

# John Raymond Nutter

1931-2010

Under bare trees on a sunny winter's day, John was laid to rest in the place he had favoured, the beautiful snowdrop and aconite strewn hilly churchyard to the South-East of St Giles Church, overlooking the village of Hartington in Derbyshire. Family, friends, colleagues and BDC Officials, Trustees and Members from all Regions who had packed the church to standing room only followed the pall bearers up the narrow path to the sound of the tenor bell. Not for this man an ordinary casket but a rectangular chest in British Racing Green, topped with his Service cap, a piston from his one-time eight litre engine, RAF and BDC neckties and, as be-fitting a scholar and enthusiast for accuracy, his copy of the Technical Facts of the Vintage Bentley. Affixed, head and foot, were the badges of the W O Bentley Memorial Foundation and the Bentley Drivers Club.

John Nutter was a Sheffield lad and attended King Edward VII School, where *Ian Fells*, his long-time friend and contemporary, remembers that he was a Prefect and stalwart member of the Scouts. He also played in goal at water polo for the School and later for the University. He came from a distinguished musical family and sang in various choirs, including the School Choir where his brother Gordon was an acclaimed boy chorister. Both he and his brother were staunch members of Millhouses Methodist Youth Club, which had a lively debating society and where dancing was taught by Mrs Bart Smith, a famous judge of dancing. This social skill was important to John in later life.

In 1950 John went to Sheffield University to read Civil Engineering. He always wanted to build bridges. After graduating in 1954 he did National

Service in the RAF. He was commissioned and went out to Gann in the Maldives to rebuild the military air-strip there. This was the highlight of his RAF career and after retirement John set to work to write a book about it which, although it never reached publication, gave him great enjoyment in the writing.

John started work with the Civil Engineering firm Henry Boot & Co. in Sheffield and lived with friends, near Bamford, in Derbyshire. In those days he had a Riley with a troublesome, epicyclic gearbox. He used to drive up the steep winding road from Hathersage to the Surprise View, standing up to see better around the corners using the hand throttle, and could beat anyone else to the top. By 1961, when John joined the Bentley Drivers Club, he had acquired his first Cricklewood car, a 3 Litre, with a 1925 Gurney Nutting body.



His old friend *Edward Barraclough* notes that John used to organise the local Natters and Noggins in the Sheffield area in the '50s and early '60s. notably in Baslow. This attracted the likes of Frank Sowden to drive his Speed Six (subsequently acquired by John) from Bingley through Bradford and Huddersfield, picking up various Barracloughs on the way via Sheffield to attend at Baslow, all on a weekday evening.

Within a very few years, John became Honorary Competitions Secretary of the Club and competed in many events before standing down in 1971 after 'five years hard' and handing over to Ray Wiltshire. During this period, in 1965, the 3 Litre was replaced with the aforementioned 1929 Speed Six, originally a Gurney Nutting Weymann Saloon although it had been earlier re-bodied as a tourer. When John acquired an 8 litre engine for this car to 'pep it up a bit', Edward remembers him leaving Rochdale at great pace towards Windy Hill and was immensely happy if a speed in excess of 100mph was indicated as the crest was overcome!

Harvey Hine remembers the car, with its 8 Litre block, being an awesome road car and John thrilled on long fast runs in any weather. One such was a winter run to Biggar in foul weather and whilst he was pressing on up Shap Fell at 90mph, Harvey had to lean over the screen with a leather to clear the snow off so he could see. They arrived with icicles on their caps.

John was quite an outdoor man enjoying fell walking. In the sixties when sailing off the West coast of Scotland, along with Edward, Frank and Peter Sowden and Harvey Hine, should the rest of the crew be laid low with sea-sickness, John was always fresh, keeping up spirits with an endless stream of 'Goon' quality jokes. From the Goons, John always referred to the telephone as the 'electric shouting machine'. He had a fund of hysterical jokes which could only be coaxed from him on certain occasions. At dinner his favourite toast was always 'Absent Friends - coupled with the name of the Wine Waiter'.



