



# *Preston & District MG Enthusiasts Club*

Established 1980

February 2014

## **NEWSLETTER**



**ITS NOT JUST SOMERSET THAT GETS IT.  
KEVIN NEGOTIATING THE PENDLE HILL LEVELS**

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### Forthcoming Events

Tue 25th February—Club Night—Bowling at the Lakeside, Preston—8pm sharp

Sun 23rd March—Sunday Run & Lunch - meet at Phantom Winger 10.30am

Tue 25th March - Club Night at the Railway Tavern - Speaker

## CHAIRMANS CHAT - FEBRUARY 2014

The first Club Night of the year also the AGM was held at our new meeting venue The Railway Tavern Leyland and what an excellent venue it is.

The Agenda for the meeting was approved by all in attendance and the Committee is now in place for the coming year.

A vote of thanks goes to Bill Bradshaw who filled the gap in 2013 following our sad loss of Alan. Bill is now standing down and we welcome Paul Heyes to Committee with effect January 2014.

The calendar of events for the coming year was considered and accepted with enthusiasm and once again we have a good, busy programme which hopefully will be of interest to all members.

Again we thank Tony Sharples who will Chair and organise the 2014 Lancashire Lanes Run with the support of Andy Schultz and Michael Hart. The event has been slightly moved back to the 31<sup>st</sup> August in order to guarantee excellent weather on the day! (so be it!)

The preparation for the 2014 NTBHWE basing in Llanberis is well under way and to date we have 16 cars on the attendance list and deposits in the sum of £100 per couple are now requested, cheques made payable to the Preston & District MG Enthusiasts Club and forwarded to our Treasurer Mick Bamber.

Should further Members wish join the event please let me know as soon as you can as I need to make firm reservations with the Royal Victoria Hotel.

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### **“The continuing SUMMER floods” (IN SUPPORT OF THE OLD “LENGTHSMAN”)**



Read on.....

OK “here we go again” I hear you say: and NO I have not put the windmill farce and green energy onto the back burner, it remains constantly in mind and is alive in my regular submissions to the various so called Authorities who unfortunately choose to ignore me.

SO what about the floods.

Our Prime Minister was quick to jump on the “climate change” band wagon for a scapegoat and then of course equally quickly changed his mind. (so what’s new!)

We have thousands of households throughout the country devastated by the effects of the flooding and in an unlikely position to be able to fully claim on their property insurance and more so, if they have existing insurance there will be future restrictions on cover for those whose properties are situated in recognised flooding areas.

SO why have these problems occurred.

What we are seeing is the result of man made negligence and nothing whatsoever to do with climate change.

Planning legislation allows the “garden grabbing” development to continue at a pace and even encourages the substantial development of “green field” sites and known flood plains! the agricultural industry seems determined to rid the countryside of hedgerows and what limited forestation remains.

Front and rear gardens of domestic properties are paved over for either car parking or because we don’t want the trouble of mowing the lawn anymore.

Highway Authorities, Water Authorities, River Authorities and the Environment Agency are these days more interested in considering “risk assessments,” “clerical opinion”, how to increase your financial contributions for the benefit of their shareholders and “feathering their own nests” rather than carrying out the maintenance work that they are both responsible for and paid for via your rates and taxation.

So rather than having large areas of developed land that was capable of substantial surface water absorption, we now have 100% surface water run off into the existing sewer systems which, at best are poorly maintained, if at all and generally speaking have not been much improved or enlarged since the time of their construction in the Victorian era.

Cast your mind back to not too many years ago when we saw the old road sweeper or lengthsman on the streets with his barrow and brush, dutifully clearing refuse and clearing the surface water gullies alongside the highway. He would report any blockages in the drainage system and action would be taken to rectify the problem.

Now, sadly the lengthsman has become a dying species and the few remaining are usually sponsored by the poorly funded Parish Councils generally for cosmetic reasons and best kept village competitions.

In history this mans job was of far more benefit and use than the Councils’ Chief Executive on a six figure salary who is busy considering (as in the case of our Preston “city” Council ) the siting of a windmill on Preston Docks - and this is only the start!

