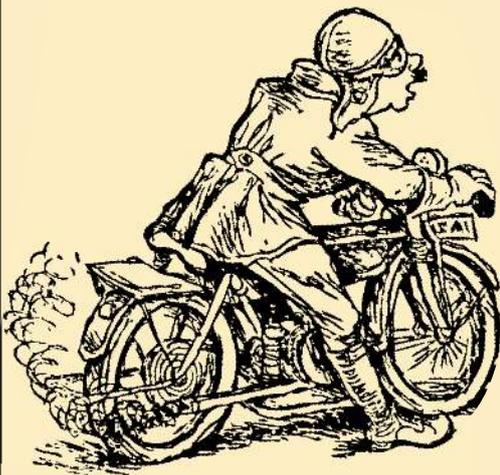
to see the exhibition and £600 had been donated to the Cape Peninsula Welfare Organization for the Aged.

A week later Lord and Lady Montagu drove their De Dion and their Humber in the club's annual pilgrimage to Houw Hoek. They went on to participate in motor exhibitions in Durban and Johannesburg before driving to Salisbury in Old Faithful and spending Christmas with Lady Belinda's brother in Kenya. The tour had been a great success, the Crankhandle Club had boosted its image significantly and the show had generated considerable local interest in veteran and vintage vehicles.

Bob Johnston, in particular, had had a most amusing experience. With his rather loud voice and 'foreign accent' (he had been born in Canada), many people had mistaken him for Lord Montagu!

*Acknowledgements to The Motoring Montagus by Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, CHC committee minutes for 1959, Klaxon, March 1960, CAR Aug 1960 and CHC Chronicle Dec 2009* 🏍️

## PS. Biking snippets for car enthusiasts



**B**ev Jacobs has come up with a few thought provoking gems, based on the February bike run.

As bike enthusiasts, we always hope for no rain as our old bikes' brakes are not too good on wet roads and we are careful not to expose them to conditions that would cause rust. It would be unusual to find a biker who truly

enjoys clingy, sodden pants, water filled boots and a visor without wiper. Something that car drivers will not necessarily think of though, is that it can also be very hot on a bike as the protective gear we wear is heavy and thick. We do have air conditioning... of the natural type... but that does not necessarily make it much cooler.

Something else that is of note is that older bikes have limited, if any, suspension, so some of the road surfaces on the Natter route were particularly challenging. Hitting potholes on my old lady is not fun

and, as my bike has its gears on the tank, operated by the right hand, letting go of the handlebars, to change gears, dodging potholes, watching for buckled/melted tar and second-guessing dodgy car drivers, was a challenging and sometimes hair-raising adventure.

Another point of interest that makes riding a bike quite different compared to a car, is that we do everything ourselves - we 'drive' and navigate the route. This means that for us to be able to read a route schedule, it should be typed in large font, in bullet format and mounted in a rally board/box, to make navigating as easy as possible. Alternatively, we have to memorise it, which is itself, very challenging for some of us with fading memories.

Of course, the advantage of

'doing it all ourselves' is that we don't ever have quarrels with our navigators, and if we take wrong routes, we don't have anyone else to blame. The downside of having no navigator is that paying for the toll gate fee is a challenge... try getting your change out of your back pocket, from under a corduroy jacket, while wearing gloves, ensuring your revs are kept at a sufficient level to prevent your engine from cutting out and trying to hear the attendant from under your helmet with your engine roaring furiously below you. We found a wonderful way round this problem our trusty sweep vehicle driver (Harvey Metcalf in his '38 Chev), paid over our funds and we were let through in single file - a great idea!

