

OUR 1960s MOTORING SCENE

THE MOTOR MAGNATES OF KALK BAY

By *Derek Stuart-Findlay*

The False Bay coast has always been a popular holiday and retirement destination. For about five years Kalk Bay was the home of two world-class motor entrepreneurs, one being South African and the other British.

Frank Connock was one of South Africa's greatest motoring pioneers. As a youngster in Johannesburg during the 1890s he was an extremely competitive cyclist, and set South African records for both the 50-mile distance and the flying quarter-mile. By 1896 he and two partners had secured the Johannesburg agency for Rover cycles. Determined to own a car of his own, he had to wait for the end of the Anglo-Boer War before he was able to buy out his partners and purchase his first car, a 1902 Gladiator. He immediately proved its potential by taking only a day to drive it the 200 miles to Mafeking, returning the following morning. This was an unprecedented feat and within two years he had set up Connock's Motor Garage, selling cars and motorcycles.

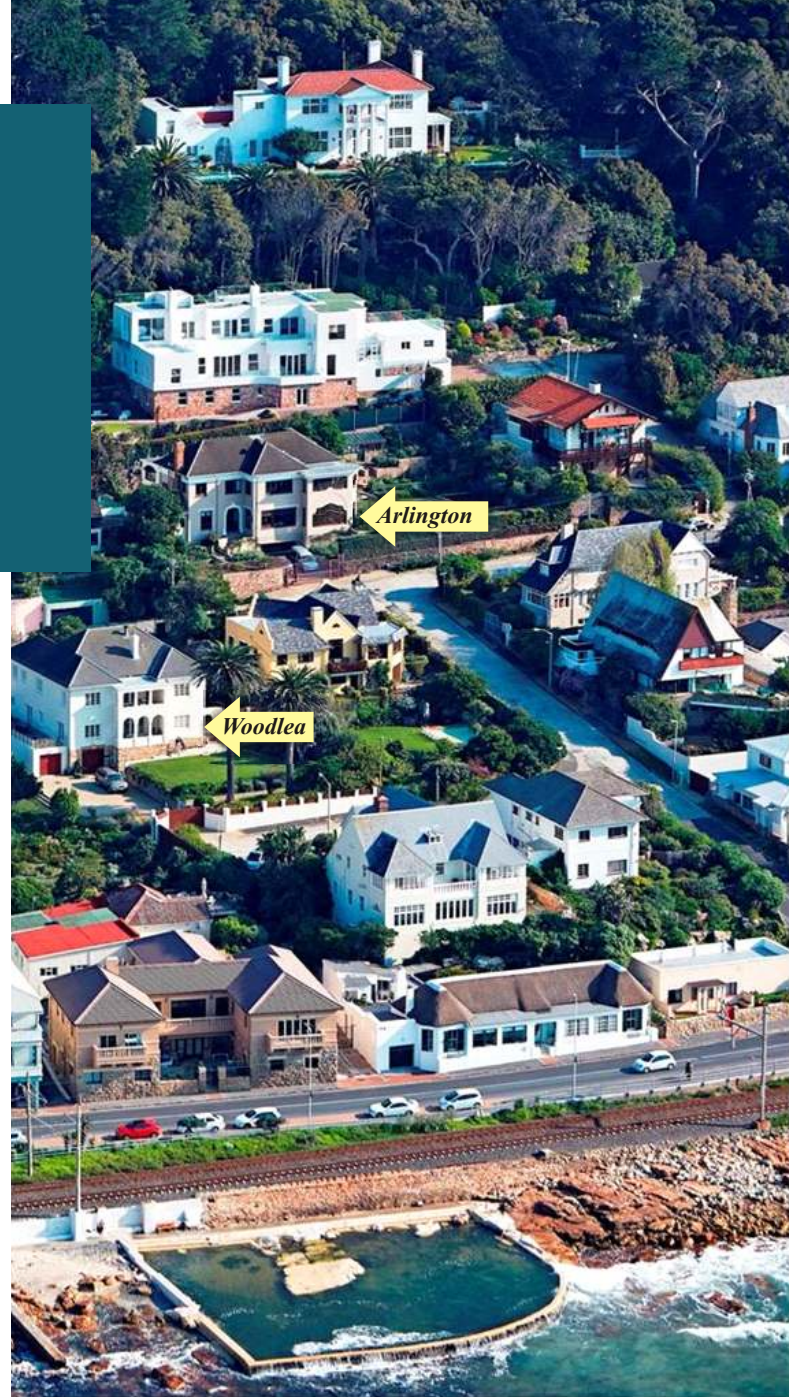
As the agent for Rover cars, he joined Robert Jefferson in May 1907 for an epic 1 600-mile journey from Durban to Johannesburg and down to the Cape in an 8 hp single-cylinder model. Jefferson had driven over vast distances in Europe and Asia, but he was appalled by the condition of the roads in South Africa.

By 1912 there were about 720 cars in Johannesburg, and Connock's, the agents for Rover, Minerva, Swift and Singer cars, participated in the first Rand Motor Show. Countering much skepticism, Connock built a huge 150-car garage in the city centre; it proved to be a great success and three years later he was elected President of the South African Society of Motor Traders. Determined to secure new supplies of vehicles at the end of WW I, Connock visited numerous British and American manufacturers to be able to place orders for his branches in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban. He was alarmed to find that the prices of cars had risen by as much as 63%.