WHEN did you last see roadside ditches being cleared of debris together with the once common dredging of tributaries to our river systems and the rivers themselves?

SO before we jump on any passing climate change “band wagon” or decide to join the

“blame for a claim brigade” why don’t we challenge those in authority to carry out the duties for which they are financed.

Let us see the rightful and proper maintenance of existing drainage systems, let us be aware that if new development is to take place that the existing surface water outfalls are capable of the extra loading.

This is not rocket science it’s common sense!

AND assuming that we have not suffered property flooding how does it affect us?

A poorly maintained drainage system gives rise to flooding along lengths of pavement which in turn quickly causes deterioration to the sub base, base and surface structure of the carriageway. The more traffic, the more damage!

Then come the “potholes” and it is at this time that another batch of complaints are forthcoming from those members of the public who have not suffered property damage by flooding but are now witnessing suspension damage to their vehicles.

It is estimated that potholed roads cost drivers £1.2 billion in repair bills and that almost nine million vehicles sustained damage to their suspension, steering ,wheels and tyres in the last twelve months.

We are informed that the Government and Local Authorities are spending £1 billion per annum on highway maintenance but despite this spending and repairing more than 2.2 million potholes, there remains a backlog of repairs that could take up to ten years to fix!

Considering that our old cherished friends (MGs that is) are far more vulnerable to expensive pothole damage than new models should we not consider support for the powers that be to reconsider their current stance on what constitutes adequate worthwhile maintenance of the existing infrastructure and to remember past lessons that to maintain means to maintain.

I say “bring back the old lengthsmen” and the back up processes that followed him, properly maintain what we have and very carefully consider the effects of adding more to any infrastructure system in place, unless we are very sure that it is capable of carrying the additional loading.

I reckon you could have at least five lengthsmen for the cost of one Chief Executive of the fore mentioned Authorities and I think I know which would be of more value to us all.

*(Please note that my diatribe was written several days ago, well before the national newspapers decided to comment on the recent floods)*

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**Annual Bowling Competition Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2014**

**8.00pm sharp**

Once again we are at the Lakeside Bowling Venue Preston so come along and give it your best AND remember that we now have a brand new “trophy” for the successful participant which I am sure would be the envy of visitors to your home as it graces the centre the your mantelpiece.

**SEE YOU THERE - BILL**

## SECRETARY'S SCRIBBLES

Well here we are into February (doesn't time fly?) and I suppose our MGs should be coming out of hibernation. My RV8 has not been on the road properly since early September, mainly due to my house move. It has been tucked up in a friend's warm double garage over winter, and I've been up to start it and take it out of the garage three times. I had a battery isolator switch fitted by Andy last year, behind the driver's seat, and what a good useful thing that is. The car is currently SORNED and needs its MOT. In the next month or so, it will have new discs and pads fitted to the front, new shoes on the back, a new back axle seal, and a full service. Then it will be Spring, the daffodils will be out, the sun will be shining, the rain will have disappeared, and I can get out in the car with the roof down.

I notice that the AA recently stated that some 3000 cars down south will have been submerged or partly submerged, particularly in Somerset and the West country. Of course, modern cars have complex electronic gizmos and management systems which don't take kindly to water, and the AA's warning was to remind any buyers to be particularly careful when at the auctions or indeed when buying privately, particularly from a man with a Somerset accent! The AA went on to say that most cars that had been submerged would be write offs. No doubt our premiums will continue to rise as a result.

And good news! Graham & Julie Lockwood have their B Roadster back on the road after a lengthy absence, this time in white livery with a 3.5 V8 installed. I'm told the exhaust note can be heard from a mile away!

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Don't forget that Joy Hunter is 50 next month and is having a big bash at Adlington Village Hall on Friday the 21st March, to celebrate. The event starts at 7.30pm, with a Ceilidh band for the 1st half and a Swing band for the 2nd half. All members and partners /wives are invited.

