

"GHOSTS OF THE NORTH" – Part 1 and 2

I am fortunate in having owned interesting motor cars for most of my life and in 1984 I purchased my first Rolls-Royce, a 20/25 Hooper Limousine in running order which served me well for the next 16 years. During that time the car did need work and I took on the task of stripping and rebuilding the engine. This was when I became hooked on Rolls-Royces, especially pre-war models after seeing the high qualities of engineering by Henry Royce.

The second Lord Monagu (1866 - 1929) was quick to appreciate the qualities of the Rolls-Royce 40/50 HP. His first Rolls was a 20HP (40526) in 1906, followed by a rare 40/50 HP the 70 HP Speed model (60751). Montagu was a leading spokesman on motoring and transport at time and was chosen by Claude Johnson to open the new Rolls-Royce works at Derby in 1908. Montagu was in India in charge of motor transport for the government (1915 - 1919) in which he took his 1913 tourer (24990). He was allocated five 40/50HP for military use, some of which were armoured cars. The armoured 40/50 became a legend for its exploits in Palestine, North Africa and elsewhere.

After the First World War so many articles were published regarding the quality of these cars and how the Rolls-Royce 40/50 had helped the war effort immensely that the motoring fraternity started purchasing these incredible machines for their daily transport. So, who bought them? Like many products, the best quality has a high price and only the wealthiest could afford these very expensive cars. At the time King Edward VII was in upheaval, as the working classes in the factories, mines and farms sought better conditions. Royce had introduced his new cars which quickly appealed to wealthy Edwardians who appreciated their luxurious coachwork, silent speed and ease of use. The 40/50 caught on quickly and by 1912 the marque was advertising itself as "The best car in the world".

One man who recognised the combination of qualities was L. F. Gjers of Gjers Mills & Co. Ltd, Ayresome Iron Works, Middlesbrough. Lawrence Farrar Gjers was born in 1858 in Sweden and was the son of the late John Gjers, one of the pioneers of the Cleveland district. After completing his apprenticeship with Messrs. Pattinson & Stead, the well-known analytical chemists of Middlesbrough, he took a position in the steel making department of the Darlington Iron Company, obtaining valuable experience in the manufacture and treatment of steel. In 1883 he joined his father in the management of the Ayresome Iron Works, Ayresome Street, Middlesbrough which is now long gone, the site redeveloped for residential housing, one street known as Longford Street, for those who know the local area.

The Gjers family lived first in Woodlands Road, Middlesbrough then moved to Busby Hall, Carlton, near Stokesley where they effortlessly slipped into the role of the local "squire".

When their son John came of age, the Gjers family mounted a huge party for him at the hall spread over three days including presentations, a dance on a specially erected temporary floor and lavish hospitality provided by the Grand Central Hotel (London). The celebrations culminated in the roasting of a whole Ox; all the villagers of Carlton were welcomed and food and drink was free to those who flocked to the event.

The Gjers first Rolls-Royce 40/50 was chassis number 60540, 1906 which was the famous experimental car (registration AX 192) photographed outside the Cat & Fiddle public house at Buxton with AX 201 ready for the Scottish reliability tour. After all trials were completed it was bought by the Gjers family in 1907. They then went on to purchase six more Ghosts - Chassis number 60718, 1908 chassis only, purchased via Cleveland Car company, Darlington.

Chassis number 1121, a 1909 Double Limousine by Barker for Mrs L F Gjers (see photograph).

