

Somerset Automobile Club

Chairmans' Chat

August 2024



Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I reported in the July Bulletin our 120th Anniversary Celebration Lunch, held at Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, on Sunday 16th June, was considered to have been a success worthy of such a significant milestone. There cannot be very many clubs, especially with a motoring interest, which can genuinely demonstrate a 120 year continuous history. As I noted in July, the day coincided with the arrival of excellent, dry, warm and sunny weather which, in turn, encouraged the arrival of an equally worthy collection of 'toy' cars. My thanks to each of you who 'dusted off' your favourite car for the occasion. The line up in front of the manor house (photo below) clearly illustrated a broad range of members motoring interest. A pictorial record follows which, I hope, clearly illustrates the success of the occasion.

Firstly, however, I turn to our future events for which I encourage your support.

Future Events.

Thursday 8th August: BYO Annual Picnic.

You have already received a separate detailed email from Matt inviting you to enjoy our annual picnic to be held at Wyndcliffe Court, St Arvans, NP16 6EY which is, as we know, just adjacent to Chepstow Racecourse.

While Matt asked for commitments before 1st August, I can now confirm that we have more than adequate support to ensure that the Picnic will take place especially given that the long term weather forecast is encouraging.

Consequently, and as noted previously, if you have not been able to commit or have chosen or had to delay your decision to attend you are invited to simply turn up on the day if that suits you.

Wyndcliffe Court is an Edwardian Manor House with sculptured gardens which, on occasion, hosts talks and lectures by notable UK gardening experts. We will have sole occupancy and gather from 12.30pm. Copious parking is available in an adjacent paddock.

While the garden does provide seating dispersed around the grounds we will primarily occupy the lawns seen on the left of the photo shown here. It is an area which amply provides both sun and shade and consequently we should take our own chairs and tables.

As you are now aware Arnold Denman (arnolddenman@camers.org) has kindly agreed to assist by logging the names of attendees. Arnold awaits your response.

The cost/head will be £10 payable into the SAC Account.

For further Wyndcliffe Court information please see: <https://www.wyndcliffecourt.com/>

This promises to be a 'super' gathering. My thanks to those who have already committed.

Thursday 5th September. A Morning tour of Thatchers Cider Factory and Tasting, Sandford.

You will recall that our recent poll of members' preferences highlighted a wish that we organise a 'balance' of non-motoring events.

I now invite you to respond to Ann Budd who, as you know, has kindly agreed to organise this visit and lunch.

Please note that we are required to submit final attendee numbers to Thatchers absolutely not later than 21st August.

We will gather in the car park of the Railway Inn, Sandford, BS25 2RA at 10.30am for a welcoming coffee when we will also choose our lunch menu. The Factory and Tasting tour will start at 11.00am and will last from 1 to 1.5 hours.



Please note that there will be no facility to sit down during the tour. Please wear sensible walking shoes, no sandals or open toes and no dogs! We will return from the visit and dine in the adjacent Thatchers owned Railway Inn.

The cost/head for the visit only will be £15.00 payable in advance to the SAC account. Please make your booking with Ann (budd66@btinternet.com) or 01275 331299 (corrected)/07732 172 475. The party size is limited to 30 attendees.

For further information see: <https://www.thatcherscider.co.uk/myrtle-farm/cider-tours/>

Thursday 17th October: Social Run and Lunch organised by Andy Rigler.

I am now able to provide further details of this event following Andy's recent 'recce' of the route. Once again we return to the Severn Vale for a 35 mile run. We will gather at the 'Pepper Pot', Lower Wick, Dursley, GL11 6DD for coffee and return there for lunch. We will enjoy Andy's route that follow roads to the west of the A38.

Further details to follow. Andy will be pleased to receive your entries from 1st September.

Sunday 24th November: Autumn Lunch.

A booking has been made to ensure that we will return to The Batch Country Hotel at Lymington.

Thursday 12th and/or Tuesday 17th December. A visit to the Urbaser 'Gloucestershire Energy from Waste' facility.