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Ian Thompson is on the organising committee for the 2014 Weaver Wander, an event organised by the Rotary Club of Crewe & Nantwich. It takes place over two days and will include an autojumble. On the Saturday (5th July) there is a 100 mile run starting in Nantwich Town Square, taking in a stop at Gawsorth Hall, nr. Macclesfield, and finishing back at Reaseheath College in Nantwich. Period dress in keeping with your car is encouraged. On Sunday there is a static display of all vehicles from 11.30am to 5.00pm with the autojumble in the Square at Nantwich.

Our club has events on that weekend, but the Weaver Wander event may be of interest to you. You can e-mail Ian on [tommo.uk@me.com](mailto:tommo.uk@me.com) for further information or go to [www.weaverwander.com](http://www.weaverwander.com).

**GODFREY**

**And so - the final part of Sam Bennett's story of life with the MG Car company in the 30's.**

### Part 3 of Sam Bennett's Story

Pressed Steel used to make the chassis for the MGs, and the bodies came from Carbodies of Coventry. As everyone knows, nothing was really made at Abingdon – it was an assembly plant, pure and simple. However, from time to time we did have to improvise or design bits and pieces to make them fit, and there were some very skilful people employed at the works. For example, there was a small paint shop by the partition, where the sheet metal workers were based, and the last job they used to do when a car came off the line was to trim the bonnet! From the bulk-head to the radiator, the bonnets were always oversize so that when the sheet metal workers got them they could be tailored to individual cars, because there was no guarantee the parallel lines of the body would always be accurate. So the bonnets would be trimmed to suit each individual car as it came off the line.

At the bottom of the ramp was the 'tyre' man, a chap by the name of Willis. He was only a little chap, and he was the man who put the tyres on the wheels. He was always surrounded by inflatable tubes, seeing if they lost any pressure, and he would also re-spoke wheels that needed attention from the Services Department. He had none of the modern tyre fitting equipment we are so familiar with today, just a set of tyre levers, which were polished like silver due to constant use. He had a board about 3ft square with a dummy hub on it, and he'd get a tyre and a tube, and in a couple of minutes it was on! At this time the assembly line itself was a brick effort about 10" high, with a guide channel for the offside wheel, as the cars were pushed along by the workers as they were, in fact, right to the finish of production at MG. In my day, should there be a shortage of wheels when the cars were ready to go down the line, then we had 'dummy' wheels which could be fitted so that production was not halted.

Then for a while I was put to work in the units, the racing engine shop, where I came in contact with Reg Jackson (known as Jacko), Sid Enever, Billy Newes and Carter, who had the dirtiest job of all, grinding out the cylinder heads etc. until they shone like silver. I must have done a good job here for I was then sent onto the 'balcony' to work on racing car assembly. We worked in a place which was known as the 'cage' because it was surrounded by chain link fencing to keep out unauthorised entry. This area was approached by the ramp leading up from the main shop floor.

As I said before, we had no such things as pits to get under the cars. We used to jack up the rear wheels and put them on wooden 'shoes', then lift the front up with block and chains. The 'shoes' ensured the tail pipes etc. didn't catch the floor. For driving the bare chassis around the works, each man had his own wooden seat which was clipped onto the chassis. These had no backrest so one couldn't use the footbrake properly, and therefore we always used the handbrake which was 'compensated' with the footbrake. In addition you had your own two gallon petrol tank with flexible pipe, and your own oil catching pan, which was used when you drained a car of its oil – which was very often.

Around the fence of the cage in the gallery were affixed all the garlands of laurel leaves which had been won by the racing MGs prepared in the racing bay. They came from many exotic places – Montlehery, Monte Carlo, The Mille Miglia and many others. At this time I worked on the 'Q' type of which only eight were made. They had two petrol pumps and I was asked to put the petrol lines in, but I was instructed that on no account was I to drill the body to fix them. At first I thought about fixing them to the floorboards, but eventually I designed and made some brackets and led the two pipes around on the inside of the body without drilling. I recall that one day a racing driver came along to collect his new 'Q' and he brought along his riding mechanic. The driver was very

disabled (due to a race accident – these fellows used to have some horrific prangs!) and he could not get into the car without a great deal of difficulty. To remedy this, we cut part of the body away, and this left a big gap on the driver's side. We then fixed him up with a broad leather strap some 9" wide to keep him from falling out of his seat when cornering – one of the very first safety belts! If I remember right his name was Urquhines.

