

Llandrindod Wells & District U3A Lecture Meeting September 2019

The Rolls Royce Story - Bruce Lawson

Report by Clive Barrett

Chairman Roger Malvern welcomed everyone to the September lecture meeting on a wet Monday morning. He spoke about a happy event the previous Saturday because member and former Chairman Bob Atkins married another member Gill Wall. He also mentioned that one of the founder members of Llandrindod U3A Patsy Godfrey had very recently left the area, and at the previous Sunday lunch group meal she had been presented with a picture of Llandrindod Lake, and he said about the U3A plaque which had been made by member Dave Wilsher. He also mentioned the film group meeting on the coming Friday, and the invitation to new members to a coffee morning at the Metropole Hotel on October 4th at 10-30am. The Chairman also mentioned new craft and creative writing groups, plus the forthcoming trip to the National Arboretum on Friday October 11th, and a new scrabble group.

He then introduced Bruce Lawson, who lives in Montgomeryshire, and spoke about Charles Rolls within "The Rolls-Royce Story" He commenced by rather surprisingly telling his audience that Charles although born in England, had actually lived for some time in Wales at the family home, The Hendre, near Monmouth. The speaker talked about his subject's early life, the first car he owned, that he attended Trinity College, Cambridge University and Eton, and was always interested in engineering. Interestingly Charles Rolls started his working career at the time of red flags in front of vehicles---- the Act was repealed in 1896. The speaker caused a second surprise by announcing that his great grandfather Henry Lawson was a leading light in establishing motoring in the public eye. He referred to the early age of pioneering and that in 1900, a group of like minded people started a 1000 mile north to south motoring route over the whole country, including trial runs and speed trials, won by Rolls, it should be remembered that there were no garages then. The pioneers included Alfred Harmsworth, founder of the Daily Mail and the 2nd Baron Montagu of Beaulieu. He further mentioned Charles Rolls as the third son of the 1st Baron Lord Llangattock and Lady Llangattock, and the fact that he drove the future Queen Mary around. Then Charles' father gave him £6,600 to establish his first garage, from which he sold foreign cars, which as well as repairing cars, he taught customers to drive, and at the time was a place where men and women associated with Rolls met.

Charles Rolls eventually met Frederick Henry Royce, on May 4 1904. Hardly surprising in view of the later success of their joint business the couple got on well. Rolls provided the glamour and the sales, also he was a good engineer, whilst Royce made the cars. They entered one of their first cars in the 1905 and 1906 Tourist Trophy races in the Isle of Man. They also showed some foresight at the time by introducing a brochure depicting their cars. Throughout the lecture Bruce Lawson showed an extensive power point presentation of cars including those made by Rolls-Royce, and the driving pioneers involved. One of the most well known and interesting of their cars was "The Silver Ghost", which was an established car at the time. At the time again rather surprisingly in 1907, the business was sold by Rolls to Rolls-Royce Ltd, and the familiar "spirit of ecstasy" mascot on the front of their cars was established. Then Charles Rolls ever the pioneer changed direction and moved into flying with the Wright Brothers. Rolls then turned his attention to ballooning, being involved in a hot air balloon race from Paris. The speaker also referred to

Eleanor Thornton, an inspiration for the flying lady mascot, and Dorothy Levitt, the first female racing driver superstar. Very interestingly I thought Bruce stated that the latter invented the driver's mirror. In the period 1907/08 the firm of Rolls Royce were selling all the cars they could make.

The Wright Brothers first flight was in December 1908. Charles continued his interest in flying and aircraft. Early flights were very primitive--- from Dover to France and back. Very sadly Charles Rolls came to a very early and unfortunate end. On July 12 1910 at the Bournemouth Airshow, an event which is still held today, the tail of Charles' plane broke off amid strong winds. A memorial flight from Dover to France was held, plus there is a memorial with an appropriate inscription for Charles Stewart Rolls 1877 – 1910(only 32 years of age). The speaker then answered a number of questions from a fascinated audience.

Chairman Roger Malvern said his perception of a firm just producing large expensive cars, had now been changed or modified, and he thanked Bruce Lawson for a very interesting presentation. The next Llandrindod & District U3A Lecture meeting will be held on Monday October 14 2019, at the Metropole Hotel at 10—30am, when the speaker will be Rhian Morgan, whose subject is quite topical “Richard III from Car Park to Grave”.