This is the strangely shaped building to the side of the M5 motorway at Moreton Valance near Gloucester, which houses an electricity generating Power Station fueled by non-recyclable domestic waste. Parties are of 15 maximum and there are still a few places remaining. Members will be given priority. Please let me know if you wish to join this visit. If you have a preference for either of the dates please let me know as soon as you are able.

If the number of those wishing to attend exceed 30 I will book a further visit in 2025.

Report Past Event.

120th Anniversary Celebration Lunch- Sunday 16th June



As noted above, this special occasion, held at Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, was a much enjoyed by 57 members and guests. Attendees were encouraged to bring their favourite cars and, as you can see from this photo the invitation was fully understood and supported – 18 times!



My thanks to Allison Taylor and George, her son, for admirably organising the parking 'line up'.

Our arrival from 12.15pm allowed adequate time to 'circulate' and enjoy the Prosecco Reception, in the Great Hall, prior to the prompt serving of our much anticipated lunch at 1.00pm.



My thanks are due to Jim Lott, who having liaised with the venue in the 'run up' to the day, had earlier overseen the detailed layout of each table. The seven tables were identified by the names of former club presidents. Each table place setting was complete with an event card, shown below, that gave a brief outline of the history of the SAC.



Image ©SAC 2024 jiphotos47@gmail.com



Image ©SAC 2024 jiphotos47@gmail.com

Just before 1.00pm I was pleased to welcome all members and guests, making particular mention of our President Chris Bigwood and Janis for whom this was a very special occasion. I followed with my favourite, humorous, Grace.

The three course lunch, which did not disappoint, was delightfully prepared and served by the staff of Epic Caterers. Dining concluded, following a further distribution of Prosecco, in preparation for the Toast to:

Toast to the 'Somerset Automobile Club' Nigel Wills, given by our immediate past President Nigel Wills.

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please forgive me, but I just want to take this very early opportunity to say what a pleasure it is to me, to be amongst this excellent turnout of members of the SAC and guests, and how delighted I am to see Chris Bigwood, our President, here today looking pretty good, I must say! And....Janis looks pretty good too!

Quite simply without his incredible enthusiasm for matters SAC, his presence among men and women, and his desire to please, the Somerset Automobile Club would, I think, today, probably, no longer exist. Back in the 1960's and 70's the SAC had 12 members, amongst whom were David Shearn and Max Dunscombe, who are not with us today, but were, along with Chris Bigwood, hugely active in the resurrection of the SAC. They were very much involved with the Bristol Motor Cycle and Light Car Club. And it was around about that time that those two and Chris rebuilt what is the SAC today, a small but such a select group of fascinating people, many of whom have been employees of Bristol Cars, Bristol Aeroplane Company, Westland helicopters and many more, all hugely appreciative of the finer things in the mechanical life that many of us live.

And, it is also a great pleasure to me to be in Abbots Leigh again, because my Grandparents used to live just across the road, in what is now, I think, a Nursing home, known then as Manor House, Abbots Leigh.

So Mr President, Mr Chairman, Mr Secretary. The Committee and the Membership whether Ladies or Gentlemen and Guests I as Past President of the SAC, and having just noticed an aspect of the Table Layout.....that a Past President has to be dead before he or she gets a table named after them, so in order to be a surviving Past President, one has to be alive, except of course for Chris who has been President once before and therefore is a surviving Past President as well as the serving President, all very confusing but there it is, I offer.....my sincere congratulations..... we are here today. One hundred and twenty years ago it was Nineteen Hundred and Four. The Old Queen had relatively recently died and her eldest son had inherited the throne. Rather strangely we have all just been through that again although much has changed in the meantime, but still there are a few road signs in Sunny Somerset with SAC on the top. The occasional Pillar Post Box naming a subsequent King.....actually there is an Edward the 7th Post Box quite close to me in London but no named Road Signs. Very special they are, 'Tis a long time, 120 years, Our first President was Sir Wroth Lethbridge, whose London house was in Hyde Park Square, just a short drive across Hyde Park from where I live, and as I have driven down here this morning, I was trying to imagine Sir Wroth motoring down to Somerset in, actually 'on' his 1902 Gladiator for SAC meetings and gatherings. Although he would probably do that because I have also gathered that he was the 5th Baronet Lethbridge of Sandhill Park, Somerset which is near to Bishops Lydeard, somewhat south of here in the Quantocks. There is a Lethbridge Arms in the village. A portrait of Sir Wroth in the National Gallery shows him as a somewhat portly gentleman and in comments elsewhere he is described as a large landowner in Somerset.