We got to know all the racing drivers of the time through working on their cars, and many used to spend long hours with us in the workshops. George Eyston was, of course, a regular, very reserved and he would have a kind word for everyone he came in contact with. All the competition drivers who came to Abingdon were real gentlemen, and they frequently visited the works to try their various seating positions or collect their new MG cars. I remember ER Hall, who I think owned a silk factory in Congleton, and who was famous for his exploits at Shelsey Walsh hill climb. A balding kind of a man, he came in one day and asked if we could fit twin wheels onto the rear axle of his car specifically for climbing – of course we could and did! Another time we fitted a device like a sunblind on the front of his radiator for quicker warm-up of the engine, and his was operated by a cable from the cockpit. ER Hall eventually accumulated so much equipment for his cars in one corner of the factory that he was sent a strong letter asking him to remove it, otherwise it would be dumped!

Nuvolari – well, what can one say about him? I once asked Alec Hounslow what it was like to drive with Nuvolari and received the reply "It is unbelievable – he is so quick and a master in the art of cornering, in fact if you put a matchbox on the racing line of a corner, he would hit it every time he took the corner". Hamilton, who came second to Nuvolari in the Ulster TT, was another man who always took time out to talk to you, but unfortunately he was killed in the Swiss Grand Prix of 1934. Nearly every famous driver of the era came into the works at some time or another, and it was my privilege to meet them all. Which reminds me, I was preparing the 'J' which either Hamilton or Black was to use at the Ards circuit in 1934, and I was told by the foreman that I couldn't go on holiday until the car was finished. I rang my girlfriend and said that when I came up to Lancashire we would go to Ireland for our holiday. Little did she know that we would finish up sitting at Quarry Corner on the circuit to watch the race. You see, MGs get into your blood and even on holiday you couldn't leave them alone.

However, it was not all triumphs. There was one occasion when one of our mechanics was killed. We had three cars which went over to the Isle of Man for the Mannin Beg. The roads were closed for testing, at completion of which the cars came back for any rectification needed, ready to go out the following morning for re-test. The mechanic was informed the car was ready and they started to prepare it around lunchtime. The driver was at a bridge party, and was told the car was ready for re-test the following morning but he said "we'll test it now". He went out on to the road with the mechanic, and unfortunately hit a taxi, the wheels of which were taken clean off. The MG overturned in a nearby field and the mechanic was fatally injured. It was a sad occasion for me to attend his funeral in Oxford.

Where was Cecil Kimber in all this, I hear you say? Well, we didn't get to speak to him much, but he was a real gentleman. He always wore a dark suit and a trilby hat, and he walked with the aid of a stick due to his disability. I will always remember the way he used to walk into the shop – even then he was Mr MG. It was a great pity that he lost his life in the train crash as he did, because I think he would have gone on to greater things. You know – Frank Williams reminds me a lot of Cecil Kimber.

There were only two men detailed for tuning the racing cars, and there was no sophisticated equipment, not even a stethoscope! Tuning was done with a long screwdriver, which you put on the engine and against your ear. All the cars were hand tuned from years of experience, and

tuning was a real art. The only problems were with cars that went abroad, where the tuning at Abingdon was knocked out by different temperatures, atmospheres, etc. and they had to come back sometimes.