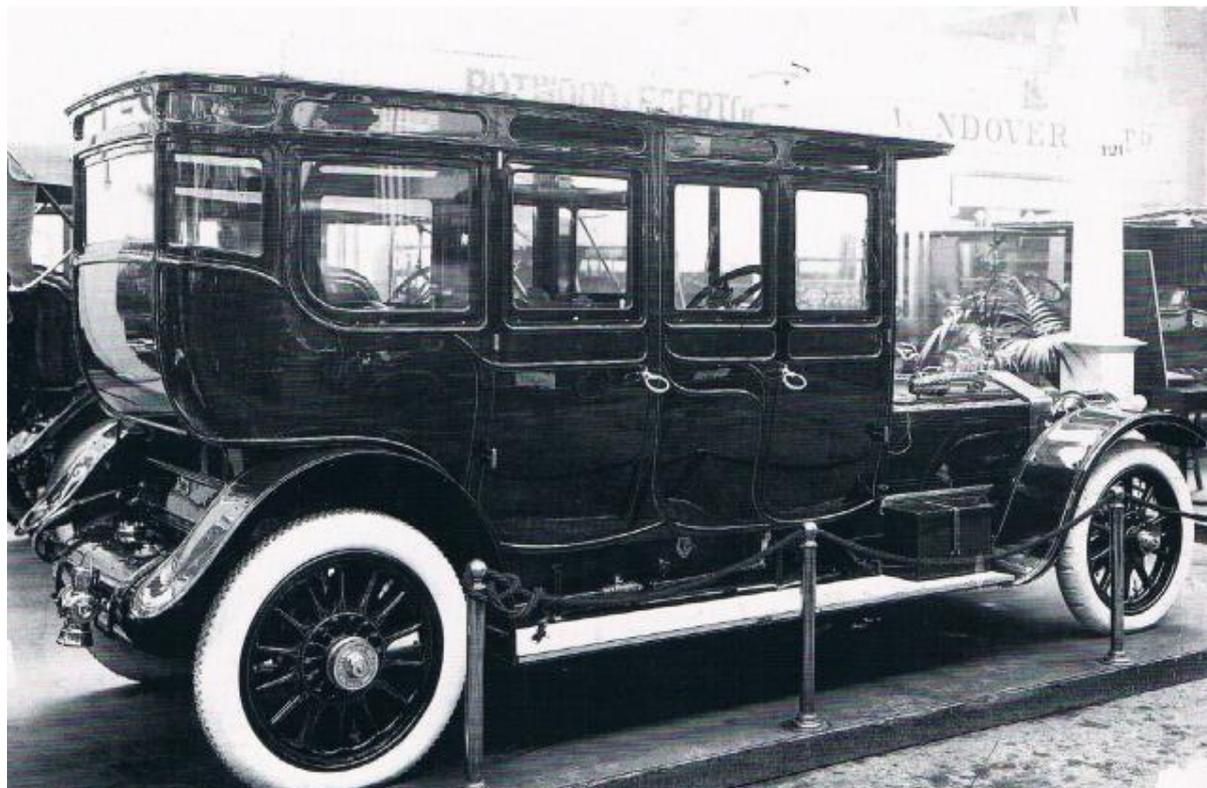
Chassis number 1292, 1910 was also a limousine by Barker purchased from Middlesbrough agent Frederick Burr of Corporation Road, Middlesbrough and registered DC-260. It was scrapped for £20.00 in 1953!!

Chassis number 1869, 1912 tourer with coachwork by E Maule & Son of Stockton, Reg, DC-8

Chassis number 1013, 1912 Laundaulette by Lawton, sold to Sir Joseph Walton of Saltburn in 1919

Chassis number 2390E, 1913 limousine by Vanden Plas, registration DC-9. All Gjers Rolls-Royces were garaged in the coach house of Busby Hall, Carlton (in recent times Busby Hall was owned by the late Barry Dodd, OBE, a second home. Barry sadly passed away recently as the result of a helicopter crash not far from his first home, Thormalby Hall near York.

The Gjers were typical of the type of family with Rolls-Royce ownership. Mr L F Gjers was a Justice of the Peace for Middlesbrough and the North Riding of Yorkshire, a member of the Iron and Steel Institute and Vice President of Cleveland Institute of Engineers. When he died in 1918 he left the then staggering sum of £300,000.