Sir Wroth's sturdy and quite substantial 1903 Gladiator was clearly a most appropriate set of wheels for our 1st President.

I am only sorry that my appropriate set of wheels (Talbot 105 reg: JJ 5067-ed) has not provided me with carriage to Abbots Leigh today. But she herself is now 92 years old but is being cared for lovingly! So, move on, some fifty years, to around and about the 1950's, when we, then young motoring enthusiasts, had begun playing with old cars, first, in my case, Dinky racing cars. I still have my Dinky Cooper Bristol, complete with a painted Bow Tie, by me, and then a real 1959 Austin Healey Frog-Eyed Sprite which I brought from John Dangerfield. Remember him? What's happened to him I wonder? Since then, we all will have discovered the London to Brighton Run, the HSCC and the VSCC who, actually are celebrating their 90th Birthday this coming autumn. What heaven that has been. But please do not worry, I am not just about to launch into a corner by corner or race by race description of my driving in races, but suffice to say, without the enthusiasm of the Somerset Automobile Club, I might never have even started, let alone finished the 2016 Le Mans Classic in my dear old 'PL', the 1930 Talbot 90.

Tempus Fugit....Um...but, I'm afraid that I cannot sit down without saying a word or two about those who today are running the club. No easy task, except for one who, I am sure, is hugely appreciated by all those members of the club whether they say so or not. I am not going to list all those who contribute to this almost thankless task, I would be sure to miss somebody out although I see several of them today and so it is easier to refer to them collectively. I have known Chris Bigwood since the early 1970's and, as I have said earlier. That really, without Chris this club might not have survived and yet he remains a central part and figure head of this splendid Club. Andanother.... there have been many more 'others' who really should be mentioned, but I have only been allocated ten minutes and it is now about 8 and a half gone, roughly the same as my fastest lap time around Le Mans.

(Nigel then referred to the current Chairman, noting that he had obviously not prepared the 'lovely' lunch today!).

I therefore ask you, Ladies and Gentlemen to stand up and raise your glasses and drink a toast to the continuing good health, on the 120th Anniversary of the founding of

THE SOMERSET AUTOMOBILE CLUB

Thank you – and I may I wish you all a safe journey home today and thank you all for being here today.

And finally with the appropriate thanks, remarking that the SAC was founded 6 months after the Wright Brothers made the first 'heavier than air' flight and good wishes I was pleased to close the 120th Celebration Lunch.

Impromptu photos by Jim Lott.



Image ©SAC 2024 jiphotos47@gmail.com

The President, Chairman and Immediate Past President confer!



Image ©SAC 2024 jiphotos47@gmail.com



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And now for some cars. Photos with thanks to Rachael Gale

Arrivals:



Phil and Jill Rumney. 1965 Daimler V8 250



Paul Sherlock. Wolseley Hornet



Nick Wood and Cherry Robinson. Marcos



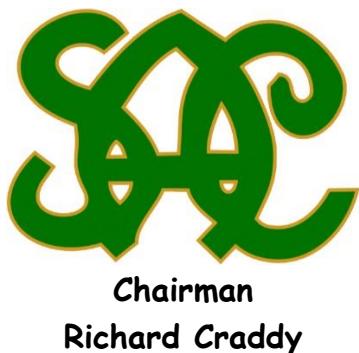
Edward and Easter Kirkland. MGB GT.