However, my job didn't last too long. My union secretary pointed out that I was taking the job of a member of the sheet metal union and I was an engineer! At another time I found a job at Morris's and was unable to get a job in the works on production. (unions again!) I started employment with a firm of contractors called Carrier Engineering from London. They were installing the new spraying and dipping plants at Cowley works. The dipping plant was similar in looks to a scenic railway – there were huge ovens and the conveyor chains carried steel bars up and down right to the end of the huge workshop. Components were added to the line at various points – items such as battery cages, wheels, in fact anything that needed stove enamelling. They then went into a bath of caustic for cleaning and then into ovens to dry them off. They were then passed into the enamel itself, following which it was baked on, dried and then removed from the track.

We also built a spraying booth over the top of the conveyor. As the cars came along, men with oilskins and wellington boots would be in the spray booth with guns containing whatever colour of paint was required. I must say that the atmosphere in the booth was very good as no mist came higher than their waists. The floor, however, was a huge grate, and had water passing underneath, and this carried away all the spray which didn't go on the cars.

Another September when I was shut out of MG, I went over to the Pressed Steel plant which was alongside the Morris Works at Cowley. I got a job with the safety engineer on the huge presses. I didn't stay here very long but got a good insight into how car bodies were pressed before sent over to the Morris works. Today, the cars are taken by conveyor over a bridge to the works. In my day they were taken over by hand!

There were a lot of fabric bodies made in those days at Morris, and watching the upholsterers at work was an education. They would use their left hand to stretch the fabric or leather, and in their right hand they would have a magnetic hammer. The hammer was split down the centre of the head for opposite polarity. Taking a mouthful of blue tacks they'd stretch the fabric, take a tack on the hammer and would put the tacks in like a machine gun! However, occasionally they swallowed (or thought they had) one of the tacks and they would then be given a 'cotton wool sandwich' (two slices of bread with cotton wool filling!) at the ambulance station. The cotton wool would congeal around the tack and make life a little easier when nature took its course!

People used to want to work at Morris Cowley because they were paid on production and the conditions were far better than elsewhere. Lord Nuffield provided almost everything the workers needed. There was a hospital, and a share ownership scheme for employees. In fact, in the works, one could go and have a tooth out, go for a haircut or, if they had a headache, go and get a powder as part of the working environment that the former William Morris had created.

George Eyston and Bert Denly were closely associated with the 'Magic Midget'. Eyston was very tall and couldn't get into the Midget easily, so Denly had to get in. However, to enable Eyston to get in, we cut a large piece out so he could get his legs under the steering column. The steering wheel also had a portion cut out of it, between the spokes, again to afford easier entry. The diff. was sited some six to eight inches away from the nearside rear wheel and the front of the engine was diagonally offset to make room in the well for Eyston to sit. We didn't have a great deal to do with the Wilson pre-selector gearbox, the experts from Wilson being more adept at this. Any faults with the Wilsons we did find, such as metal fatigue or cracks, were identified with a red label and returned to the factory for rectification. I recall on one occasion a K3 coming in, on which the pre-selector had accidentally been passed through into reverse, and the clutch let in! It twisted the propshaft just like a woodscrew, pulled the rear axle, snapped the spring links, and the

driver's legs were damaged! This gives you an idea of the enormous power the K3 possessed. Following this accident a means of checking was devised so that there was no fear of a driver accidentally engaging reverse.

At the end of September, when the competition season was finished, I was sent over to the service department to work on cars which had been involved in accidents. The cars were dismantled and the parts laid out on paper on the shop floor, so that when the insurance people came they could estimate the damage and the cost of repairs. When cars came in to the service department, John Thornley who was then Service Manager, would make sure that all personal belongings left in a car were removed and placed in safe custody. They were then returned to the car when repairs were completed. At the services store, should you require spares, no time was wasted waiting for the storeman to hand them over. You had a small box in which you put a list of your requirements, and you would place this on a ledge in front of the stores counter. The parts would then be brought to you at your work station so no time was being wasted on the job. The name of the chap in charge of my section was Croxford.