*John Mackinnon* recalls that:- "John first came to the Scottish Region in 1963 on the occasion of the Christmas Party. Thereafter he came to many of our Whit Weekend Rallies and also on some of the Island Hops organised by the Gordons. John obviously loved Scotland and hopefully the Scottish BDC Region. We, in our turn, always enjoyed his company. John's employer in Derbyshire bought a small concrete pipe-making outfit in West Calder and it was his job to come North every month to see that all was going well. It was John's practice to alternate his night in Scotland between our house and the home of the McCosh family in Biggar. We always looked forward to his visits. The sales and office manager at West Calder was one Douglas Brilliant and it quickly became obvious to John that he did not match the exacting Nutter standards so he had to go. Nutter's company was duly taken to a tribunal at which they won, and the report in 'The Scotsman' produced the headline 'Nutter sacks Brilliant man'. John always enjoyed telling this story against himself. One of John's sources of humour was the Meccano Magazine and on telling one of these stories his great frame would rock with mirth. The Club has benefited greatly from his presence over four decades, and to all interested in the history of the Club and the cars, John will be particularly missed."

John shared a passion for Bentley motoring which welded his friendship



with Harvey Hine, who recalls that whilst sailing round the Hebrides in a 36 foot yacht, his navigational ability was seriously questioned when they only just missed a submerged rock in the Firth of Lorne which would have sunk them. John redeemed himself by successfully mixing gin and tonic on a gimbal table whilst reaching at a steep angle with gunwales awash without spilling a drop.

Of an earlier Scottish trip *Harvey Hine* relates:- "We were motoring along the tricky lanes of Perthshire when John announced he was stuck in third gear but with a free gear lever. We managed to return to Loch Tummel taking care not to select two gears at once, and set about repairs to the broken selector fork. In the hotel owner's garage, I removed the shaft and the broken fork and caught the 'bus to Pitlochry Bus Station where they brazed it all up for me. 'Bus back and rebuild gear box. Perfect. John then pronounces we should have a dram of every malt in the bar. We never made it - there were forty or fifty bottles lined up! The following morning we saw a flying saucer over Schiehallion and a posse of RAF fighters turned up to chase it, so decided we needed a long walk to get our eyes back into focus. John was always sparkling company and our numerous trips were seldom without an element of mischief coupled with some gastronomic experience. He was a great friend, a seriously competent driver and the epitome of what the Bentley Drivers Club is all about."

As recently as 2008, John enjoyed a week's holiday on the Isle of Mull and visiting other locations on the West Coast, a part of the world that was always one of his favourites.

Everyone thought John was a confirmed bachelor and then, to everyone's pleasant surprise, in 1970 he met and married Liz who has been the mainstay of his lengthy career. John and Elizabeth were wedded on the day before BDC Silverstone at



which John was racing his Speed Six. On being quizzed about this rather unusual honeymoon recreation, John observed that it was desirable to start as one intended to go on! Thus began the period of the Nutters carrying on the BDC tradition of residing, as far as possible, in old public houses, beginning with The Old Bull at Towcester, convenient for Silverstone and, by 1982, The Old King's Head in Matlock prior to their move to Hartington in 1987.

It was in Derbyshire that *Johnnie Winther*, who at that time lived locally, recalls meeting, at a 'lock-in' at the George at Alstonefield, a tall dark courteous fellow, a friend of another local chap. It was not until many years later when Johnnie had joined the Club, that he and John again met and realised that neither had earlier mentioned or admitted to being a fan of Bentleys!

The other 'local chap' at the 'George' was *Chris Hornblower*, who there first met and befriended John and Elizabeth. As Chris said in his Tribute at John's funeral:- "Here was a man in a position of some responsibility who, like myself, found great pleasure in escaping to a small country retreat with a classic cross section of local customers from all walks of life, who shared banter and a love of putting the world to rights, even if they changed their minds the following week.