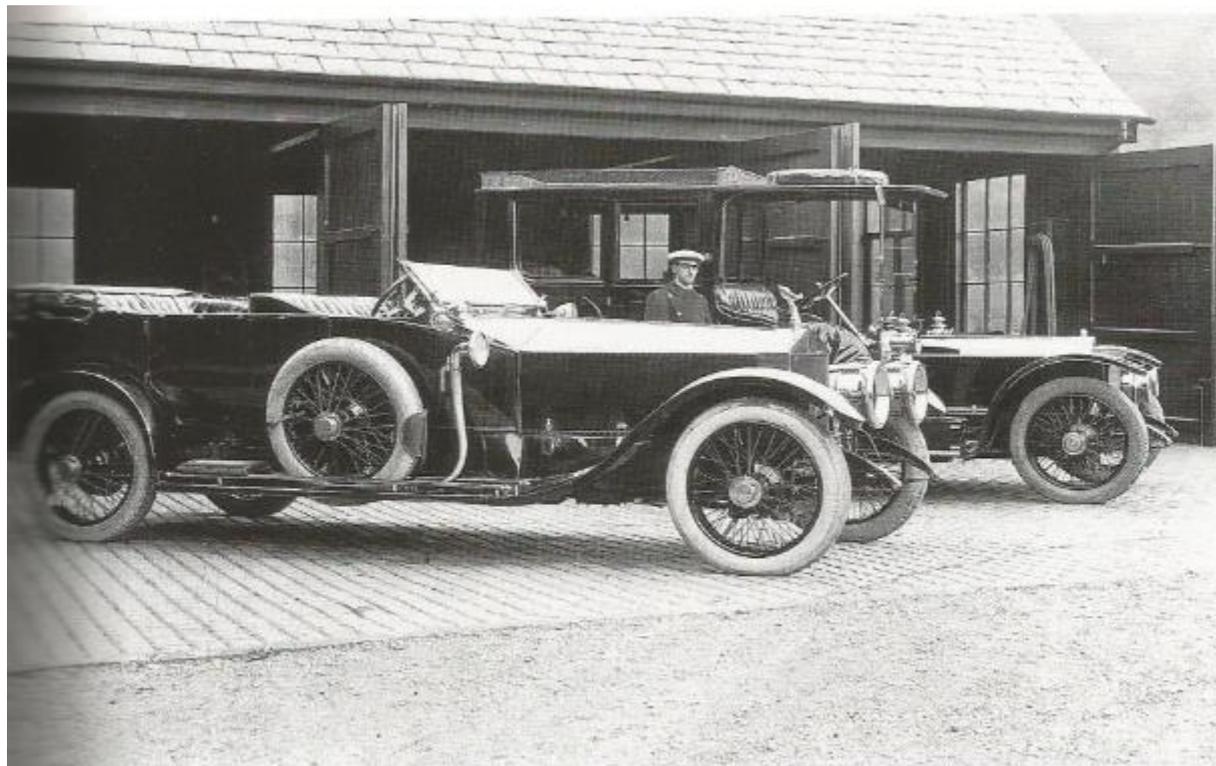
One of Gjers Silver Ghosts Chassis 1121

“GHOSTS OF THE NORTH” – Part 2

After members had read part 1 of Ghosts of the North, I was approached by a few members who asked if Lawrence Gjers was the same Gjers who was connected with the Middlesbrough & District Motor Club in the early days? The answer is yes. He was made president in 1909 and donated a cup to the winner of the 12 hour reliability trial which became known as the Gjers cup. The winner in 1909 was J. H. Dale, I believe this trophy is on display in the awards cabinet in the Motor Club.

Many Rolls-Royce 40/50 Silver Ghosts came north to wealthy owners and aristocrats and many of those owners names will be familiar. One of the earliest Ghosts was chassis number 60524, a 1906 30 HP owned by Samuel Peter Austin of Ripon, Yorks. Samuel Austin went into partnership with Pickersgill to form Austin Pickersgill & Sons Ltd shipyard at Sunderland. Another early car, chassis number 1661, a 1911 landaulette by H J Mulliner was owned by the Hon. Geoffrey Howard of Castle Howard, York. A 1910 Ghost, chassis number 1235, tourer by Rippon Brothers was bought by Sir William Ackroyd a carpet manufacturer of Grantley Hall, Ripon. Sir Walter Runciman of Newcastle-upon-Tyne bought a limousine in 1910 with coachwork by Angus Sanderson of Birtley, Co. Durham. The car was bought second hand in 1934 by R. Wiggins of Imperial Garage, Norton-on-Tees. Another Ghost by Angus Sanderson was bought by C. A. Cochrane of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, registration number X 33.

In 1911 Miss Jane Belk of Middlesbrough bought a Barker limousine, chassis number 1578, registration DC 150 (photo below) via dealer Wardman of Harrogate. Its next owner was Mr Barrett-Hext of Coniston who owned the copper mines in the Lake District.



1912 2068 Maule & Sons of Stockton tourer and the 1911 1578 Barker limousine supplied to Miss Jane Belk of Middlesbrough.

The Ghost was then sold in 1950 to car dealer Cecil Bendall of Stevenage, Herts, and the car, in totally original condition, is still in the family today owned by Cecil's great grandson. In 1912 Miss Jane Belk also bought another Ghost chassis number 2068, registration DC 246, a tourer (photo) by Maule coach builders of Stockton-on-Tees. In 1911, Sir John Randles (JP) of Keswick bought a limousine, chassis number 1831, registration X 2477 by Angus Sanderson. In 1956 it was bought second hand by George Kendrew of Stockton-on-Tees. Tom Potter from Kirby Stephen became the next owner in 1958 and sold it in 1959 to Douglas Thompson and Ken Hart of Breckon Hill Motors, Marton Road, Middlesbrough.

Lady Sadler of Eaglescliffe also bought a Ghost by Maule of Stockton, hers being a 1912 landaulette, chassis number 2202 and registration DC 180. In 1914 Lillyd Williams of Normanby Hall, Eston, Middlesbrough purchased a 40/50 Rolls, coachwork by Maule, this being chassis number 32 YB and registration DC 548. Lord Dugdale of Crathorne Hall, Yarm purchased a 1914 landaulette by Hooper, chassis number 31 UB, supplied by A. W. Greer of Northallerton, North Yorkshire.

This list is only a small selection of what did reside in the north of England before the Great War. Many Ghosts were past their sell by date in 1914 and were broken up to provide for the war effort. Some Ghosts were hidden away from the prying eyes of the authorities so they could be recovered after the war.

One story, believed to be true, of a 1910 Ghost being bricked up in a large Victorian house, reducing the room size by at least eight feet in width. The owner is believed to have been lost in the war and the house sold on. The new owners had not realised in two years residence until a relative noticed that the size of the room did not conform with the outside wall and after measuring the room realised there was a false wall. Knocking down the wall revealed the 1910 Ghost covered, the same car survives today.

It may have been noticed that a lot of Ghosts carried locally built coachwork such as Angus Sanderson, Maule and Rippon to name a few. In the next few months I shall be putting pen to paper to reveal these wonderful coach builders of the North, many of which are unknown.

Nick Clark.

Pictures of Silver Ghost Barker limousine, chassis number 1578, registration DC 150 taken at the Annual Rally at Rockingham Castle in 2013.