The reason I returned to my native Lancashire was that at the end of the 1935 racing season I motor cycled back up to the North West to be re-united with my girlfriend. It was quite a journey in those days, via Banbury, Kenilworth, Stonebridge, Stafford, Congleton & Stretford, and as one approached the Lancashire border, you could smell the coal damp. We had decided that whilst I was working away at Abingdon, we would go our separate ways and see if we could come to a decision about our future together, as I had no hopes or means of settling down. When I arrived back in Lancashire, I was told that there was a job going at the LMS locomotive works in Horwich. I had always vowed that I would never work for the railway again after being fired at the end of my apprenticeship, but I went along to see what the job was about. They said that my advantage was that I had combustion engine experience – all the men at the works were steam men! There's plenty of work for you, I was told, we've got six ton cranes with Perkins engines, two tonners with Ruston-Hornby engines, fire trailer pumps with Coventry Climax, Dennis fire engines & Jap engines. In fact, you are the ideal man for the job. So I took it and there I stayed on the railway, until my retirement.

I hope you have enjoyed my reminiscences. If, in some parts I've not been strictly accurate, please forgive me. After all, it was some 50 years ago when I was a small part of the exciting era of MG at Abingdon in the 30's.

*Narrated by Sam Bennett sometime in the late 80's*

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**And finally, as a footnote to the Chairman's Chat, for those going on the NTBHWE please forward a deposit of '£100 per couple' to Mick Bamber, the club Treasurer.**

**Cheques should be payable to the Preston & District MGEC.**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Club Event</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Start / Meet</b>
Tue 25 Feb	Tenpin Bowling	20.00	Lakeside Superbowl 8pm
Sun 23 Mar	Sunday Run & Lunch	10.30	Phantom Winger
Tue 25 Mar	Club Night (Speaker)	20.00	Railway at Leyland
Sun 6 Apr	Sunday Run & Lunch	TBA	TBA
Sun 27 Apr	Drive IT Day—inc. Treasure Hunt	TBA	TBA
Tue 29 Apr	Club Night	20.00	Railway at Leyland
Sun 4 May	Lakeland Car Museum, Newby Br.	09.00	Phantom Winger
Sun 11 May	Sunday Run & Lunch	10.30	TBA
Tue 27 May	Club Night—evening run	19.30	TBA
6/9th Jun	NTBHWE—Wales	TBA	TBA
Sun 15 Jun	Sunday Run & Lunch	10.00	TBA
Sun 22 Jun	Hoghton Tower Classic Car Show	10.00	B&Q car park, Bamber Bridge
Tue 24 Jun	Autotest	19.30	Schultz Palace
Sun 29 Jun	Classic Car Show—Burnley	10.00	B&Q—Bamber Bridge
Sat 5 Jul	Lostock Hall Carnival	10.30	Centurion Way
Sun 6 Jul	Leighton Hall Classic Car Show	09.30	Phantom Winger
Sun 15 Jul	Club Run & Lunch	10.30	TBA
Sun 20 Jul	Fleetwood Tram Day	09.30	Ribble Pilot car park, Preston
Tue 29 Jul	Club Night—SYCO	20.00	Railway at Leyland
Sun 3 Aug	Northern National—Pateley Bridge	09.30	TBA
Sun 17 Aug	Sunday Run & Lunch	10.00	TBA
Tue 26 Aug	Club Night evening run	19.00	TBA
Sun 31 Aug	Lancashire Lanes Run	09.30	TBA
Sat 6 Sep	Oulton Park MG Race Meeting	09.00	Charnock Richard Services M6
Sun 9 Sep	Fairhaven Classic Car Show & lunch	10.00	Ribble Pilot car park
Tue 30 Sep	Club Night—Annual Quiz	20.00	Railway at Leyland
Sun 12 Oct	Sunday Run & Lunch	10.00	TBA
Tue 21 Oct	Club Night—Speaker	20.00	Railway at Leyland
Sat 1 Nov	Bonfire Night inc. hotpot	19.00	Schultz Palace
Tue 25 Nov	Club Night—Natter & Noggin	20.00	Railway at Leyland
Sat 6 Dec	Annual Dinner & Awards	19.30	Possibly the Railway
Sun 28 Dec	Cold Turkey Run	10.30	TBA

# Committee, Contacts and Useful Information



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