"John took great pleasure in being part of the group and we enjoyed his dry sense of humour and the occasional snort of laughter when something really

amused him. On warm summer evenings you could always hear him arrive in the pub car park by the roar of the Bentley. We also enjoyed the annual Boy's Night Out in both his old cars, when in the long evenings we would venture afield in convoys to explore the other hostelrys in the area. I was honoured to be allowed to drive the Morris Cowley (Bullnose), but not without a certain amount of patient but serious coaching. Apart from his 'George' outings, it was clear that John loved driving his Bentley to local car meetings, relishing the power as he navigated his way through the country lanes of Derbyshire. He always said that when steering those routes was no longer pleasurable (no power steering) then that was the time to sell. And so he did, eventually.

"One of my lifetime memories of a good day out was the day we went down to Old Warden to a Shuttlesworth Trust flying display. The sheer sound and joy of overtaking everything on the A1 doing just under 90mph was something I will never forget and something he so clearly enjoyed. God alone knows how much fuel that jaunt consumed. That was something I was able to reciprocate to some extent when he visited Seattle, as I took him flying out over the Puget Sound to show him the city, the old and new Tacoma

Narrows Bridges and to fly him right down the flight-line at Boeing's Everett facility, full of 747s, 767s and the new 777s. Even then John introduced me to new contacts, because, as Archivist for the Bentley Drivers Club, he had engineered access to the Bruce McCaw collection of automobiles, by providing information on the Blue Train Bentley which had recently been acquired for the collection.

"While Birchwood Concrete was his working life, he had fond memories of his RAF service, especially the time spent in the Indian Ocean and he was always happy to talk aviation, both ancient and modern, maybe enjoying through me the growing success of a British company in the commercial aviation business. R-R was acceptable for its jet engine prowess, but proper Bentleys were all apparently pre-1931. It was clear to us all how honoured (and humbled) he was by the Honorary Life Membership conferred on him by the BDC.

"His unwavering love of his cars was matched by the hospitality to friends in Hartington and, whilst Liz was probably the instigator of most of these events, John was always the consummate host. His departure to Newcastle drew a line under these times but not our memories of them and he will be fondly remembered."



John went on to become a respected member of the Club Main Committee, serving from 1965 to 1977 and joining again in 1981. He became Deputy and then Clerk of the Course for many a Silverstone meeting and other Hill Climb events. He was eventually appointed Club Steward for our Race Meetings.

His Speed Six was once selected for display at the Club's Dorchester Dinner Dance. On the matter of preparing the car for this great honour, John was reported to have said that his wife complained of him coming to bed so late and so tired that he did not even wash properly, and in the morning she woke up covered in oily finger-marks.

In between all this he started up and ran from 1971 to 1974 the Vintage Spares Scheme which has since gone from strength to strength.

One of his great services to the Club in the 1980s was his stint on the editorial panel and as *Review* Editor for five and a half years in company with Past-Chairman Tony Judd. During this time he also edited, laid out and planned the second Golden Jubilee Book 1936-1986. This task, in itself, would have been quite sufficient to cover the whole of one man's spare time. In typical humour his own credit says, 'Edited, a bit, by John Nutter'. He made many and varied contributions





to the Club magazine from early days until very recently. A comment from an early Editor, **John Croxon**, is germane in that he said that John's critical faculties and opinions were always sharp, down to earth and constructive. He was also a very straightforward man.

Past-Editor, raconteur and Review Index guru

**Hugh Young** writes:- "Many years ago I had been mentoring a youngster with vision problems here in Victoria (on Canada's left coast) but a magician with his hands. He was keen on becoming a motor-racing mechanic. I was able to contact Jim Kirkpatrick who ran the Jim Russell racing driver school at Donington. Kirkpatrick agreed to take on Kevin as a trainee motor-racing mechanic; an unusual arrangement for a drivers' school. I felt it would be appropriate to present a bottle to John Kirkpatrick in thanks and asked John Nutter on the electric telephone if he could do this for me. I specified a 'jolly

nice single malt', reimbursement guaranteed. Good old Nutter duly delivered the bottle to Donington and let me know how much he had spent, and I got a money order off to him right away. This was a characteristic example of old Nutter's ability to Get The Point without if-ing, and-ing or but-ing.