The price of fuel had also risen



Connock and his 1902 Gladiator setting out for Mafeking, 1902



Quarterdeck Road, Kalk Bay

sharply and by 1921 South Africa was experiencing a massive slump in car sales. But Connock secured the highly prized agency for Buick cars and GMC trucks, and ensured that Connock's Motors was one of only four Johannesburg firms to survive one of the worst motor trade slumps in South African history. Sir William Morris visited Johannesburg at the end of the decade and he and Connock negotiated an agency for Morris cars that that helped the firm to survive the Great Depression and the move to smaller, less expensive vehicles.

Frank Connock turned 70 at the end of WW II. Having been

awarded life membership of the Motor Traders' Association, he sold Connock's Motors to the JSE-listed Atkinson-Oates Motors Ltd and he and his wife Gwen retired to a beautiful home, Arlington, in Quarterdeck Road, Kalk Bay. He was a generous benefactor to numerous local charities, and gave a vital donation to the Crank-

handle Club that enabled the club to host the celebrated 'Motoring thro' the Years' exhibition in the Drill Hall when Lord Montagu visited the Cape in 1959. Frank Connock died in 1962 at the age of 87.

During the southern



Frank Connock in 1958



Robert Jefferson behind the wheel with Frank Connock as passenger in the 8 hp Rover leaving Durban, 1907

summers in the late 1950s BMC hired a holiday house, Woodlea in Prenton Street, off Quarterdeck Road for its chairman, Sir Leonard Lord. It was just around the corner from Arlington, and when they met Lord and Connock would have had many interests in common.

Leonard Lord had played a crucial role in the British motor industry for some thirty-five years. As an extremely talented young production engineer, his forceful personality had propelled his career from a poor working-class background to the peak of the industry. As an engineer in the Hotchkiss (later Morris Engines) plant in the 1920s, he impressed the owner, William Morris, who, in 1927 moved him as works manager to help revive Wolseley Motors Ltd., a bankrupt concern he had acquired that year.

In 1933, at the age of 36, Lord was appointed governing director

of Morris Motors Ltd.

The Cowley-based company was in trouble. During the 1920s the Morris had been Britain's best-selling car but during the Great Depression the company's market share had dropped precipitously from 51% to 27%. Recognizing the urgent need for a new mid-sized car, Lord created the Morris Eight. It was an attractive, well made, modern design, and when launched in 1934 was a sensation. Around 250 000 were produced in four years, Morris Motor's sales doubled and profits rebounded to record levels.

But by then the British government, concerned about Germany's rearmament and needing a supply of aircraft engines for the RAF, proposed the construction of 'shadow' factories linked to the motor industry. William Morris was against the idea and clashed with Lord who supported it. Lord left



Arlington, 37 Quarterdeck Road

Sir Leonard Lord



Morris Motors and by 1938 had joined its main opposition, the Austin Motor Co., at Longbridge near Birmingham.

He immediately proposed and styled a new range of models around the Austin Eight, Ten and Twelve. He also introduced a range of commercial vehicles. These served the company well during WWII when the Austin Ten saloon, its pickup, the 'Tilly', and the K-series trucks and ambulances became standard transport for the British army.

This war-time production proved to be a huge benefit as Austin was the first manufacturer able to meet the post-war demand for new cars. As MD and chairman, Lord's next masterstroke was the 1947 1200cc A40 Devon saloon. Given Britain's need for export earnings, it was aimed at international markets and was a great success. In 1952 BMC was formed, merging Austin and

Morris. To rationalize a wide range, Lord insisted that only three engines, the 850cc series A, the 1500cc series B and the six-cylinder series C, would power all the makes in both organizations, including the popular MG and Austin Healey sports cars. Lord's main focus was small cars and he set a team led by Alec Issigonis the challenge of designing a totally new concept. In 1959 the groundbreaking Mini was announced by Sir Leonard Lord, the BMC chairman.

In Cape Town an Austin assembly plant had been built at Blackheath. While in the city in the early 1960s Sir Leonard, after studying Ralph Clarke's motivation for the construction of a series A engine plant, approved it



Above: 1934 Morris Eight



Right: 1939 Austin 10 saloon



1947 Austin A40 Devon

immediately. It was the first engine plant in SA and was a considerable success, producing an impressive 150 000 units.

Sir Leonard, soon to be appointed Lord Lambury, retired in 1961 at the age of 64. He bought Woodlea (which he renamed Lancarty) as a holiday home. Three years later he opened a new service centre for the BMC agents, Robb Motors, in Paarden Eiland. Each year he would ship out from the UK the latest prestige model with the registration BMC 1, the last being a Rolls-Royce engined Vanden Plas

Princess. Always a heavy smoker, he died in 1967 at the relatively young age of 70.

Looking back, it's fascinating that the small village of Kalk Bay had provided a home for two such extraordinarily talented motor executives.

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1959 Morris Mini-Minor



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