
A Day at the Europlate Convention 2018 - by Chris Hayward

Some ASCO members may know that I am interested in vehicle registrations, but they are probably unaware I subscribe to a newsletter about such things called '1903 And All That' - the title indicating registration of cars in Britain being compulsory from 1st January 1904 under the provisions of the Motor Car Act 1903. I cannot say I am fascinated by every article in the Newsletter, but nevertheless I eagerly devour each new issue that lands on my doormat.

I have my counterparts in other European countries, and in alternate years there is a gathering of such people, called the Europlate Convention. This year it was Britain's turn to host the event, and as it was organised by a certain John Harrison, who also edits '1903aat' and lives in Loughton, less than 40 miles from me, I checked the programme and decided that one of the four days of events looked particularly interesting, starting with a visit to Whitewebbs Museum in Enfield, based in a former pumping station.

The museum was founded about thirty years ago and has gradually been developed by the Enfield & District Veteran Vehicle Trust into an impressive display of artefacts associated with motoring in the twentieth century, including a number of cars, motorcycles, fire engines and ambulances, as well as many scale models. I joined in this visit on Maundy Thursday, and as well as a handful of English enthusiasts, our small group included a couple of Germans, an Estonian, two Czechs, and an inhabitant of Luxembourg who as a child had escaped to the West from



his native Czechoslovakia in August 1968, when Soviet tanks put an end to the 'Prague Spring'. Since the end of Communism he has made return visits to the land of his birth, but one feature of his interest in number-plates is that his Luxembourg-registered BMW bears a 'cherished' plate TC 1730 - identical to the one on the car his father drove from behind the Iron Curtain 50 years ago.

After a couple of hours at Whitewebbs we drove along the M25 and M11 and turned east to Great Dunmow for a pleasant pub lunch, and then to the nearby village of Great Easton for a visit to P & A Wood, the noted dealers and restorers of Rolls-Royce and Bentley cars. Not having attended a meeting of the RREC, I had never seen such a collection of these magnificent vehicles, which were parked both outside awaiting work, and inside undergoing restoration. In addition there were a number of cars in their Heritage Collection, and we were treated to a tour of the extensive facilities lasting a couple of hours. I was pleased to see some young apprentices among their workforce, doing tasks of a complex nature, such as rebuilding engines.



I had a quick look at the list of cars for sale: at the 'cheap' end was a 2004 Bentley Continental GT Coupé for a mere £30,000, but many of the rest seemed to be priced at £250,000 to £450,000, with several marked P.O.A. One in the workshop that caught my eye was a huge black Rolls-Royce once owned by Field-Marshal Montgomery, with a forward-leaning split windscreen which cannot have done anything for its aerodynamics. Another was a Silver Ghost which was driven from London to Edinburgh entirely in top gear to prove its versatility and reliability, and there was a 1959 Silver Cloud I Harold Radford 'Estate wagon' for sale at £650,000. If you ever have the chance to visit P & A Wood, I would certainly recommend it.

Incidentally, if any ASCO member has a query about registration numbers I would be happy to try to answer it, using two authoritative books I now own on the subject, having bought the second from its author during the Europlate visit. The book has only just been published, with the self-explanatory title '*Motor Vehicle Registration Numbers of Great Britain 1963-1974.*' My other, much-thumbed volume, covers the whole period back to 1903, so all vehicles ASCO members are likely to own are covered.



Any ASCO members interested in finding out more about '1903aat' may send a large self-addressed envelope with a £1.26 stamp to John Harrison at 175, Hillyfields, Loughton IG10 2PW, and he will send you a sample back-number and subscription details. More about Europlate can be found on www.europlate.org.uk.

Chris.