On at least one occasion during a visit to the Sceptered Isle, John let me drive him in his 6½/8, a combination of chassis and engine that responded splendidly to maximum use of right welly. I found I could gauge my progress by the sucking sounds of sharp intakes of breath through his clenched teeth. He was a huge, huge pillar of the Club. I've had several accounts of remarks made at his memorial Service that were exactly the sort of ribaldry that he enjoyed."

While essentially a shy man, John had a way of looking at one with a steady gaze that was quite un-nerving unless you were aware that, at any moment, the ice would be broken by a dry and witty pronouncement. As **Barbara Fell** has said "He had a lovely smile".

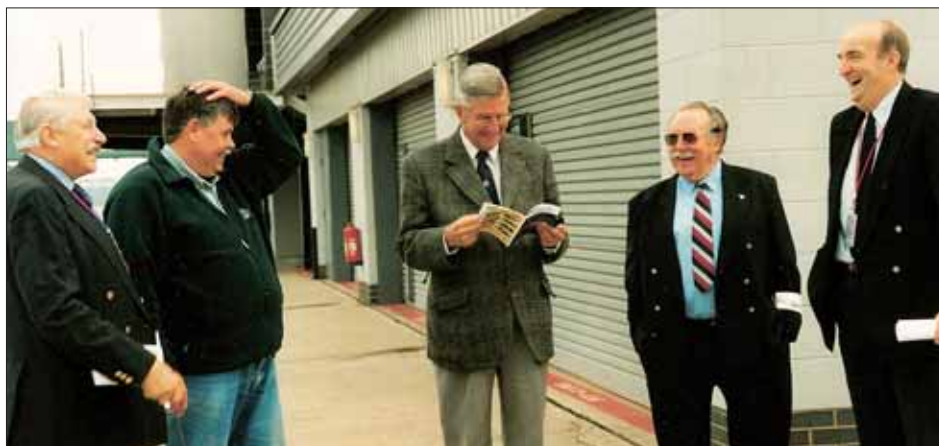
Perhaps John's most recent and therefore best known activity was his appointment as Honorary Archivist in June 1993. In that guise, with his phenomenal memory for faces and cars, most

were in awe of him; perhaps something to do with his height, his stature or his eagle-like hooter! His often slow and measured delivery masked a quick and discerning mind. He was never shy of asking the opinion of others and had a scholarly approach to cataloguing and arranging archives, and especially to his research and writings. However, with his deadpan humour and twinkle in the eye he became, and will forever be remembered as 'The Headmaster'.



As **Will Morrison** has said "Can't you just see him sitting at the top desk in the archive room mulling something over?" As a passionate 'Vintage' man, John may have appeared at one time to be a bit 'flat earth' about Cricklewood and the cars of the Old Company. Strangely, but totally in character, in later years he would fuss that we had little knowledge or record of the T-Types or later models and were therefore in danger of failing to assist those Members keeping these cars. During this period he organised the Archive Working Party, spending many long hours to bring order to piles of boxes of documents, books, magazines and thousands of photographs.

His crowning achievement, the emergence of the W O Bentley Memorial Foundation from the earlier W O Bentley



Society, sprang from his support of Richard Sanders, Tony Dyas and others on Main Committee who saw the need to protect the archives and memorabilia of the Club from predatory action. A Trust Deed was set up and the recognition of the Charity Commission was obtained. John became first Chairman and a Trustee of the Foundation and worked tirelessly for its future and establishment of the bedrock upon which to build.

John's deepest wish was to see steps completed that would underpin the long-term success of the Foundation and the security of operational funding.

In the last few days of his life it gave John great pleasure to see the tangible signs of this success come through in the form of the Lease Agreement between the Club and the Foundation, bringing them together in harmony within the new Headquarter building, to which he was able to add his signature.

John is irreplaceable. We have lost a giant and a friend. His legacy will remain, but the portrait, arranged by his fellow Trustees, taken specially and hung in the archive area at Wroxton as a tribute to his work, will keep alive our memories of him as the remarkable person he was.

*IF, CH, JEB, HPH, JM, HJTY, MHE, DJR*