And with thanks to Cherry Robinson:



The Dining Table Place Cards:



Somerset Automobile Club
120th Anniversary Celebration Lunch
Sunday 16th June 2024
Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh,
North Somerset

Welcome and a Grace

Richard Craddy-Chairman

Organic chicken liver parfait, brioche, tomato and onion jam, crispy onions and charcoal salt.

Caramelised shallot and goats cheese tart tatin, balsamic glaze, rocket.

Pressed brisket of beef, horseradish mashed potato, seasonal roasted vegetables, beef jus.

Charred salmon, samphire, crushed new potato, lobster bisque.

Wild mushroom and vegetable wellington, roasted new potatoes, rosemary and burnt onion cream sauce.

Eton mess, fresh berries, smashed meringue, chantilly cream.

Seriously sticky toffee pudding, butterscotch sauce and vanilla bean ice cream.

Toast to the 'Somerset Automobile Club'

Nigel Wills - Immediate Past President

Somerset Automobile Club – A brief History

The Somerset Automobile Club was formed on 16th June 1904 at a meeting held at Glastonbury Abbey House when the following Aims and Objectives were adopted:

- To encourage the use and discourage the abuse of mechanically propelled vehicles.
- To foster friendly feelings between members of the club, motorists and the general public and to arrange meetings, social functions and/or competitions for those purposes.
- To further the enjoyment of automobilism in the County of Somerset.
- To affiliate with the Automobile Club of Great Britain and Ireland, founded in 1897 (latterly named the Royal Automobile Club).

The initial membership, being geographically widely spread throughout the county, was reported to have been in excess of 70.

Until the outbreak of WW1, the club promoted Hillclimb competitions at Puriton, Longleat, Buncombe, Wraxall, Upper Weston (Bath) and Shiphэм together with Speed trials at Weston super Mare which were revived for a single post war event in 1920.

The SAC retained a close relationship with the RAC until 1999 when the Breakdown motoring services branch, to which all SAC members had hitherto held membership, became a separate commercial organisation.

The Somerset Automobile Club, in broadly retaining its original objectives, has remained independent and continuously active until the present day with a focus on regular social and dining gatherings together with visits to museums and manufacturing organisations of interest to its current membership of 70.

Presidents.

President: Christopher Bigwood

1904-1908	Sir Wroth Lethbridge	1971-1979	Christopher Bigwood
1908-1911	Lieut. A. Armitage	1979-1986	John Roland Hosbonds
1911-1940	Sir Robert Sanders (later Lord Bayford)	1986-1993	Esme Salter
1940-1971	Lord Strachie	1993-2001	Gerald Millington
		2001-2017	Nigel Wills

Postscript:

The Gladiator Car.

During his vote of thanks Nigel made mention to founding President Sir Wroth Lethbridge's 1902 Gladiator car.



Photo Bonhams.

The Gladiator was powered by a 10hp twin cylinder engine. This body is described as having passenger rear entrance.

The Gladiator was a relatively short-lived French marque that produced cars from around 1896 to 1920. Founded in 1891 by Paul Aucoq and Alexandre Darracq it transferred to British ownership a few years later.

This 1903 Gladiator, auctioned by Bonhams in 2017, was sold for £141,500.

And finally:

As we know the success of a picnic very much depends on the weather. We can only hope that **Picnic Day Thursday 8th August** will be a suitably fine day and I really encourage you to attend if you feel able.

Likewise, I encourage you to joining our visit to **Thatchers Cider on Thursday 5th September** with lunch afterwards at the Thatchers Railway Inn. Please register with Ann Budd before 21st August.

So, with a final look back at 16th June, I look forward to meeting again and enjoying more SAC events before too long.



Until next time and with my thanks to those who commented favorably on the 120th

Best wishes,

Dick. (craddyrichard@gmail.com/01454 414842/07776 202 663)

SAC Bank account: Bank: Lloyds, Business Account number: 00577513, Sort code: 30.00.01. Please mark your transfer with your name and the identity of the event.

